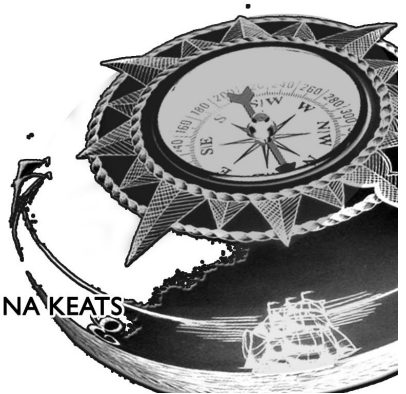


QUEST OF THE HYBRID

They want to kill us
Only *she* can save us...

GINGER GELSHEIMER | CHRISTINA KEATS



Copyright © 2014 by Ginger Gelsheimer and Christina Keats

All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9915018-3-0

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to persons living or dead, or any similarity of events depicted herein to real life incidents, are purely coincidental.

WheelMan Press owns all publishing rights to the content contained herein. Copyright remains solely with the author. If you find this content being offered freely on the Internet somewhere other than an authorized vendor website, then this book has been pirated. In such instances, please report the theft to WheelMan Press at:

wheelmanpress@gmail.com

First Printing, 2014
Printed in the United States of America
A WheelMan Press publication

DEDICATION

For my daughter **Taylor**, you are my inspiration and sunshine every day. Thank you for your patience and for believing in me. Thank you to my mom, dad and sisters who have always encouraged my creative side. And for **Christina**, the love you share for these characters and this story was the glue that held us together when things weren't easy. Thanks for hanging in there on this wild ride to make our dream come true.

-**Ginger**

For Lara - I dedicate this work to my daughter Lara, who has never stopped having faith in me and for always allowing me the time and creative freedom to help make my dreams come to life. You are a sweet thing and a bright light in my world. And for **Ginger** - I dedicate this to my good friend and creative partner. My amazement in her endurance and dedication has no limits. Support and friendship make for endless possibilities!

-**Christina**

Also, a big thank you to Tom and Greg for putting up with us and all of our "finals" and to Tom Parsley, Jim Dunlap and Chris Lee for your support! You've all helped make this something special!

CHAPTER I

April 17, 1897—Aurora, Texas

Aurelius wiped the rolling sweat from his brow. It wasn't enough he'd just seen a dozen dead Celphian soldiers at the Atlantis portal, now his own death seemed imminent.

He struggled to maintain control of the malfunctioning airship with sparks and smoke blowing past the windshield. There was no easy way out of this dire situation.

The scenery below was magnificent for the chaos with tiny houses scattered about like ants. Even in his immediate dilemma, he couldn't help but admire the statuesque silhouette of the windmill against the twilight sky. Too bad he was seconds from smashing it to bits. He flipped several control switches to no avail as the airship bounced across the prairie sky.

"Don't fail me now!" Aurelius yelled. Holding firm to the neon steering controls, his attempt to avoid a crash was all in vain.

"I'm going down!" he called out to the floating air screen next to him. Adrenaline pumped hard through his veins and luminescent sweat oozed from his skin.

Suddenly, the ship twisted into a death spin and smashed into the blades of the windmill. Skipping across the ground like a pebble across a lake, it finally came to a stop after crashing into a tree. Brilliant flames burst from the explosion, blinding Aurelius as he grabbed for his chest. The flash and chaos kept the source of his excruciating pain a mystery.

Surrounded by fire and a thick screen of green and black smoke, Aurelius was losing consciousness fast, barely catch-

ing sight of the burly, stocky man running toward him before the blackness set in.

“What in the...?” Using an old blanket, Judge Proctor smothered the fire burning on Aurelius’s uniform. “We’ve got to get you out of here!” Struggling to lift Aurelius, the judge managed to cradle him and carry him to the barn near the house.

Young, beautiful and not a day over twenty, Emily Proctor rushed into the barn behind her father accompanied by the neighboring town doctor who had seen the spaceship moments before it crashed.

In and out of consciousness, Aurelius gasped for every breath as his skin turned a grey shade of blue. Quickly, Doc Harrison cut open his uniform, exposing a large metal object impaled in his chest.

“Water,” Aurelius strained to whisper.

After a quick glance from her father, Emily hurried out of the barn. As Judge Proctor watched over Aurelius, he noticed a hint of violet sparkle from the slits in his eyes.

Emily rushed back into the barn carrying a large bowl of water and knelt down by Aurelius’s side. Even though Aurelius’s face was covered with gashes, his unnatural beauty enchanted her. His stark white hair adorned with an ebony streak against his olive skin and Rembrandt-fine features made him the most beautiful man she’d ever seen. She was immediately lost in his crystal, ice-blue eyes, which pierced deep into her soul though she didn’t know him.

