

Little Boy Blue

Chapter 1

Zaffre swiftly climbed a stone stairway to the landing. Hiding in the shadow of an awning, his heart pounded beneath his dusty cloak, and his breath came hot and ragged. He tugged down his hood to recover his eyes and hoped the jostling crowd below had not already noticed their vividness. Zaffre knew that on entering Deeville, this shantytown inhabited by deviants, he was skirting danger. But he also knew this was the only way to save the other Trues - especially Saffron. She was his closest friend and a True-amber, just as he was a True-blue, and her life was destined to be extinguished by sunrise tomorrow if he failed to find what was so desperately needed to aid her escape.

He peered over the bowed and dishevelled heads of banished humanity, swarming like wingless insects in this dark and depressive alley. Deeville, once known as Deviantville, had sprung up rudely and quickly at the base of Mount Horus. Zaffre took in the rise of the long extinct volcano. Atop its summit was the city of Ocula and within its walls was the Pinnacle of Power, the dwelling of the reigning clan. For the past five years Clan Brown had ruled Ocula and its surrounds, and no-one could foresee its end. In a city segregated according to one's eye colour, those that were brown-eyed were in the majority and therefore had the political advantage. The Greens were next in number, followed by The Ambers, and then The Greys. The Blues, decimated in The Colour Feud fifteen years earlier, were still recovering and, though a more honourable clan, were least in population.

Zaffre's father Cobalt was killed in the feud. He had also been a True-blue, as was Zaffre's mother, Sapphire. A True was one whose colour was pure and strong and was highly regarded and protected. Clan leaders were always chosen from this pool, and so were breeders. At the age of two a child of Ocula was examined and, if its eye colour was deemed the same as its parents, was allowed to stay. If different, it was handed over to the appropriate clan. If abnormal, such as in Heterochromia, where each eye was a different colour, then the child was banished from the city entirely. Left at the foot of Mount Horas, the child was collected and raised by a deviant family in Deeville. Zaffre studied the passing crowd and wondered at the brokenness that lay within their hearts as a result of such an action. How many unfortunates had also been born here with perfect eye colour, yet forced to remain in this squalor because of their 'so called' imperfect genes?

Zaffre had come to hate segregation, though it was the norm in Ocula. However, three years ago, in a radical trial to promote unity, chosen True children from all shades had begun to be schooled together. This is how Zaffre had met Ash, Malachite and Saffron. They were all Trues and, though from different clans, had

become firm friends. At seventeen years of age, this was their last year of schooling and the last year of permitted integration - in the eyes of the law, that is. The foursome had formed other ideas.

Not long ago, Ash had told Zaffre and the other two friends about the existence of powders that when mixed with water and dropped into the eye would change the colour of the iris, at least for a few hours anyway. If they got their hands on it, the possibilities were endless. Zaffre had considered it just a myth, a legend, just like all the other stories created to give hope from the tyranny of oppressors. But Ash had believed it so whole-heartedly that he'd decided to make it his life's quest to discover its whereabouts. Unfortunately his venture was never fulfilled for Russett, an overzealous Brown student, and dictator in the making had discovered his plan. Ash had been dragged from his dormitory bed two weeks ago by Brown guards and had not been heard of since, thus convincing Zaffre of the possibility of the drug's existence. When hot-headed Saffron had furiously confronted Ruskea about his role in Ash's sudden departure, he made sure she was imprisoned for treason. Malachite, fearing he may be next, fled to the refuge of his own clan to seek advice from his elders. Zaffre had also absconded, not just to save himself, but to continue the quest for the miracle drug and plan Saffron's escape.

Zaffre scratched an itch at his throat, just below his right ear, about where the Eye of Horus had been tattooed. The eye of his tattoo was inked in blue to match his clan and had been etched on his second birthday, just like every other child of Ocula. Malachite had a green tattoo and Saffron, an orange. He made a mental note to make sure their necks were covered if they were to change their eye colour. He took from his pants pocket the crumpled piece of paper he'd discovered amongst Ash's discarded belongings and read it again. *'Ebony DV - C15'*. 'DV' obviously meant Deeville, and he gathered he needed to find someone called Ebony. But what C15 meant, he could not fathom. Was it an address? A password?

He scanned the alley once more. Such a strange place this town was with modest dwellings. One violent dust storm and they'd be gone in an instant. Here and there were structures made from quarried stone and felled timber, but these were rudely built and nothing like the impressive buildings on the heights of Mount Horas. How unfortunate life was. The only physical difference between him and most of these ostracised people was the colour of their eyes, yet abandonment had made its mark on their spirit. Despondent survivors they were mostly, though every now and then he would catch a glimpse of a person with a purpose other than just endurance. It was in their stance and their voice. These people exuded resilience and command, and he wondered if they had the fortitude for rebellion. Zaffre looked up at the hulk of the volcanic monolith and the Pinnacle of Power, which was visible even from down here in the shadows. He saw it through the eyes of a rebel deviant and it was not something to cower from, but to covet.

