



A BECOMING
ATTRIBUTE



DEBRA KRISTI



A Becoming Attribute

A Balance Bringer Chronicles Short Story



by

Debra Kristi

A Becoming Attribute

“From the moment of inception, I was born into greatness.” I scratch at my hairline and tilt my head in consideration. “No. No. No,” I chirp. Too cliché. I can do better. My English teacher would push me to do better.

I bite my lip and narrow my gaze upon the metallic flecks embedded in the floor tiles, pushing my unconscious mind to solve this hidden riddle and wow me. “In an ordinary world lived an extraordinary girl...ha ha, yeah right,” I rattle off my little rhyme, already knowing it’s another fail, and shuffle up behind Chris in the checkout line.

It’s Sunday morning, and for a lack of anything better to do, Chris and I are going to kick back and watch a rental movie. In our one-high-school town, there aren’t a whole lot of options for entertainment. No mall, no movie theater, and no money for dirt bikes. The town fun was yesterday, on Farmer’s Market Saturday. Really it’s more like a street fair/flea market mix, but in any case, Saturdays are fun and Sundays not so much.

“What are you doing, Crystia?” Chris asks, exasperated, and sets the chips and soda on the moving belt. One person stands in front of us in line.

“I’m writing my superhero theme song.” I smile at the back of his head.

He erupts with a sarcastic laugh and turns to look at me. “If you’re a superhero, then this boring, dusty town must be Gotham?”

“No...” I contemplate my options. Our quiet, rustic home of Faredale is nothing like Batman’s Gotham or even Superman’s Metropolis. Actually, I can’t think of any superhero that came from a small desert town. Maybe that’s because superheroes need a larger community of people to save. Metropolis is to Faredale as a book is to a chapter. Yet I can’t help but believe that Faredale, as uninteresting and unexciting as it is, has well-hidden secrets. After all, there is something not completely normal about me or my sister, and we live here and are definitely meant for something more. “No,” I continue, “we’re sitting in the closet cabinet, pushing our way past the cloaks and coats toward the entrance of Narnia.”

It’s our turn, so the clerk rings up our purchase, and Chris hands over the money.

“I think you’re a tad confused. I may not have read the Narnia book...”

“The Chronicles of Narnia,” I interrupt.

“Whatever.” He shakes his head in irritation. “I haven’t read the books, but I saw the first movie, and it has nothing to do with superheroes. It’s all magic and destiny and that crap.”

“So what? I can blend my worlds if I want to. I’m being creative,” I beam. “I may not look like a superhero, but I’m still walking my path of discovering. Heck, maybe I’m more than a superhero. Maybe...” I folded my hands together and pressed them down the front of me, “just maybe, I’m a goddess.”

Chris laughs, collects his change, picks up our goods, and leads us toward the front door of the market. “Okay, Miss Superhero wannabe goddess. You can show me just how amazing your powers are when we get back to your place.” Clear expectation weighs heavy in his banter.

My happiness drops like the first nose-dive on a roller coaster. This is my fault. I created this situation by allowing him to move our relationship to the next step. Only, I didn’t see the event of last week as an advancement or betterment. I saw it as a sign we should stop...completely. So why am I still here, going through the motions? I bite the inside of my lip.

The front doors slide open and exposes a typical Sunday scene: the mid-morning sun glistening off the asphalt, a multitude of parked cars, and the buzz of people moving in and out of the market. But today, something is definitely different. Directly in front of us, in the shade of the store overhang, a collection of tables and cages sits on proud display.

“Where did all this come from?” Chris says, mirroring my thoughts. And then colors and sweet softness register in my brain, and my mood instantly lifts.

An uncontrollable squeal leaps from my throat, and I rush to the nearest table with a cage. A cage filled with kitties.

Stripes and splotches, fuzzy fur all around. I want to eat them all up!

“Kittens? You can’t get a kitten. Let’s go.” Chris tugs my arm while attempting to balance the six-pack of soda and bag of chips in his arms.