“Try to hold him down,” Doc Harrison ordered.

Emily used her weight to help her father restrain Aurelius, as the doctor yanked the shrapnel out of his chest.

Present Day—Aurora, Texas

Drenched in sweat, I woke to my own bloodcurdling scream. I felt my chest, making sure there was nothing impaled in it because the pain came with me out of my nightmare.

I'm pretty sure my older brother James broke his toe running to make sure I wasn't being murdered, though I had awoken him this way almost every night this month. He limped over to my bedside, holding his foot in one hand.

"You scared the living hell out of me."

I was embarrassed as usual. "Sorry, didn't mean to wake you."

I felt sweat roll down my brow. A small bead snuck into the corner of my eye. It stung like salt in a wound.

"Want some water? You look like you just ran a marathon."

"Yeah...okay." I was still trying to get my bearings.

I had barely caught my breath when James hobbled back with the water and set it on my antique nightstand. It had been with the family as long as the farm, as was the case with most of the furniture.

He plunked down next to me, leaving no chance I'd be lucky enough for him to just go back to bed. I was going to get the loving brother lecture.

"You really need to get some sleep," James began, pushing loose strands of hair behind my ear.

"You know it's always like this before the anniversary."

He put his head in his hands. "There *is* no anniversary."

I rolled over toward the wall to avoid looking at him.
Why was he so closed-minded?

James sighed in exhaustion and stood up. As he walked out, he flipped the light off and closed the door.

I loved my brother dearly and felt bad knowing how worried he was but I couldn't stop. These visions were real, and there was no doubt they had purpose.

The visions always made me feel like I was going through life with blinders on, knowing there was much more out there. They impressed the idea of what the world could be—what it was. Unfortunately, the only thing I did know for sure was that my name was Jesse Proctor, and by that, I inherited the Proctor curse.

Other than the curse, I'm just an average girl. Well, almost average—I do stand nearly six-feet tall. Height runs in our genes and my brother is five inches taller than me. I have boring brown hair, usually worn in two braids to keep it out of my eyes that are a weird shade of blue-grey.

James and I have pretty much raised each other on the same farm where my family has lived for generations. It's a quaint and comfortable place where the rolling sunsets will take your breath away.

We've always relied on each other. What choice did we have as the curse swallowed everyone else? The story in town was that my mother couldn't handle the constant stalkers snooping around looking for answers to the strange disappearance of her mother and father, or for some remnant from the alien crash in 1897. They said she caved to the heckling from the rumor mill and took off when James was eleven and I was nine. My brother won't talk about her. He's so angry. I hold onto a different side of the story—a side he can't accept.

Our father told us about her obsession with a man with violet eyes. This man told her about the great Order that was coming and how she needed to help. She also spoke of another man with electric-blue eyes that she said was following her

around town. Our father thought she had finally lost her mind and run off to join a cult.

I believe she told the truth. Otherwise, she must have been crazy and I wasn't willing to go there. I also believed in my memory of "him" taking her. *What else could I think? Otherwise, I was crazy, too.*

With our mother gone, our father raised us until he died three years later from too much of the bottle. I never faulted him for this—it was the only way he could cope with her leaving, and the Proctor curse was now hanging above our heads more than ever.

My teenage years were awkward with both parents gone and only James to look after us, so I buried myself in research and still do to this day. I guess I'm sort of a loner.

With my perfect SAT scores, I could've left it all behind and gone to an Ivy League school, but I knew there was an answer to my mystery, a way to save my mom and another world to explore.

So instead of school, I took a job at the library, spending my days sifting through everything that had ever happened in this town since that formidable day in 1897.

I knew James thought I was crazy but I was on a mission.

CHAPTER 2

I loved the smell of fresh coffee brewing in the morning. It actually made getting out of bed tolerable. I poured two cups, one black and one with more cream than coffee, before heading outside to mend things with James.

If nothing else, he was going to be mad about his toe. I knew it hurt because I could actually feel the throbbing pain. It was a strange thing with us that we had always shared, kind of like what they say about twins. A connection not easily explained and not one that we bragged about because of the already deep-seeded scrutiny around our family's past.

James was built like an ox, which had always made me feel safe. His muscles bulged out of his T-shirt as he aimed his rifle at the metal cans lined up on the makeshift target range behind the house. He pulled the trigger and launched the first can like a rocket.

He fired again and another one flew high in the air. He had come a long way since his BB gun.

I set the coffee down on a rotted stump that had served as a table for the past ten years and then grabbed the other rifle. Taking my time, I carefully lined up one of the cans in the scope.

Bam! James fired another shot and scared me out of my skin.

"Asshole!" I said, punching him in the shoulder.

"Go ahead." He bowed and stepped out of the way. "Glad to see you want the practice."