He made his way back down the steps to the alley. Carefully shading his eyes, he asked a clutch of street peddlers if they knew of a person by the name of Ebony. A pink-eyed man with hypopigmentation known as a 'Pig' answered first.

'Sure, we all do around these parts.'

The others chuckled and a thin, hooked nose man with one green eye and one blue eye smirked, 'You want to wet your whistle, young fellow, then she's the one to ask.'

Zaffre clutched the horn strapped to his belt, the one inherited from his father and, if folk lore was correct, could call forth the sleeping creature from the cavern inside Mount Horas with one desperate blow from his lips. As the motley group laughed and elbowed one another he realised they meant something entirely different.

The 'Pig' spat and pointed a grimy finger in the direction of a ramshackle hut at the end of the alley.

Zaffre pushed his way through the throng to the dwelling. With some hesitance, he opened the door and was immediately greeted by a tall, dark skinned woman smelling of wood smoke and chemicals.

She eyed him eagerly, 'What's your desire, young one?' she asked, thrusting out her well endowed chest and lifting her skirts to reveal bare, shapely thighs.

'I ahh...I...um,' he stuttered turning away, unfamiliar with such brazen informality from a woman.

Zaffre felt a hand on his shoulder and as she pulled him against her, his hood slipped back uncovering his face. He saw the startled look in her strangely pinpointed stare.

'You're not from here!' she cried, and her eyes, devoid of any colour other than dots for pupils, revealed she was a 'Rid'. He'd never seen a person with Aniridia before now, and was fascinated. So was she. He could tell she was enamoured by the depth of his blue, by the way her tongue slid over her lips.

'What do you want with the likes of me?' Her voice had taken a husky tone.

'C15', he blurted, not knowing what response she would give.

Her body jerked. 'You want C15?' Her eyes narrowed, 'Do you even know what that is?'

He took a stab in the dark, 'A powder? To change eye colour?'

She quickly dashed forward to shut the door. 'Do you know the significance of chromosome 15?'

He thought for a second. Of course, he should have guessed. '15 is the chromosome that determines eye colour.'

'Well C15 is the artificial equivalent. Its street name is Seef. If that's surely what you're looking for, then you're on a most dangerous mission.' She arched a thick eyebrow, 'Can you pay?'

'How much?' He fumbled in the pocket beneath his cloak.

She stared, her pupils enlarging further. 'With those eyes you're a breeder, that's for sure. Give me some seed?'

'What?' He felt his skin warm.

She went to a stacked shelf and took down a glass phial, 'True seed is worth plenty 'round here.' She leant over a counter and withdrew a leather satchel. 'What colour are you after, or do you want a palette of all-of-the-above?'

Zaffre smiled, 'Ahh...a palette sounds good.'

'Fill this,' she urged holding the phial out for him to take. 'Then you can have the Seef,' she said removing a small carton from the satchel and shoving it into the depths of her bodice.

Zaffre's eyes darted around the room, 'So where do I...?'

Ebony let out a sigh, 'You're a bashful one aren't you. There's a place back here.' She pulled aside a faded curtain and ushered him in. 'I'll give you ten minutes.'

The storeroom was dark and dusty and smelt like old straw and rodents. He lifted his cloak, not believing what he was about to do for the sake of his friends. A commotion from the front room caused the phial to slip from his grasp. Shouting and a mighty crash. Followed by a cry, and then silence.

He waited, his heart in his throat, and then pulled a dagger from his boot. Venturing out through the curtain he found the shelves overturned and the place ransacked. Lying prostrate across the counter was Ebony. Her throat had been sliced and rivulets of crimson poured out and dripped onto the dirt floor. She was passed saving.

Zaffre instantly reached inside the woman's bloodied bodice and extracted the carton of Seef. Then he fled through the open doorway, hoping he was not being watched.

Chapter 2

Meanwhile, in the Pinnacle of Power, Ruskea was settling nicely into his new role as Supreme Commander of the ruling Browns. His elevation came as a result of the sudden and most unexpected death of his father, Marron. As he paced meditatively along the balcony looking across the valley of his command, he ruminated on the passing few years.

Ruskea had been waiting patiently for this Command. In his eyes, his father had been a limp wristed leader, too quick to offer the hand of friendship to eternal enemies. Ruskea believed that all non-Browns should only remain alive, and subservient, to the one True Colour; the Brown.