He’s right, of course. I know he is. My mother has never allowed us to own a single pet. That might be why I’m so drawn to animals. The lack of such an experience makes me desire it even more. And these kittens...they’re so freakin’ adorable! It was smart to set this pet adoption up in the front of the only true grocery store in town. Given it’s among Faredale’s top five weekend destinations the pets should get plenty of exposure. Plus the sight of these kittens tugs at the must-have heart string. I can attest that it works. I want to take them all home.

“Can you give me a minute?” I snap.

“Come on, Crystia.”

Internally I sigh, but externally, I ignore him and stick my fingers through the cage. The kittens are brawling, a frenzy of color toppling and turning. “Come here. Come see me,” I coo, beckoning.

As if the sound of my voice calms them, the play stops and the kittens sit up and stare at me, wide-eyed. A sweet, little black-and-white takes the lead and approaches my fingers, rubs against me. I wiggle and scratch her fur.

“How much are they?” I ask the girl working the pet adoptions.

“Fifteen dollars and a signature,” she says with a stunning smile.

“Only fifteen? I can do that!”

“You are not taking one of those fur-shedding creatures in my car,” Chris says.

Embarrassed, I avert my eyes from the girl. “It’s less than a five-minute drive. How much hair is he going to shed in such a short time?” I pin Chris with a glare.

“You’d be surprised.” Chris’s face morphs into a scowl.

“You no want a meowers, anyhow.”

“What?” I balk.

“I said—”

“Not you,” I cut Chris off, quick to look at the pet adoption girl. She’s staring down the front of the store, avoiding looking at Chris and me. Maybe she’s embarrassed for me, too. Or maybe playing witness to our bickering is overly awkward.

“They too little. Immeowture. Tear and chew everything.”

Who else is here? I glance back and forth, but there’s no one. Only the girl, myself, Chris, and the kitties. No one else lingers around the cages at the moment. My body jerks, and I stare closer at the cats, my gaze moving away from the kittens, until I pause upon an older, wise-looking cat, beautiful with long orange fur.

“Yes, I talk to you, furless one.” The cat blinks.

“What?”

“What’s wrong with you?” Chris yanks on my arm.

I pull away, wave him off, and stare at the cat. *Holy flipping kitties!* Did I just understand cat speak? “How am I hearing you?” I ask the cat, totally not caring how crazy I appear.

“Supurrb question.” He lifts his paw and begins to groom, then pauses and looks up at me. *“Don’t know.”*

I glance to the kittens, then back at the cat. “I haven’t gone mental, I am hearing you, aren’t I?”

The cat tilts his head as if bored by the question and watches me through slits for eyes.

My gaze snaps to the sign, taking in the information. Normal cats. Nothing special, besides being homeless, adorable, and awesome. I chew on my thumbnail, and gnaw on the need to figure this out. Today only, the sign says. I can't let this cat go without understanding what's happening. My eyes widen, knowing what I must do. He has to come home me.

I wrench open my purse and dig out my wallet, tearing it open. My cheeks flush. Five dollars and change. How can I not have fifteen dollars? My gaze darts to Cris and then back to my bare wallet. I sigh. I could ask Chris for the money but I don't want to owe him.

"Can we go now?" Chris says.

"In a minute." I turn my attention back to the girl. "What's that one's name?" I point to the orange tabby.

"That's Oscar. He's a sweetheart." Again, she smiles, and I feel a tiny pang in my chest.

"Can you save him for me?"

Her smile falters. "I can't make any promises. Of course, the kittens are always the most popular, so there is a good chance he will be here if you come back fairly soon."

"How late will you be here?" I ask, feeling a sense of urgency spread through my body.

"We're here until two o'clock."

I look at my phone. Ten fifty-seven. I have plenty of time. Still, I don't want to push my luck. "Let's go." I grab Chris's arm and make way for the parking lot.