I looked through the scope and lined my can up perfectly. I pulled the trigger and had to stretch my imagination to

think I might've heard a small ding—either way, the can didn't move.

“Again,” James encouraged. He liked the idea that I might be able to protect myself, although he'd never let it come to that.

Once again, I took my time to make sure the can was perfectly centered. Holding my breath, I fired and nicked the top of the can causing it to wobble before it fell over. Making my miss even more dramatic, the can rolled around with a metallic reverberation before it fell to the ground.

I wasn't focused. My mind was a tornado and I was still angry about last night. “Why can't you believe me? I saw him take her.”

“It was just another dream, Jess. You were so young when she left. You were traumatized and confused.”

James sounded so condescending, I wanted to smack him. I'm nineteen years old. Did he not think I knew the difference between a dream and reality?

“These are memories, James, memories!” I was so mad that I fired off three shots in a row, blowing all three cans high in the sky.

Before I could flash a redeeming smile, I saw Marcus gating around the side of the house. Great, all I needed, brother number two. He wasn't really my brother but he might as well have been—the three of us had been musketeers since I was five. Marcus was a natural charmer with his celebrity smile and dark shaggy surfboard hair, and he loved messing with me.

“Damn, Jim, you already piss her off this morning?”

James rolled his eyes and held his hand out to shake with Marcus. It wasn't really a shake but a sideways smack of the hands.

“Mornin’.”

The look in his eyes left no surprise of what was to come next. I absolutely hated it. He picked me up off the ground and twirled me around in a bear hug until I was dizzy. As soon as my feet hit the ground, I hit him hard in the chest.

“My apologies, doll.”

“I’m not your doll, Marcus. I’ve known you since before you could even spell the word ‘doll’.”

“How about you forgive me and I’ll take you flying later?”

I could feel the excitement twinkling in my eyes which also meant they were swimming with tears. They always did this from any type of emotion, good or bad. It’s one of my most annoying quirks, especially when I’m angry. There’s nothing more embarrassing than fighting with someone and trying to hold your ground while crying like a baby.

For me flying was a passion and being confined to the ground was like being in a prison that limited my world. To stay grounded meant working and handling chores every day, and sweating for what seemed to be nothing. I should’ve been an eagle, gloriously spending my days soaring through the cliff tops and exploring the vast blue sky. I felt so free in the air, even if we were just flying an old crop duster.

Marcus rebuilt an old Boeing-Stearman Kaydet, finally getting it running last spring. We’d spent the entire summer and numerous hours learning how to fly it. Okay, he flew and I rode until a few weeks ago, when after persistent nagging and pleading, he reluctantly let me take the front seat.

“Sunset?”

“Okay, think I can fly solo after a practice run?” I was dying to take it by myself.

“Let’s work on that landing and then we’ll talk.”

James glared at us and fired at a target hanging from a branch. Bull's-eye.

So much for mending things. I was sure I'd just taken a step back instead. James didn't like me flying with Marcus, and he was afraid of the old plane. He had a terrible fear of heights and thought it would break down in midair. It was one of the few things he was afraid of.

We didn't fight all the time—we typically got along quite well and were only divided over what really happened to our mom. I knew what happened and he was wrong. It was that simple.

I knew this because of the visions I've had since I can remember remembering. I've always trusted my gut instinct, which seemed to live on steroids, but James continued to insist that I couldn't differentiate between dreams and reality. I swear one of these days he's going to throw in the towel and have me committed, or worse—married off.

CHAPTER 3

Perfect, I didn't have to meet Marcus until sunset, giving me the entire day to work on my research. I knew I was getting close to something big. I could feel it.

I spent most of the day at the library perusing every article or book they had on the subject of space travel, wormholes, black holes and the theory of relativity. I was pretty sure our mom had stepped through a different dimension or some sort of portal. It was the only thing that made sense because she disappeared right in front of my eyes.

Only one more stop to go before home. Nervous, I took a deep breath before entering the double doors to the police station. I moved quietly toward the counter, trying to stay under the radar. Completely blowing my stealth, a young police cadet yelled as though I was standing a football field away.

"Can I help you, pretty lady?"

I shrunk my head into my shoulders like a turtle and looked around—all eyes were glued on me. I could feel the blood filling my cheeks.

"Can you tell me if Detective Blake still works here?" I asked softly.

The cadet leaned in close, winking at me and flashing a cheesy smile. "Sure does."

I waited for him to continue but he didn't move. He leaned in closer with that goofy grin. *Was he flirting with me? Ugh!*

"Is he here?" I had to have sounded annoyed.

Detective Blake wandered around the corner and the cadet quickly returned to his task of shuffling papers.