Under his father's rule, Ruskea had been prohibited from practicing the science he loved, that is, the science of war. His father had banned the development of new capabilities and had even restricted the production of current weapons. Now that he had the Helm, it was full steam ahead, and his secret research of the past three years was close to fruition.

He hoped that the legend he had stumbled upon a number of years back and the item that came into his possession around the same time, would provide the very thing he had longed for – complete domination. If there was truth in this legend and his research seemed to be pointing that way, then he had the perfect delivery system for achieving this goal.

Ancient stories told of a horn that if sounded by a warrior at the height of battle, would call forth a mythical fire breathing creature to fight at his side; the truth of the story Ruskea hoped, was that only two of the horns existed and that they were the 'Light Horns of Horus'. The horns, he believed, were ancient signalling devices. The tale he had heard, was this: The horns, once activated became linked by high frequency radio waves, to an ancient spacecraft which had been orbiting this planet since the days when wars were still numbered. Once the horn 'blower' had contact with the craft he could control the weapon on board. To observers who had seen the horn used, it appeared as though the warrior was indeed blowing it, he was in fact placing a small amount of his breath into the device to identify himself as a legitimate user, hence they became misnamed in legend, as horns. It is said that the weapon on board the craft is a super laser and was originally designed to keep world peace by destroying missiles before they reached their targets and had been controlled by an unnamed super-race. Ruskea had no need to use the weapon in this manner, to his knowledge no opposing force had anything resembling a missile; he would be using it against people. Mere flesh and blood stood no chance against such a device and absolute domination of any battlefield would be his.

He knew the research was nearly complete. He and his fellow scientists need only unlock a couple more code strands and they would be able to reprogram the horn and weapon to his breath alone. His research was also looking promising for

the targeting of the super laser. He was certain now, that he could attach a discriminating wavelength to the beam which would target only certain colours more importantly, not target one in particular; Brown.

A soft voice in his communications earpiece disrupted his reverie. The code had been finalised. The voice informed him he was now the controller of this Light Horn of Horus. He dictated a short message in reply, ordering the horn to be delivered here, to his balcony. He summoned his generals and leading scientists and informed them to be prepared for test-firing. If all went to plan and the weapon was controlled, he would pressure his scientific staff to complete the targeting system and inform his generals to make ready for war.

Below, in Deeville, Zaffre held his hand against the pouch tied to his belt. He wanted to reassure himself that the package of Seef was secure after his quick departure from Ebony's store. He had made his way to the outskirts of the town and was resting under the shade of an ancient olive tree at the top of a small knoll. From here he gazed east across the valley, to where the city of Viride could be seen perched along a ridge not far from the summit of Mount Horus. He wanted to be there as quickly as possible to find his friend Malachite. As he stared across the valley, clouds to the south began to glow, and to his horror, a massive bolt of lightning, brilliant white, leapt from the clouds and struck the base of the distant range. This was no usual lightning he realised quickly as an insidious tendril of fear found its way into his bowels. The bolt continued to hammer the ground and as it started to move slowly along the range a feeling of dread joined his fear.

Chapter 3

As he watched dumbfounded Zaffre slowly realized this strange fiery bolt of unspeakable power was no random phenomenon. It had intelligence, a purpose or some form of control, and, the longer he watched the more evident it became that this malevolent light was heading directly for Viride. He watched as the powerful bolt crossed the earth, blasting all to dust, leaving a wide, burnt and blistered path of destruction in its wake.

‘Malachite,’ he thought in horror.

Without realizing he found himself running towards Viride. It was a futile gesture, he would never make it in time and, deep down, his indoctrination stated he should leave the Greens to their fate. If he was seen openly helping another tribe, a true of his stature, why, he’d be excommunicated, more than likely sent to Deeville in utter disgrace. But Malachite, Malachite was his friend. Suddenly eye colour seemed so trite, so unimportant. He continued to run. As he ran the horn on his belt buzzed meekly. He transferred it to his pocket then ignored it. Desperately, he ran on, tears streaming from his eyes, his voice hoarse from calling, all to no avail.

He ran till his legs were jelly, his throat whipped from rasping breath but he knew it was futile. The bolt was moving slowly, purposefully, but still faster than he could run. All he could do was watch in horror as the bolt drew closer to the waiting city. The horn in his pocket was buzzing constantly now, something that had never happened before. Normally this would have interested him greatly but now, right now, he had much more important things on his mind. But, it was insistent, madly buzzing against his leg.

