

Harmony

Book three
(The Crystal Series)

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For Seb, for inspiring my new character in the upcoming new series, Elleanor
Stone Collection

Prologue

Rhea, mother of all gods, defender of the earth, watched, listened and plotted. The serene, somewhat bored expression on her exquisitely ethereal face hid the calculated, surreptitious way with which she looked forward to outsmarting her husband. Cronus, as usual, gave no thought to anyone or anything but his own importance. He presided over the proceedings, lording his position, trying to undermine all she and her daughter, Meredith, were trying to accomplish. Meredith had been barred from attending the assembly.

In fact, Rhea had no idea where Cronus held her daughter. Cronus detained her somewhere, making sure she could not influence the other gods who were present. *He would not dare mistreat my daughter!* Rhea tried to brush aside her worry that he might harm Meredith in any way. She knew too much of his own indiscretions, and the multitude of offspring those had spawned. Harming one of her own children would lead to direct retaliation. Rhea was not above exacting her own pointed vengeance.

Her siblings, gods in their own right, were also, for their own purposes, biding their time. *Cronus expects us all to bow to his whims.* Rhea knew that more than a few of her brothers and sisters were eager to garner as much power as they could for themselves. The heavens were not as secure under his dominion as Cronus imagined.

Aside from those present, Rhea was aware of other gods who were patiently watching and waiting. Long forgotten to time, Zeus, her beloved son, hungered for his own return to power. Born from her union with Cronus, Zeus remembered well his father's attempt to end his life at birth. It was only through the actions of others that Zeus had managed to survive.

Zeus, for the longest time, believed his father remained imprisoned in Tartarus where he had placed him. Having tossed his father into the endless abyss to languish forever in torment, Zeus, unfortunately, had put him out of his mind. *If only we had known.* Rhea would have done everything in her power to stop her husband's return. Cronus escaped his prison having spent less than ten years in the abyss.

Rescued by Poseidon and Hera, two of her other children, Cronus kept himself

hidden for centuries before making his presence known. Why their other children had saved him, Rhea never found out. *What had Cronus promised them?* Whatever it was, he must have never made good on it. She knew with certainty that Poseidon and Hera were now aligned with Zeus.

Sitting on her assigned pedestal seat, ignoring Cronus's droning, she pretended to study her nails. Anyone glancing her way would see indifference to her husband's speech. They would be wrong, however. Rhea was paying attention to every word her husband uttered. Every now and then, she casually shifted in her seat, drawing Cronus's eyes her way. She had taken extra care with her appearance before the meeting. Rhea knew Cronus had a particular liking for the gown she had chosen. Blue as the sky, the gossamer material hugged her every curve. The bodice dipped so low it made its necessity obsolete. Her ample bosom, almost fully exposed for his shrewd examination, entranced him.

She hid a smile at how hard he endeavored to concentrate on what he wished to articulate. Leaning forward, seemingly to be attentive, Rhea caught his momentary loss of focus. Resuming his speech, Cronus's gaze fell on Rhea, who ran her hand leisurely through her hair, brushing it out of the way. Waves of golden blond curls ran free, fanning her shoulders, as they cascaded down her back. His eyes raked over her, in much the same way as when she had first entered the meeting arena.

Rhea suppressed a shudder of revulsion before he could see it. *Does he know how much I detest him?* Cronus fancied himself above any and all gods. He could never imagine his near-perfect looks and physique would be matched by anyone. Rhea could name several mortal men she had sampled who had put him to shame.

Mortals were the very reason they had been called into that meeting. Her daughter's actions were regrettable, but Rhea saw an opportunity arise from them. Meredith, born of a passionate and impetuous affair with a Sidhe warrior, caused immeasurable problems with her most recent actions. At the time Rhea met Meredith's father, she believed him to be a mortal man. She should have known, guessed, he was something more. Even a goddess could be fallible.

The Sidhe race, a secretive and mysterious race of faeries, hid their very existence

from the outside world, for a reason. Humans were an unpredictable race. Anything unknown would be judged a threat. Her affair with the Sidhe occurred during Cronus's imprisonment. When Meredith was born, Rhea gave her care over to Zeus. Where he had placed her, who had actually raised her, Rhea had never thought to ask. Only many centuries later had she formed a relationship with her daughter.

Meredith's own involvement with the Sidhe race should not have come as a surprise. Curiosity over her father led her to search for the Sidhe home world. As impetuous as her mother, she set in motion a chain of events presently threatening the continuation of humanity. Cronus was incensed at her actions. He held Meredith accountable for the perils she had unleashed on his precious earth.

When the Sidhe Elsam captured Meredith, torturing her to gain power over his queen Eliana, Meredith did not foresee what she would end up setting in motion. Sidhe power lay in their protective crystal, the Kaemorra. It afforded their island protection, hiding them from the prying eyes of humans. Within their cloak of invincibility, they lived an idyllic life. In one careless move, not thinking of the consequences, Meredith spelled the crystal to disappear. Her need to punish Eliana and her people for Elsam's actions, drove her to make them all pay for her treatment. Not even Eliana's imprisonment of Elsam swayed Meredith from her course.