“I’m Detective Blake. What can I do for you?” He looked friendly enough with his short build and potbelly. I slid over to where he stood at the end of the counter, glad to be away from the creepy cadet.

“Weren’t you the officer that handled my mom’s disappearance? Samantha Proctor—most people called her Sam. It was about ten years ago.”

Sadness shadowed his face. “Yes, I remember her. I always felt bad—her disappearing and leaving you kids and your dad that way.”

The blood returned to my cheeks and I realized I was glaring at him. I forced a small smile back to my face.

“Would you still have the files from the investigation? I was hoping to look through them.”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. They *are* still considered evidence.”

“Does that mean you’re still looking for her then?” The look of desperation on my face must have swayed him. Ha! I’m sure it was more about the thought of actually having to do something around here. Nothing bad ever happened in Aurora that wasn’t related to my family.

“Let me see if the box is still in the cage.”

He went to the back, so I killed the time by looking at mug shots in the lobby. Reward announcements for missing fugitives across the state, missing children profiles and my favorite, mug shots of the month, which plastered the walls. None of them were from Aurora.

Detective Blake returned, carrying a small box marked “S. Proctor” on the side. “There wasn’t much,” he said, sliding the box across the counter to me.

I stared at the thick packing tape that held the mystery closed inside. “Thank you. May I take it with me?”

“Sure,” he said with sympathetic eyes and a hint of a smile. He probably thought I was crazy, too.

I set the evidence box carefully on my bed and peeled the fifty-pound bag off my shoulder. My back was killing me from lugging the books around all day.

My heart beat in my throat. For years I had searched for answers or clues that would help me find her, and all that time this box had been sitting on a dusty shelf. Since the case had been cold for nearly a decade, I didn’t see the police as having anything else to offer. Lately, however, I had a strange vibe that drew me back there like a magnet.

I stared at the packing tape again—the only thing between me and what was inside. Strangely, I was afraid to open it.

I picked on a loose end of the tape and pulled it up slowly. *What if there was nothing in it? Or worse, what if what was in it proved I was wrong—that I hadn’t seen the blue-eyed man take her?*

I grabbed the tape firmly and ripped it off the box. Taking a deep breath, I lifted the lid and he was right. There wasn’t much—a clear plastic bag that contained Mom’s driver’s license and a couple of credit cards. I found it strange that she wouldn’t have taken those if she was just moving on.

Then I saw it, at the bottom of the box—a tiny, black velvet bag. The tears exploded in my eyes. Mom’s crystal necklace! It appeared magical with the silver specks glistening in the blue liquid inside—metallic blue like the Blue Morpho butterfly.

When I was a little girl, I used to pretend the crystal could open any door to any castle on the planet. It had been so long since I had seen the necklace that I'd almost forgotten about it. Holding the crystal up to my cheek, I could feel Mom's energy for a minute before carefully laying the necklace out on my nightstand. I'd always gotten an electric charge from it and Mom told me the crystal had a special connection to us.

I pulled some papers out of the box, which included a police report filed the night Mom disappeared. I had provided a statement that night and Detective Blake had written that I was confused, thinking I saw a man with spooky blue eyes take Mom into the windmill. A statement had also been provided by James, which said he was sleeping when he heard my scream. When he ran out, he saw me running across the field toward the windmill. Below the two statements was a comment from Detective Blake—"Missing woman probably left in the middle of the night." I ripped the report into pieces.

Then, another treasure stared up at me and it wouldn't have excited me more if it had been gold and diamonds. I recognized Mom's tattered leather journal immediately. I must have been about seven the first time I saw it. We were investigating what made fireflies light up.

I flipped through the journal to the entry we made that night. James had snapped a picture of us holding a huge jar of fireflies, and it was still taped securely in place next to my crayon-written explanation. I had even signed it to be all official.

"Too funny, how silly was I?" I asked aloud, laughing at myself and the memory.

"Want me to answer that?" Marcus replied out of nowhere.

Startled, I slammed the journal closed. Marcus was posing in my doorway, flashing his pearly whites. Maybe all the other girls couldn't resist him, but I was definitely not interested.

He lunged for me on the bed, trying to take the journal from me. "Let me see. Is it about me?" he asked, lying on top of me.

"Arrogant, aren't we?" I teased, managing to get out from under him. I quickly tossed the journal back into the box and replaced the lid. Moving it out of his reach, I couldn't cover my ground fast enough and Marcus managed to grab a book from the floor that had so inconveniently fallen out of my bag.

"Black holes? Time travel? Interesting reading, Jess."

I took the book out of his hands. "Thank you."

"Ready to fly, little lady?"

I was so excited that even his little lady comment couldn't annoy me. I grabbed the crystal from the nightstand and held it out to Marcus.

"Will you put this on me first? It's a good luck charm."