In Viride, the people were panicking. Most had seen the fiery bolts size and apparent intention and had formed their own conclusions. Some fled in horror, some stayed, locking their doors and windows, hustling children and pets indoors, and still others prayed, looking for a miracle or sign or perhaps both. The bolt ground on.

Finally, totally exhausted and with nothing left but the faint hope that Malachite had evacuated the city Zaffre halted. He collapsed beside a lone tree on the track and watched as the bolt drew closer and closer to the city. It seemed unstoppable.

As he rolled to his side he felt the horn digging in his side. It was vibrating wildly in his pocket, urgently, desperate in its intensity.

‘Strange,’ he thought removing it to get a better look.

It was vibrating so intensely it was almost impossible to hold. It had a life of its own now and felt as if it had the power to totally vibrate him. Holding it as best as he could he looked at the shimmering horn. It was vibrating with such frequency and speed that it had completely lost its definitive outline and a new shape had materialized, dancing in the blur before his eyes.

It was the shape of an eye and its colour was neither blue or brown nor green or indeed any colour he had ever seen before. It was rainbow, constantly changing, colour and hue. Shiny, glittering and beautiful, absolutely beautiful. In that moment of clarity he knew exactly what to do. He held the now glorious horn gently yet firmly to his lips and blew.

It produced a thin keening whistle like sound but he knew it had the power to travel, to change lives, to change the world. As he watched from the base of the tree the bolt stopped its travel and began to change form.

'We've lost it. We've lost control,' hushed Bruin, a junior scientist, who was leaning dangerously out of a window and peering through a telescope at the now stationary bolt.

'What do you mean we've lost it?' inquired Tan, his supervisor, storming to the window to take up the offered telescope.

'See for yourself. We've lost it,' Bruin replied unhappily.

Somberly Tan paused. He was glued to the image through the telescope, not believing his eyes, trying desperately to will it away but there it was. The bolt had stopped moving and seemed to be changing form and, more worryingly still, it seemed to have totally lost its menace.

'Ruskea must be told,' Bruin meekly offered in sympathy.

Tan rolled his eyes. 'I know. Wish me luck.' He slunk upstairs.

'What!!! What do you mean lost it!!!?' Ruska hurled across the room.

'Umm. We seem to have temporarily lost control of the mechanism. I am confident we will regain control in the very near future sir.'

'Future,' Ruska growled menacingly. 'I WANT IT NOW.'

Tan fled, throwing absurd promises over his shoulder as he left the room.

Ruskea fumed. Surprisingly he found his horn clutched tightly in his hand and he began to think. He looked at the lifeless horn in his grip. 'Maybe it needs to be blown again,' he thought doubtfully but desperately. He positioned himself where he could see the stationary and rather pathetic bolt in the distance and blew hard into the horn.

From where he lay under the tree Zaffre watched the bolt change. For some unknown reason it seemed to draw up inside itself and now it was strangely hovering

just under the cloud line. Zaffre could see the bolts top up beyond the clouds and he could see a vast rainbow of some sort forming.

‘Rainbows are good,’ he thought obliquely.

Unpleased, Ruskea saw the bolt rise into the clouds but from his position he couldn’t see the rainbow forming.

‘No,’ he yelled in frustration at the disappearing bolt. In part desperation, part fury he drew his deepest breath and blew into the horn with all his might.

The bolts rainbow in the sky slowly grew and then, like an over-pressurised balloon, it exploded at a furious pace all over the sky.

Zaffre watched as millions of rainbows galloped and arched all over his horizons, in all directions as far as he could see, covering everything in a wash of constantly changing colour.

‘It’s beautiful,’ he thought. ‘Rainbows are good.’

In the tower Ruskea fumed. He didn’t understand what was happening but it was definitely wasn’t part of his plan. Ha watched silently, unhappy but helpless.

From under the tree Zaffre watched as the ethereal mass of rainbows stopped shimmering and stayed, completely enveloping his entire world. Completely exhausted he lay down. Exhausted, but happy. Somehow he knew that this rainbow spectacular was good. It just felt right. The horn was still in his hand. It was silent now and cold, its message sent, but the feel of it in his hand was somehow comforting. He felt himself dozing off and being too tired to resist he let himself go. A faint itching just below his right ear was annoying, but it wasn’t enough to keep him from dropping off.

The light but slowing firming tap on his foot woke him and he aroused with a start. The setting sun was directly in his eyes but the rainbows were just as he remembered. A familiar figure was standing over him, some one he recognized, kicking him softly with the toe of his shoe. The face was haloed by the setting sun and he couldn’t make out its features, but eventually he knew who it was.

‘Malachite?’ he hoped.

The nodding head offered the answer.