Heat rises through me, and my feet fall heavy against the pavement. I imagine steam rolling off my skin as we make our way to the car. I don't say anything, just walk directly to the passenger door and wait for Chris to let me in. I stand there, fuming and waiting, and then look back at Oscar and the girl. The clench on my heart loosens, if only a little.

Chris unlocks the door with a click of his remote. "What's your deal?" he asks, then pulls open the driver's side door and slips in behind the wheel.

I drop into my seat and sigh. "Just take me home."

He grunts an ugly sound of disgust, then starts the car. We drive away from the store and from Oscar the orange tabby in silence. Less than ten minutes later, we're pulling up to my house. My mom's Ford Explorer sits in the driveway.

"Great," Chris mutters, pulling the car to a stop at the back of the driveway.

Relief washes over me. If the Explorer is here, then my sister is home, which means no alone time for Chris and me and no repeat of last week. "Doesn't matter.

It's not like you were going to get some," I say, then turn my body to face him. He looks like I just punched him in the gut.

"Is this about the stupid cat thing?"

I take a deep breath, steel my core, and think about all the emotions that have been swirling within me over the last week. Ever since we took our relationship to the next level.

"That comment makes you sound like an insensitive jerk." He starts to open his mouth, but I throw up my hand, stopping his rebuttal. "Right now, I'm asking myself why I would want to give so much of myself to such a person, and the truth is...I don't. I think it's time we call it."

His nose wrinkles; his brows furrow, and he stares at me in silence.

All week, I felt this brewing, but I didn't think this process out. Didn't plan what I would say or how the breakup would go. Not that something like this would ever stick to a plan. He used to make me laugh and smile—once. We used to be happy. Somewhere along the line, things changed, yet out of habit, our relationship continued. But now it's time for us both to find something better.

"We're done, Chris," I say. "You deserve someone who's more into you."

"What is that supposed to mean?" His voice slams into me like a hammer. "I've invested two years in you! You can't cut me out now."

My mouth drops open. I snap it shut, jump out of the car, and turn to look back at him. "It's over!" I yell, then slam the car door and march to the house, refusing to look back. *Invested two years. What a steaming pile of cat poop!*

I burst through the kitchen side door. Only after I am inside with the door shut do I hear Chris drive away. The tension that has seized my body unfurls, and I lean against the door, close my eyes, and attempt to find serenity.

Chris and I hooked up in the middle of my freshman year. I never even considered anyone else, and yet when I think about him, I don't get the slightest bit excited. Now I'm not sure I ever did, even in the beginning. But I should be excited by my own boyfriend, right? He became a favorite sweater or hoodie. The one you grab for comfort and ease. That was Chris, comfortable and easy and always there. But when did he become such a jerk?

"Bad day?"

I jolt ramrod straight and stare across the kitchen. I didn't hear my sister walk in. Ana carries a dirty glass to the kitchen sink. She pauses, glass still in hand, and looks me over, then meets my gaze.

"What happened?" she asks, a crease forming between her brows.

I relax and step into the room. "I just broke up with Chris."

She sighs sympathetically. "You can do better."

"Probably." I set my bag and phone on the kitchen table and wonder if my lack of emotion towards Chris is a sign of a deeper issue. Maybe I'm incapable of feeling that kind of connection, of finding love at all.

"No probably about it. You will. When the right one comes into your life, you'll know it." Ana turns toward the sink and begins to run water into the dirty glass.

I mull over her words, consider smarting off about her own lack of effort in the area of relationships and dating. The thought lasts all of a second. It's more time than I care to spend on boys, especially my now ex-boyfriend. "Can I have fifteen dollars?" I move beside her and lean against the counter.

"That came out of nowhere." Ana shoves the dish brush into the glass and swooshes it around in circles. "What's the money for?"

"I'm getting a cat."

She spins towards me so fast I think her head might snap off. "Are you crazy? Mom will kill you!" Her voice pitches; the kitchen sink gurgles and thumps, and suddenly water is spraying the ceiling and falling upon us like the overspray of a fire hose.

