



## The Crystal

WE DRESSED QUIETLY BY THE LAST LIGHT OF THE FIRE'S dying embers and slowly shuffled back toward the house through the wooded darkness. I was dead tired, starving, and had some leaves stuck in my underwear. Furthermore, a nagging specter of skepticism continued to lurk in a corner of my mind. I wondered how much accuracy I could assign to a deck of cards. There *had* been a ring of truth to what Rhonda had said, and the Fool card kept haunting me. Was I a fool for *doing* this, or a fool for being so *skeptical* about it? The card showed a person looking away as he was about to step off a cliff to a sure death. Did that mean I should be looking forward? Or should I stop all progress before I get myself killed? Needless to say, I was more confused than ever.

"Let's consult the crystal before we eat," suggested Cynthia. All the women seemed to agree, although I didn't know what they were talking about. I tried to ask them about this crystal thing as we walked back through the woods, but they just told me to wait and see. Back inside the house, Rhonda drew open the curtain on the picture window in her living room to reveal a row of quartz crystals and other stones arranged carefully on the window sill.

"The crystals sit in the sunlight during the day for recharging," she said, picking out a large, clear quartz

point about six inches long. She inspected the crystal closely, and put it back.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked.

“Recharging? How does a rock ‘charge’?”

“By the sun. That’s not the right one, anyway. Here, let’s use this one,” she said, offering no further explanation. She picked up a smaller pointed crystal, pencil-thin and about three inches long, and cradled it in the palm of her hand.

Rhonda tied a short, thin hemp cord around the blunt end of the crystal, then laid the contraption on the edge of the circular coffee table in the living room. Unrolling a large world map, she spread it out on the table, securing its upturned corners with four ceramic coasters, then placed the crystal on top of the map, near its center.

Deb struck a match and lit one end of what appeared to be a small, tight bundle of straw, about the size of a large cucumber, which began smoking profusely. She carefully waved the smoking bundle around each of us, one at a time, directing the smoke onto our bodies with her hand. “This is a smudge stick of sweet grass and sage,” she said. “The smoke purifies us before we consult the crystal.”

All six women knelt around the coffee table, insisting that I join them. Rhonda held the free end of the foot long cord with her right hand, allowing the crystal to dangle a couple of inches over the map’s center. Each of us placed our right hand on Rhonda’s, one at a time, clockwise; we did the same with our left hands. Rhonda’s large hands seemed like iron, and the entire mass of hands was very solid and surprisingly motionless. The crystal point remained suspended at the end of the hemp cord, fractions of an inch above the map.

“Let’s close our eyes tightly,” she said, “Very tightly. Concentrate on the pressure behind your eyelids. Concentrate.” A gentle “om” chant began, and I quietly joined in. The kneeling women began to lean back and forth in a slow sideways rhythm, moving me with them, our hips, arms, and shoulders touching. “Concentrate on

the pressure behind your eyelids,” I heard Deb’s voice whisper. The quiet chanting continued, as we moved like seaweed coaxed by gentle waves, leaning slightly one way, then another, back and forth, chanting, concentrating on our eyelids, gracefully weaving and undulating, chanting hypnotically, focusing. The clump of hands suspended in mid-air in front of us became very warm. This went on for quite some time, perhaps for hours. I was soon in some sort of trance, it seemed, and time became unnoticeable and irrelevant. I could feel my knees on the carpet beneath me, and the warm pressure on my hips and arms from the women on either side, first pressing against my right side, then my left, over and over again, pushing me ever so gently back and forth, back and forth. My eyes remained closed.

Eventually, I became completely oblivious to everything, as if I had fallen fast asleep. My mind became totally blank, and although I was physically present, I was not there in any other way. Strange visions tumbled through my head uncontrollably, as if I was drifting into a dream world, sinking deeper and deeper. Suddenly, the chanting and movement stopped. I impulsively snapped opened my eyes. The women were staring at me, smiling. The crystal lay on the map, utterly still. “Don’t move,” Rhonda whispered. “Remove your hands very slowly and carefully, one at a time,” We did as she said. She set the hemp cord on the map, careful not to disturb the crystal.

“There you have it, Joseph,” she said, with a nod of her head toward the map and a pleased look on her face. I looked down at the table. The sharp point of the crystal lay directly on St. John’s, Newfoundland.