A wave of relief filled his body and he gathered himself to stand. It was only then he noticed Malachite’s eyes and, open mouthed, he stared. Malachite was doing exactly the same thing, staring into Zaffre’s eyes with total intensity. His once

dazzlingly sharp lime green eyes were now, if possible, even more vivid. They were a kaleidoscope of colour, constantly changing, amazing, just like the horn.

‘Your eyes,’ they both said in unison as they clasped each other’s shoulders.

Chapter 4

“They’re all multi-coloured,” said Zaffre amazed.

“So are yours,” said Malachite, “It’s making me a bit dizzy,”

Zaffre grinned.

“The swirling is a bit much. I think it has something to do with the horn,” he scratched his neck idly, “It did a swirly rainbow thing before... you know, I’m beginning to think the legends were wrong; it can’t be meant to summon a monster from the depths of the mountain...”

Malachite was taller than Zaffre, and he dipped his head to peer more closely at Zaffre’s neck.

“Er... Mal?”

“Your tattoo,” said Malachite, baring his own neck, “Has mine gone all coloured too?”

Zaffre blinked.

“Yes, I... this is really weird ... Mal... I... um.” Zaffre paused to collect his thoughts, which were darting about like fish and causing his head to spin. “We’ve got to save Saffron. She’s due to be executed at sunrise. The eye powder exists; Ash was right. And I’ve got some... got it off a Rid in Deeville... something just started to obliterate Viride, and my horn started buzzing,” he held the horn up and waved it in Malachite’s face, “So I blew it, and the lighting beam sort of retracted into the clouds and then there was a sort of rainbow explosion... and now we have multicolour eyes...”

Malachite gave him a suspicious look.

“Zaffre... you didn’t happen to ingest or maybe inject anything while you were running around Deeville?”

Zaffre rolled his eyes and pointed skywards. Malachite let out a breathe and ran both hands through his hair in the way he usually did when he was in the middle of an exam and came across a difficult question.

“Zaffre?”

“Mmmm?”

“What in the name of all that is Green is going on here?”

Zaffre cast him a helpless look. Malachite ran his hands through his hair again and made an annoyed sound.

“Just when I’d got some answers too,” he said, as they fell into step heading away from Viride and back towards the capital, “I’ve been cast out for ‘impertinence and treasonous behaviour’. The aunts were extremely cross, and father as good as told me not to come back, and as for the Green Elders they told me in no uncertain terms. That was how I knew I was on the right track.” He grinned suddenly, and nudged Zaffre with his elbow, “You know that girl I told you about?”

Zaffre rolled his eyes. If he’d heard Mal talk about Jade once, he’d heard it a thousand times.

“Jade?”

“The very same,” Mal’s striding walk seemed to have acquired a certain swaggering smugness, “Most upset when she heard I was being kicked out. Came round to see me. Gave me a little something to remember her by,”

Zaffre snorted. Mal’s amorous adventures with the beautiful Jade usually crumpled under questioning. He had once spent a good half hour explaining in euphemistic detail some of the things they had got up to in the kitchen of Jade’s house during her parents’ anniversary celebrations... and Zaffre, Ash and Saffron had all roared with laughter when Mal was forced to admit that he and Jade had actually spent three solid hours washing dishes while various relations popped in and out of the kitchen in search of more wine.

“I’m serious!” said Mal, in mock outrage, “She really did.”

“Oh, I’m sure,” said Zaffre, detecting in the vagueness the hallmark of one of Mal’s not-quite-truths, “What was it though?”

Mal fumbled beneath his coat, and just as Zaffre was about to say he didn’t want to know after all, Mal pulled out a very odd looking dagger in a sheath. It was decorated all over with a slightly lumpy design of eyes, and the metal had iridescence to it like a dragonfly’s wings. It glinted in the dying light, and Zaffre thought the patterns were familiar.

“She gave you a knife?”

“Yep,” said Malachite proudly, tucking it back into his coat pocket. He sighed reflectively, “I did find some things out though. Gossip mostly.”

As they trudged down the road Malachite explained all that he had discovered about The Colour Feud, and the tentative steps towards recovery taken by the now dead Marron, who had implemented the mixed schooling program for Trues and tried to promote inter-clan cooperation. Rumour had it that Marron had been killed by his

son Ruskea and that Ruskea was pouring funds into the secret development of weapons.

“And I bet that’s what that super lightning bolt was. *And* I know how we’re going to save Saffron,” He said, giving Zaffre another jab in the ribs with his elbow, “You’ve got the eye colour drug, and I’ve got all the secret intel on the Treasoners’ Prison. Jade’s got an uncle who used to work there, and she reckons that he said once, that the whole system was loopy, because the entry scanners are sewn into the uniforms, and the uniforms get washed on site, so all anyone would have to do, was break into the washroom and nick some uniforms and they’d have access to the whole place,”

Zaffre frowned. He did not think this sounded promising, but it was better than nothing, and if it meant they had a shot at saving Saffron...