I squeal screams of delight, holding my hands up. I'm five again and running through the sprinklers, only this time the sprinklers are inside the house.

"Holy Gaia!" Ana yells. "What's happening?"

A devilish smile takes hold of my face. "You're a beautiful freak, just like me."

"I am not a freak!"

"Are!" I get right up in her face. So close I can see the water drops fall from her lashes and the zig-zag of her green-blue-brown irises. "Just accept it. It's why you're so great on the swim team."

"You think I cheat?" Her voice rises and cracks.

I don't answer. I'm captivated by the sight before me. My sister is about to shove me. Her hand is raised, and I recognize the look on her face, but I don't think she realizes her fingers are sparking with blue electricity. *That's new.*

Ana's hand slams into me, the current sending my body into a wave of quakes and twitches.

"Oh no! Oh no!" she says, her voice washing into garble. She sounds so far away.

My body jolts, jolts, jolts. My world hardening and pitching. And now Ana's in my face. Or is she? My body drops, and I fall into feathery softness. Everything becomes mushy and wet and blotchy.

Then darkness consumes until there is only black silence.

And sleep.

A low moan rumbles through my chest. *Did I make that sound?* Something squeezes my hand. Heavy with the weight of sleep, my eyelids fight the desire to open. I'm damp like I threw myself on the bed after walking in the rain. Weird. I take a deep breath and stare, blurry-eyed, at the ceiling. I don't recall what day it is or what I was doing before I lay down. I don't even remember lying down.

"I'm so sorry, Crystia," Ana says and squeezes my hand a tad tighter.

I blink. Everything that led me to this point illuminates. My thoughts reel, and the memories surge. I sit up with a bolt. *What time is it?* My head throbs, but still I need to know. In a frantic motion, I twist toward my nightstand to see the clock. One twenty-three. *Oscar!* In a leap, I tear my hand from Ana's, spring from the bed, and start tossing clothes out of my dresser drawers. I don't care if what I grab matches. All I want are dry clothes. Dry bell-bottom jeans, a dry gossamer top, and dry pink tennis shoes.

Ana is sitting on the bed behind me, her eyes narrowed and face tight. Her head tilts to the side. "Are you alright?"

"You mean after you electrocuted me?" My tone is irritated, but I don't care. Waking up wet, confused, and with a headache, and more importantly, losing all that time, is not my idea of fun.

"I didn't..." Her gaze drops to her lap. "I didn't mean... I don't know what happened."

I can sense the onset of a sisterly moment, and I don't mean to be insensitive, but—ugh, I have to go. I scan my dresser and nightstands but don't see my phone. It must still be in the kitchen.

I'm gonna make it. I'm gonna make it, I chant silently as I turn to leave Ana alone in my room, but then stop short. In the doorway I pause and look back. "One of these days, you're gonna have to admit the truth, and when you do, I hope I'm there to hear it." I leave her, mouth agape, my bedroom door slamming shut between us.

Phone, keys, cash, car. I power down the hallway, through the dining area, and into the kitchen. Remnants of a puddle remain, along with several sodden towels in a bunch. I step around the mess and grab my bag and phone off the table. *Phone and keys, check.*

Now the cash. I retrieve Ana's money jar off the shelf above the sink, not even caring that she'll know what I did. To save Oscar, I need the money. Within the jar, is a mix of coins and folding cash. I snatch a twenty-dollar bill and slide the jar back into place.

Ana calls my name from down the hall. *Kitty crap. She's coming.*

“Please, Crystia! Let me explain.” She moves closer, still talking, but I don’t know what she’s saying. I’ve stopped listening.

“Its fine, Sis.” I fish my car keys from my bag. “I needed a nap anyway,” I snap and head out the door.

Walking across our dirt driveway, I shake my head and wonder why Ana feels the need to be normal and fit in so badly. “When is everyone going to accept the fact that there is something off about our family,” I mumble.