The crystal vanished, hidden from the Sidhe race for over a thousand years. The queen had no alternative but to force her people to scatter across the far reaches of the earth. As an added hindrance to keeping her race safe, Eliana lost her connection to the Kaemorra. Without its magical properties to guide her, her ability to foresee the future diminished. Nearly powerless in seeing coming dangers, she ordered her people to stay isolated and not affect the natural course of history.

Meredith cast one final obstacle in thwarting Eliana from reclaiming the Kaemorra. If the Kaemorra was brought back to the island to re-establish its invincibility, Eliana's payment would be the loss of one of her sons. Aidan, thought to be the oldest of the queen's children, would perish, if the queen decided to return her people to their island of Eruva.

Through the long years that followed, a quest, a prophesy grew out of the search for

the Kaemorra. Meredith unknowingly dragged her own descendant into the melee. *Alexa, that is her name.* Rhea knew the young woman exuded strength and was worthy of her lineage. Meredith had not anticipated what Alexa's birth would set in motion. Alexa, along with Aidan, were destined to work together to retrieve the crystal from where Meredith had hidden it.

At the time she spelled the Kaemorra to vanish, Meredith had no idea that Alexa would become bonded, be the one true soul mate to Aidan. When this became known to her, stopping the prophesy, or what it entailed, made it almost impossible to gauge an outcome. *And it might still be too late.* Rhea saw many differing endings to the saga. It all hinged on Cronus and stopping his interference.

Aidan, over six-feet tall, with hair as black as coal, had Rhea wishing he did not have a bond with her descendant. She would have liked to sample what he had to offer herself. His Herculean physique reminded her of past legends. Blessed with the most incredible emerald eyes, Aidan had been drawn to Alexa without ever having met her. She, in turn, wanted nothing to do with him.

Finding herself bonded to Aidan, she fought the attraction by turning to his brother, Liam. There was nothing wrong with Liam either. Almost as tall as Aidan, his sandy blond hair and sinewy physique were quite pleasing in and of themselves. Having the same emerald eyes, possessed by all Sidhe, his were just as captivating.

Alexa, petite, auburn haired with enchanting gray eyes, enamored both brothers, creating further upheaval to the goal set before them. A descendant of Meredith, with her own mother a witch and her father a Sidhe, Alexa could be nothing less than as powerful as her ancestors. Even before her nineteenth birthday, when her full abilities manifested, the young woman showed signs of heightened senses and powers. Meredith searched for a way to undo what she had set in motion in order to save Alexa. Subtly she changed the spell cast over the Kaemorra. It allowed a way out of the predicament she had created.

As time drew near for the Kaemorra to be discovered, Elsam's imprisonment came to an end. Released after his thousand-year sentence, the angry Sidhe resumed his plans for power. Using the legendary creatures known as the shadows, Elsam forged an alliance with

them through subterfuge and cunning. Along with the shadows, Elsam had been working with Manar, the Daimon prince. That alliance was quickly falling apart. Manar had his own plans for the Kaemorra.

Elsam was learning he held little sway with the rest of his followers. Myrick, the warlock in his employ, grew weary of Elsam's motivations. The capture of Bet, Eliana's daughter, and Alexa's parents should have given Elsam the upper hand. Their torture at the hands of Myrick yielded no results. Elsam did not garner new information as to where the Kaemorra was located. Instead, they somehow managed to escape. Elsam was unaware who had aided them.

It was an added impediment to their quest that Aidan, thinking Alexa had turned to his brother, allowed himself to be captured. *If she knew his condition, Alexa would surely blame herself.* Rhea hoped Alexa would be able to reach him before it was too late. Missing for months, Aidan's plight remained perilous. Alexa had placed her own self in harm's way in order to save him. Hoping to rescue him, she let herself be apprehended by Myrick. That noble, but foolish act, threw her friends and family into disarray.

Everyone believed she had perished aboard the boat, which exploded seconds before they could rescue her. Liam was the most affected by her loss. Everything, all their efforts to find the Kaemorra, were thrown into chaos. Meredith had once again intervened, contacting Eliana directly with the news that Alexa lived. Giving the queen information was the latest act that put her in Cronus's crosshairs. She had been warned after her last visit with Alexa not to interfere again.

Meredith had done the unthinkable. Appearing to Alexa, with Rhea's blessing, she explained why she had acted to hide the Kaemorra, even Rhea was surprised by her daughter's actions. Bestowing all her powers on Alexa, including her immortality, Meredith for all intents and purposes, was now human. *She never ceases to surprise me.* Rhea did all she could to protect Meredith from Cronus's fury. *I must protect Meredith at all costs.*

Rhea convinced Cronus to hold an assembly to discuss her punishment, but she saw no clear resolution from those in attendance. The other gods were equally in an uproar over Meredith's most recent actions. There were those who wanted Meredith banished, while

others were more inclined to see her ended. Alexa, unaware of exactly what Meredith had done, had no idea she was immortal.