“Zaff...” Malachite’s voice had lost its confident tone. He sounded a lot more like the scared overgrown kid he’d been right before he’d run away. “Do you think Ash is still alive?”

Mal had looked up to Ash. They all had. Ash was... inspiring. His solemn grey eyes, wry grin and his absolute earnestness when he spoke about colour equality... he was the reason they were all friends, and he was the reason Zaffre had set out on this journey. If he was dead... well, if they succeeded in saving Saffron, they could try to do something to make sure Ash hadn’t died in vain. Zaffre realised Mal was still eyeing him anxiously in the dimming twilight.

“I don’t know,” he said truthfully, “I hope so.” It was his turn to elbow Mal, “Stop freaking out, you big scaredy Green.”

It was fully dark by the time they reached Ocular, and thought the clouds still had a rainbow glimmer about them, the night was very black. They had stopped on the way into town to experiment with the Seef. It stung, and Zaffre found it made his eyes water at first, but at least they both had brown eyes now... not that that would help much if they were caught, Zaffre reflected grimly. They’d found the tree - the one beside the prison wall, and now they were up it, all that remained was to drop to the ground and run across the lawn to the washroom. Behind him, Malachite clung to the branch, anxiously awaiting Zaffre’s next move.

Zaffre took a breath and slowly lowered himself down off the branch, until he was hanging by his fingertips, feet way off the ground. Even if he wanted to, there was no turning back now. He closed his eyes and fell with a jarring thud.

“Zaffre?”

“I’m fine,”

“Ok,” Mal slithered off the branch and dropped to the ground lightly.

They took off across the lawn towards the dim white of the washroom, and slipped silently in through the swinging doors. In the dark of the room, Zaffre could just make out the large washer-drier machines, and the big crates full of uniforms. He gave Mal a nudge and they crept over to the crates.

“Pity they’re not sorted by size,” whispered Mal as Zaffre leaned into one of the crates to grab a uniform. He hauled on the thick fabric beneath his fingers, and tossed it at Malachite’s dark shape.

“Hey, watch it,” hissed Mal, as Zaffre leaned in again, “Could have taken my eye out with this zipper end, you know?”

Zaffre, reaching around in the crate for another uniform felt something warm under his hand... it had eyelashes... and a nose...

Zaffre uttered a smothered oath and flung himself away from the crate, tripping over Mal’s big feet and sprawling on the floor. Just as Mal was saying ‘Hey, watch it,’ for the second time, a dark silhouette rose up out of the crate, and a blinding beam of light caught them both in the eyes.

There was a sharp intake of breath, and a sudden girlish giggle.

“Now what in the world are you two doing, creeping around in a prison washroom at night?”

Zaffre and Malachite blinked in the bright light. It couldn’t possibly be...

“S-Saffron?”

Chapter 5

'Ye gods, you two gave me a scare' gasped Saffron. 'I thought that I'd been rumbled. The guards have been making a frightful racket since they discovered me missing.'

'So how did you do it?' asked Zaffre.

'Easy, just clambered into one of those large laundry crates while they were in the change rooms, and waited until it got delivered here.'

'And what in the world were you going to do next?' came from Malachite.

'I didn't know, I thought that I'd figure that out when I got here.'

'So now that there's three of us trying to get out, what do you suggest?' asked Zaffre.

'I don't know. How did you two get here?'

'Over the wall using a tree on the outside.'

'That figures, no-one ever wanted to get in, it's getting out that's the tricky bit.' Then: 'Hush', shushed Saffron, 'there's noises coming up the corridor. They're about to look in here.'

'Better get outside, said Zaffre.

'And then what?' from Malachite.

'I don't know, we'll think of something,' from Saffron, ever the optimist.

Outside, they ran straight into a lone guard, who was scanning around in the dark with a large Maglite spotlight. He was extremely surprised to see them.

'Hey', he shouted running towards them.

Zaffre tackled the guard, and got him on the ground while Malachite quickly pulled out his knife and dispatched him before he could raise any alarm.

The three of them pulled the guard around the corner of the building, just as another guard from inside poked his head out and looked around in the dark.

'No one outside here', he said, 'any way Choco's patrolling, just in case she thinks she can scale that wall,' said the guard with a laugh, as he pulled his head back in and closed the door.

'Ok, so that's that', panted Malachite, as he sat down outside against the prison wall, joining the other two. 'Do you know where Ash is?'