I get in my car and pull out of the driveway to head for the market, all the while obsessing over Ana and myself. *She’s just not ready yet*, I tell myself. But she will be, must be, soon. And when she is, we’ll talk. We’ll talk about how I can talk to cats, and she can electrocute things and probably manipulate water. We’ll talk about how I’ve seen her hold her breath underwater for like ever! And how she’s the strongest and fastest swimmer on the school swim team. Or how I’m the fastest runner on the track team. And I don’t even break a sweat! It all has to mean something.

Are her abilities inhuman? Are mine? Or are we both just crazy?

My face flushes, and my fingers tap, drumming nervously. I rock back and forth in my seat and yell at other drivers on the road. *Move, people!* I need to get Oscar before it’s too late. I need to figure out what this is, what I’m capable of. My palms sweat, and I have to grip the steering wheel tighter than usual to keep it from slipping through my hands.

I pull into the store parking lot and catch sight of a truck stopped at the front of the market. The girl with the cats now has someone helping her, and they are loading supplies into the back of the truck. Closing shop. My heart pounds like a rabbit on the run. It’s not yet two o’clock, and they are already packing up. Quick as I can, I park the car, lock up, and speed-walk toward Oscar.

“Hey,” the pretty girl says, seeing me rush toward her. “I didn’t think you were going to make it.”

“Almost didn’t, by the look of things.” I survey the cats. Three of the five kittens are now gone. Hopefully off to loving homes. On the other side of the kittens, Oscar sits at attention, watching me. My heart and breath calm.

“You still had fifteen minutes,” the girl says. “I would have waited, just in case.”

A weight melts off my chest. “Thanks.” I stare at her stupidly, then look down to hide the color I feel warming my cheeks. Shoving my hand into my back pocket, I pull out the twenty-dollar bill I “borrowed” from Ana’s money jar. “Let’s get the process started.”

“Alrighty!” She grabs a form and pen from the table, and before I know it, I’m a new cat owner, with five extra Ana-dollars to spend on pet supplies. Add that to the

five dollars I already had and Oscar will want for nothing. I snort. *As if.* What will ten-bucks get me? A food dish and collar?

"That's it?" I ask when we're done.

"That's all there is," she tells me. "It's not about the money or overwhelming paperwork." Her mouth lifts at the edges and her lip gloss shimmers. "It's about finding our furry friends good homes." She hands me my copy of the adoption paperwork, along with a flyer on proper cat care.

I fold everything up, shove it all in my back pocket, and nod, maybe a little too enthusiastically, but I'm excited to start exploring this new talent. *I can talk to cats!*

"You look so nervous," the girl says, her entire face brightening. "Relax. Owning a cat is a great experience. You're going to love it."

"I don't doubt it." I turn and walk toward Oscar, eager to talk to him again. The girl follows.

As I walk past the kittens, they move to the cage siding, meowing, and press their little paws against the grating. "*Mea,*" they whine. "*Mea.*"

Beyond their cage is Oscar. He lifts his lazy gaze to mine and meows. "*Said meowers were trouble.*" He shifts his gaze to the kittens then back to me. "*We go now?*" He licks his paw and presses it to the barrier between us.

"In a minute," I say, leaning down in front of Oscar's cage to get a better look at him.

"You have a way with the cats," the girl says from behind me.

"So it seems." I press my hand to the metal separating Oscar and me. He moves his paw and rubs his nose to my fingertips. "I need to figure out what to do with this newly discovered talent of mine. Maybe get a job like the one you have." I'm about to say more, but I stop myself, clamp my mouth shut. *Why am I telling a stranger my secrets? I need to contain my excitement and—*

"I don't think you'd do well working a position like mine." The girl starts folding together the cardboard cat carry box. "The animals respond too favorably to you. You'd probably want to take them all home." There's a hidden giggle in her voice.