Hearing her name spoken, Rhea snapped out of her musings. Luckily, Cronus only mentioned her and required no response. With his back to her, while he continued speaking, Rhea caught the tail end of his statement. The word Tartarus sent a chill through her. *He would not dare, would he?* She was unsure under what context the Titan prison had been mentioned. Still, she paid attention in order to catch up to what he had been saying.

More than one of the gods was now staring at her. Keeping her face neutral, she ignored them all. Cronus wanted them to put an end to the entire race of Sidhe, especially Eliana and Elsam. He saw both of them as responsible for the chaos in the world below. He had yet to mention Meredith and what he wanted to be done with her. Across the room, the one god she could absolutely count on was following Cronus's movements. Rhea eyed her brother Hyperion, trying to catch his attention. Keeping his eyes on Cronus, Hyperion acknowledged her by lifting his forefinger. The message was clear. They would meet as soon as Cronus had ended his tirade.

It was fortunate that some of her other siblings were also not as enamored with Cronus's wishes. The infighting among the gods had been going on for as long as Rhea could remember. They each had their own needs and wants. Most of the time, Cronus managed to keep them in line. This, Rhea could see, would not be one of them. She had sat silently for hours while her husband voiced his concerns and the way to remedy them. When Cronus stopped speaking to take a breath, she saw her opportunity. Rising from her seat, all turned to see what she would do.

"Cronus, darling, we need a rest." She said, as she sashayed towards him.

Putting her arm through his, she leaned into him so he could feel the press of her breast on his arm. The action resulted in the desired outcome. Cronus's eyes dropped to her cleavage. Rhea could have gagged at the hungry way he stared, if not for her need to keep him placated. Giving him her most adoring look, he took the bait.

"Yes, let's adjourn for now. We can meet again in a couple of hours." He absentmindedly spoke, while his gaze lingered on Rhea's breasts.

Her siblings gladly started to leave. Hyperion gave her a pointed look before departing. She knew where to meet him. Cronus wrapped his arms around her, dragging her up against his chest. Behind his back, she rolled her eyes and grimaced. His intent was clear. He wanted to take what she had offered. Rhea knew she would have little choice but to go through with it. Sleeping with him always mellowed him. She just needed a few minutes alone with Hyperion first.

"Darling, why don't you go to my rooms. I will join you there after I get your surprise." She teased him.

Cronus, as always, led by his baser instincts, bought it. Smiling seductively at his wife, he pinched her behind before retiring to her rooms. Rhea craftily hid her frown at having to give herself to him. All the playacting in the world would be needed to pretend she enjoyed his touch. Once he retreated out of sight, Rhea departed for her meeting with Hyperion. Arriving at the location, she found her brother with Helios, his son. The two had been arguing. Rhea made her presence known, giving Hyperion a questioning look.

"Helios has returned with news. I thought it best he reports directly to you." Hyperion let her know.

Where Hyperion was larger than life, tall and blessed with unbelievable strength, Helios was slight, compact and appeared weak. The impression was wrong. Helios had his own strengths, not requiring brawn, but stamina. What he had been up to, Rhea had no idea.

"There is a new entrant in the quest for the Kaemorra." Helios started. "I think time is on our side."

Rhea looked down at the world, finding and understanding what Helios spoke of. She laughed, delighted at what she had discovered. Hyperion joined in, just as pleased as she. *Yes, things might work out better than I had hoped.* Helios excused himself, having nothing more to add. His father and aunt knew everything now.

"You know what you must do," Hyperion told her.

"I will keep him occupied. I loathe every moment I spend with him, but I will do what I must. It is all in Alexa's hands now. I have to go. He is waiting." Rhea left Hyperion, dreading each step.

Stopping in the servants' quarters, she eyed the many young nubile women who were present. Finding one that would be pleasing to Cronus, she beckoned the woman to follow. She chose her because the young woman matched her in shape and height, but had dark features and hair. Cronus would appreciate the contrast.

Entering her rooms, Cronus already lay naked atop her bed. Walking towards him, she slipped her dress off her shoulders to let it drop to the floor. His eyes widened expectantly at seeing her naked. The young woman followed behind Rhea, untying her robe and also letting it fall. She knew exactly what was expected of her.

Rhea brought her along to act as a buffer. She hoped the young woman would take up most of his attention. Stepping up to the bed, she lay down next to him on his right, while the other woman took his left. Cronus greedily turned to the young woman, giving her his full attention. Rhea inwardly smiled that her plan had worked. She would find as many women as it took to keep his mind off of what was going on down below.