'He's actually in the high security section, according to gossip,' whispered Saffron.

'Damn', said Malachite, 'how do we go about releasing him then?'

'Just let me get my breath back first', was Zaffre's answer, 'then we can try to work it out'.

'It won't be long before it begins to get light, so we haven't got much time,' Saffron pointed out.

'I think that we'd better get ourselves out first, then think about Ash again,' was Zaffre's reply.

Saffron swallowed a sob, 'We can't do that, just, leave him here!'

'Better that we survive so that we can help Ash later,' said Zaffre, 'rather than be captured ourselves and put back in the prison or worse.'

So, carefully they took their time returning over the lawn back to the fence, in the hope that in the dark they might be mistaken for guards. When they got there Saffron climbed onto Malachite's shoulders so as to reach the top of the wall, and then pulled herself up. Zaffre stood on Malachite's knees and grabbed hold of Saffron's hands to pull himself up. Saffron then dropped to the other side while Zaffre reached down to help Malachite up and over.

Just as Zaffre was dropping down, the horn at his side began to vibrate just as it had the day before.

'What now?' he wondered aloud. 'How can that rainbow effect help us now?'

'Listen', Malachite pointed out quite vehemently, 'if there's to be another destructive lightning bolt, you really don't have any chance but to blow it, and soon. If we just sneak around the wall here a bit, we should be able to see Viride and Deeville below us, and check out what's happening.'

In the dawn light, they could just make out the outlines of the two towns below, as well as the beginnings of a huge thunderstorm overhead. Huge dark clouds were forming.

'Looks like it's coming back,' continued Malachite. 'Better blow that horn.'

'What's coming back' asked Saffron.

'A major disturbance in the sky,' answered Malachite. 'Late yesterday Zaffre blew his horn, you know the one he inherited from his father, and it seemed to diminish the storm. As well as giving us rainbow coloured eyes.'

Saffron looked at each of them in turn, 'You're kidding me. They're only a murky brown now.' Her eyes widened, 'Hang on, how did you get brown eyes?'

'Seef,' the boys said in unison.

'What?' Saffron frowned.

'Ill explain later,' Zaffre said taking up his horn, 'after I've given this a go.' He gave it a soothing stroke, put it to his pursed lips and then blew gently.

Nothing happened.

'Blow harder,' came from both Malachite and Saffron.

So he did, as long as he could.

Only a quiet whisper came from the horn, but the black clouds instantly roiled back, followed by a sudden parting. A ray of sunlight focussed down precisely on the three of them.

'Well that solves everything - I don't think,' said Saffron as she collapsed exhausted on the ground.

Instantly an ear-splitting thunderclap coincided with a magnificent lightning display that covered the whole sky. Then the earth began to shake, and cracks began to appear in the wall behind them.

'Watch out,' said both Zaffre and Malachite as they pulled Saffron out of the way.

The wall began to topple and fall inwards. Through the rising dust they were able to glimpse that the prison walls were also beginning to crumble. The sound was deafening as solid matter became dust.

'Phew' what a terrible smell, said Saffron holding her nose, 'cement dust mingled with the smell of lightning strikes.'

'Right, let's go and find Ash,' demanded Zaffre, not taking any notice of Saffron. 'The guards will be so disoriented they won't know who we are in these clothes.'

Without too much trouble they found Ash wandering with other prisoners near the main gates, and looking slightly dazed.

'Where in all that's sacred did you guys come from?' he demanded recognising his friends.

'We'll tell you later,' said Zaffre, 'but first let's get to the city centre to see what's going on there. Ruskea, will surely be demanding terrible retribution now that his plans for total domination of all clans has been frustrated.'

'Hey, why do you two have brown eyes?' squinted Ash.

'They'll explain that and something called 'seef' soon enough, I hope,' shrugged Saffron pushing him along.

'Seef? You found some C15?' Ash cried.

'I did,' nodded Zaffre, 'thanks to the notes hidden in your room. But more of that later, we need to move fast.' He pulled down the hood of his cape.

A collective cry came from the surging crowd around them.

The group looked up and saw that the Pinnacle of Power was crumbling away in slow motion. It had been built on the edge of the city on top of a crag. The earth shake of moments was now proving that the structure wasn't as stable as previously thought. It was slowly subsiding under its own weight.

As the four elbowed their way through the panicked throng of Ocula residents, an elderly woman carrying a small child let out a shout.

'The Horn of Horus, he has the Horn of Horus!'

Zaffre had been clutching his father's horn in his hand, and now felt his arm being lifted high by the old lady. Her grip was surprisingly robust.

'I've seen this before. It is he who has redeemed us this day from Ruskea's supremacy,' she announced, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement, 'He blew Cobalt's horn. He is our saviour!'