I sigh and turn to face her. "You're probably right." My heart sinks into my stomach, and my gaze drops to my pink tennis shoes. *I must have this Doctor Doolittle ability for a reason.* My mind starts tossing around all the jobs I can think of that involve animals.

"I might have an idea, though," the girl says, "if the size of the cat doesn't matter to you." She sets the completed cardboard carrier on the table next to Oscar's cage. "My name is Natalie, by the way." She shoves her hand toward me.

My gaze pops up to meet hers, and I shake her hand, squeezing a tad too tight. But her touch is warm and comforting. “Crystia,” I say. “What kind of idea?”

“Well...” She hesitates and looks back at her co-worker, who is now packing the kittens into the back of the truck. “My sister works at the Feline Preservation Center, and I’d be happy to introduce you.”

“Seriously?” Mini-kittens are doing somersaults inside my ribcage. “You’d do that for me?”

“Sure.” She smiles, and it’s like the world just opened up a thousand and one possibilities. “I can’t guarantee anything will come from the introduction, but it’s worth a try.”

I stare into her big, brown eyes, and swallow the lump in my throat. My mind whirls, creating daydreams of working with tigers, panthers, cheetahs...

“Big meowsers pushy. We’re purrfect.”

Guilt stabs me in the gut, and I grin at Oscar. “Can I hold him now?”

“Of course. Just be careful. We wouldn’t want him running into the parking lot.” Natalie opens the cage and pulls Oscar from his confines, hands him to me.

I pet him, bury my face in his fur. “I’m blessed we found each other, Oscar.”

He purrs and pushes his paws into my shoulder in an attempt to knead my skin into dough.

“Ready to go home with me?” I ask my new furry friend.

His forehead presses against me.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” I say and place him in his temporary cat carrier. “I guess you’ll need my phone number or something?” I ask Natalie, continuing to pet my new orange friend through the open lid of the cardboard carrier. His fur takes to the air, shedding as if escaping an impending doom. It tickles my nose, my eyelashes, and I can taste it on my lips. Chris was right. His car would have been filled with cat hair.

Natalie gives me a perplexed look and my cheeks immediately warm.

“My number. To call me about the position?” I quickly follow up and close the top of the temporary cat carrier.

“Of course.” Her eyes twinkle like she’s privy to a joke. “Can I see your phone?”

Now it’s my turn to be perplexed, but I take my phone from my back pocket and hand it over.

“Smile,” she says, and then leans into me and takes a picture of the two of us. With lightning quick fingers she presses a bunch of buttons, then grins, and hands my phone back to me. “Now I have your info and you have mine. If for some reason you don’t hear from me, you can tap me.”

“Tap you?” My nose wrinkles pushing tension between my eyes.

“You know, tap,” she says and imitates pushing a button on her phone.

I look down at my phone. My contacts page is open. At the top of my-favorites list, our faces smile back at me. Or really, she smiles and I look confused. I don’t know what to say to this so I don’t say anything. I simply stare at the picture in a stupid stupor.

“I should know something about the job within a week or so.”

“Great. This is exciting. Thanks!” I glance up to see her moving away, toward the truck. Then I glance down at Oscar’s paw, protruding from one of the holes cut in the box.

I set Oscar’s box on the ground and help the Natalie and her co-worker fold and load the last table. Natalie pulls a small bag of cat food from the back of the truck. “To get you started,” she says. “Can I help you get this to the car?”

“Thanks. I didn’t know carry-out service was provided.” I grab Oscar in his box, and Natalie laughs. Together, we walk to my little, old, silver Mustang parked in the middle of the lot. I set Oscar’s box in the front passenger seat, open its top, and whisper to him, “This will be quick. Don’t worry.” If I didn’t know better, I’d think he rolled his eyes at me before looking away. After closing the lid of the box, I wrap the seatbelt around his cardboard kitty cage and lock the belt into place.

“Thanks for everything,” I say to Natalie.

A moment of awkward silence passes between us, and then she takes a step back. “Okay, well, good luck with Oscar, and I will talk to you soon.” She turns and starts walking back to the front of the store.

“Yeah, talk to you soon,” I say to her retreating back.

And then she turns and waves, and a silly grin creeps across my face. *What’s that about?*

I jump into my car before I can say anything embarrassing.

Minutes later, I’m driving my car with Oscar at my side, heading toward home. My home that has never seen a pet.

Gah! Mom’s going to be so irritated that I adopted Oscar.

A meow from within Oscar’s box beckons me to look down. His orange paw is pushed through one of the side air holes.

“We’ll be there soon,” I say, returning my attention to the road. And sure enough, a few minutes later, we’re parked, out of the car, and walking toward the house. “I need you to do me a favor.”

“Meows?”

“I need you to stay hid...”

The kitchen side door swings open. “Crystia...” At the sight of my cardboard cat carrier, Ana freezes, blocking the doorway. “You got the cat?” Her eyes widen with disbelief or shock or both.

“I did.” I climb the two steps and push past Ana and into the kitchen, set Oscar’s box down on the table. “You need to see how amazing he is. Then you’ll understand.”

Ana doesn’t respond. Instead, she stares at me and at the box and at the orange paw jutting through one of the air holes.

I open the lid, retrieve Oscar, and gently place him on the kitchen floor. “This is your new home,” I say. “Our room is all the way down the hall and on right.”

Oscar glances between me and Ana and then walks a circle around the room before disappearing through the doorway and into the shadows of the dining room and beyond.

Ana coughs and my gaze jumps from Oscar’s departure point to her. “You talk to him like he knows what you’re saying,” she says.

“He does.” I shrug. I’m not going to lie, even if I know she won’t believe me. Not until she hears it for herself. That’s what I’m waiting for, her to hear Oscar and vindicate me.

“Mom is going to be infuriated,” she counters, ignoring my admission of cat intelligence.

“Only if she finds him.” I grin, mischievously.

“Oh, for the love of Gaia and God!” Her hands rise and then fall at her side. Her lips torque, and her nose wrinkles. “There is no way you can hide that cat from Mom. He’s gonna shed and smell and...”

Oscar yowls from somewhere at the back of the house.

“See?” She points. “And meow.” Her hands drop with a solid *cerplump* on the table. “Unless mom suddenly becomes blind, deaf, and loses all sense of smell, she’ll be on to you before you can spell that cat’s name.”

I’m grinning from ear to ear. She can blow hot air at me all night long, and I doubt I’ll mind. Mysteries have always been a love of mine, and this—Oscar and the ability to understand him—is the most intriguing mystery I’ve yet to come across. It’s even better than the mystery of the anonymous valentine note left in my locker a year ago. Possibly even greater than our missing Father.

“At least you won’t be in the line of fire when she becomes wise.” I grin, grab the empty cat carrier and bag of cat food, and then move past her in my search for Oscar. I see no need to drag this conversation out any longer.

“Don’t be so sure,” she says from behind me. “Mom will likely blame me for remaining silent.”

Mom could. Pets have always been one of her trigger buttons. Maybe this is why. Maybe she always knew I’d be able to communicate with them. And maybe, just maybe, she’s been trying to keep me from that discovery. A gurgle of lava-hot acid rises in my chest.

“Just put all the blame on me,” I yell over my shoulder. “I’ll take full responsibility.” I walk down the hall toward my bedroom and hear Ana grumbling from the kitchen.

The door to Mom’s room is open; so is the door to Ana’s, but I see no sign of Oscar in either. When I reach my room, I find the furry feline curled comfortably on my bed.

“Look at you,” I say, closing my bedroom door behind me. “Already making yourself comfy.” I drop all the cat supplies on the floor and stare at Oscar.