The multitude surged forward, chanting the old woman's words. Zaffre felt panic rise. A couple of brawny men bent to lift him onto their shoulders, but before they could do so, a sturdy arm wrapped around him and pulled from midst the fervour. It was Malachite.

'No time for socialising,' Malachite winked, and thrust Zaffre ahead of him as they joined Saffron and Ash and hurried away.

Chapter 6

Sapphire, hugged her son and stared into his familiar eyes. 'So, there is true power in that horn of your father's. I always thought it was a myth. Such a shame he wasn't able to use it to save himself during the feud.'

'And all the others,' the woman beside her said with deep sadness.

Sapphire studied her sister's face, 'Yes Cerulean, and all the others. But we can rejoice. It has saved so many today. Not just Blues but all clans...even the Browns.'

'The Browns?' Cerulean spat onto the stone floor.

'Yes,' Sapphire touched her shoulder. 'There are many Browns who also despised Ruskea and his ways. We cannot blame them all for his tyranny, you know that.'

Cerulean let out a groan and moved away towards the kitchen. A meal wouldn't cook itself.

'Mother, can my friends stay here until we work our next move?' Zaffre asked, knowing her answer already.

'Of course, son.' She smiled at Saffron, Ash and Malachite, 'You're always welcome here. And it's safer here inside than out on the streets right now. It's absolute mayhem out there. Though you will need to contact your families. They must be very concerned.'

'We will find them soon enough' Saffron assured, 'I'm sure they've realised that my execution didn't come to pass.'

Ash let out a sigh, 'Though I fear my parents think I'm already dead. I will be keen to find them and reveal that I'm far from it.'

'And I can't wait to find Jade,' Malachite said with eagerness, 'We'll have some catching up to do.' He gave a wink.

The others just rolled their eyes.

While Sapphire joined her sister in the kitchen, the four friends each took a seat at the intricately carved wooden table.

'What happens to Ocular now?' queried Zaffre.

‘Once the jubilation settles down, there’ll be a search for a new leader.’ Ash said with a serious tone, ‘Unless a clan decides to take power by force like the Brown’s did, which I highly doubt, there will probably be some sort of referendum.’

‘Yeah and when word gets out of what really went on today, I’ve got a pretty good idea who it might be,’ nodded Malachite.

Zaffre’s eyes widened, ‘And who would that be?’

‘According to that old crone...,’ said Malachite digging Zaffre in the ribs, ‘...the hero of the hour.’

‘Hey, I’m not a friggin’ hero. I was just the one to give the horn a good blow.’

‘But you were the only one who could, remember,’ said Saffron, laying her hand on his, ‘Little Boy Blue, Son of Cobalt the Great.’ She raised an eyebrow.

‘Get out of it.’ Zaffre scolded, though choosing not to pull his hand free. He quite liked this feel of her skin against his.

‘She’s telling the truth Zaff,’ offered Ash. ‘You inherited this Horn of Horus. It was destiny.’

‘Destiny?’ Zaffre frowned.

‘Looks like it.’ Malachite, slapped him over the shoulder and then turned to the other two. ‘But he can’t do it alone.’

‘No. That’s for sure,’ said Saffron giving Zaffre’s hand a strong squeeze.

‘And we don’t want it to go to his head,’ smirked Ash.

‘Never,’ exclaimed Malachite, ‘That’s why he needs us alongside.’

‘I sure do,’ said a voice filled with emotion.

The three friends glanced back at Zaffre. His eyes, as blue and as bright as they’d ever been, glinted in the firelight.

The time of the Blue clan was returning.

In Deeville, revelry was in abundance. Dancing, singing, feasting and a little happy debauchery was in full swing as townsfolk celebrated the truth to the rumour that Ruskea was dead. Now that the ruling Brown Clan had been vanquished in one fell swoop, hope was tangible and the promise of a new and more equal future was on the horizon. At least that’s what every inhabitant of Deevile was praying for. Except for one.

In a back alley, in a dark room above a butcher shop, crouched Russett. He dropped the colour blue into his right eye and blinked. Once it took hold he would join the celebrations and no one would be the wiser as to his true identity. To everyone else he would be just like any other poor soul banished from Ocula for having heterochromia. Russett's father was dead, his clan's power was dead, but his sense of revenge was not. It lay in the pit of his stomach like a hibernating beast. When the time was right it would awaken and propel him into action. But for now he had cheap accommodation, a means to make a living, and thanks to an underhanded dealer in Seef, concealment. He also had his plans to keep him warm at night. He may have to bide his time, but retribution will come.

'Ocula will be mine,' he growled.