He looks up and his whiskers twitch. *Thought you stank.* He shakes his head. *Other very stinky-stinky.*

“Ana?” I don’t know if I’m disappointed or happy that my sister smells worse than me. What does the stink mean? I turn my nose toward my arm pit and take a whiff. I don’t think I smell bad, but I’m not a cat. “Is that normal? People smelling bad to you?” I take a seat on the bed and start petting him. He purrs and presses his head against my palm.

“Stink...no. Heard talk.”

“What kind of talk?” My insides are exploding with light and effervescence. I can’t uncover answers fast enough.

“Talk of mother world. Stinky humans from mother world.” Oscar flops onto his side and rubs against my covers.

“Mother world?” My voice pitches and my skin itches. I can hardly remain seated. “What does that all mean?”

“Just mother world.” He rolls over. *“Think you stink like mother world.”*

Oscar is both informative and not. He creates more questions than he reveals answers. Leaves me to speculate. And yet, what he says fits nicely into the puzzle of me. I never felt right in this world. Now I can say that’s because I’m probably not meant to be in this world. Just like Supergirl or Wonder Woman.

“Hiddenkel,” he says.

“Holy hot places!” I jump off the bed. Oscar sits up and watches me with his piercing cat eyes. If I had a kitten for every time I’ve heard that name in my sleep, I’d be so far beyond a crazy cat lady that I’d be institutionalized. I fluff Oscar’s fur and then run around my bed to my closet door. A collage of magazine pictures

covers the entire surface. It's my dream board, all the places I'd like to visit and all the things I want to do before I die. Along the bottom, I tear free a space, pulling back a paper picture of the canals in Venice. Grabbing a pen from my nightstand, I write the name "Hiddenkel" in the newly exposed place. If this is a real place, then I need to add it to my bucket-list. Possibly move it to the top of my must-do.

"If my family isn't from here," I think out loud while staring at the new addition to my closet door. "Then it's possible all these things we can do are real. Ana and me, we really are different for a traceable reason."

"Ana," Oscar says. "Stinky-stinky." He jumps off the bed and sits beside me.

"But she can't understand you," I say.

Oscar sneezes, then wipes at his nose with his paw. When he's done, he sits up straight and looks directly at me. "*She must...if she is to become.*"

Superheroes. Goddesses. The words whirl through my head like a sand storm of clean kitty litter. "Become?"

His stare is steady, but his shoulders seem to tighten, heighten. "*Become the needed savior.*"

And there it is! Everything I've been searching for and more. Not just superheroes or goddesses, but saviors! Chosen ones.

Adrenaline pumps in a mad rush through my body, and my grin most likely devours my face. I swallow the onslaught of giggles threatening to explode from my lungs and clench the bedsheets tight within my grasp. I cannot wait for the becoming to begin. I am ready. Bring it on!

THE END



Dear Reader,

I hope you enjoyed this read from and about Crystia. She is a fun, free soul. Are you interested in reading other scenes from the point of view of other characters? Feel free to drop me a message and let me know your thoughts. I will happily consider creating other scenes for future projects.

Haven't read the full story yet? Check out the first and second book in the series and watch for more exciting additions to the series in 2019.

[Becoming: The Balance Bringer](#)
[Awakening: The Balance Bringer](#)

Visit me at DebraKristi.com to hear my latest news and watch for updates on The Balance Bringer Chronicles. Don't forget to grab your [FREE gifts](#), if you haven't already. Have a beautiful and most magical day!

Debra Kristi

Follow me online

[Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Pinterest](#)

About the Author



Born and raised a Southern California girl, Debra Kristi still resides in the sunny state with her husband, two kids, and four schizophrenic cats.

Her love for the fantastical began at a very young age when her imagination magically transformed the backyard swing set into the U.S.S. Enterprise. Since then she's had a lifelong love of science fiction, fantasy, and creative storytelling. Unlike the characters she often writes, Debra is not immortal and her only superpower is letting the dishes and laundry pile up. When not writing, she is usually creating memories with her family, geeking out to sci-fi and fantasy television, and tossing out movie quotes.