

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: 54 chapters in, we get our first Crystal Pelham POV xD

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Seated behind her desk outside of her Aunt's office, Crystal is on her third rewatch of the Press Conference when her mother comes rushing in. Feeling like she's been caught with her hand in the cookie jar, Crystal immediately pauses the video on her phone and bolts to her feet.

"M-Mom!"

But Sarah Pelham, otherwise known as Lady Photon, isn't here for her. She manages to spare Crystal a single apologetic glance even as she makes a beeline for her sister's office.

"Not now, Crystal."

Without even breaking stride, her mother reaches the office door and doesn't bother knocking, slamming it open and then slamming it shut behind her a moment later. Though not before Crystal hears Sarah's opening words to Carol.

"Have you seen the news, Carol?!"

She knows she shouldn't eavesdrop but given the subject matter... Crystal all but rushes out from behind her desk and over to the door. She then presses her ear against the surface of the old, porous wood so she can listen in on the conversation happening on the other side.

“-seen it, Sarah, yes...”

“Well what are we going to do about it, Carol? I assume your daughter did NOT see fit to let you know she was leaving New Wave to join this... this Covenant group?!”

From what Crystal can hear, it sounds like her mother is pacing back and forth across the room, probably with her arms crossed over her chest. Carol, meanwhile, sounds a bit more distant and clearly hasn't stood up from her desk yet.

“What can we do, Sarah? What's done is done. Vicky is an adult woman who can make her own choices.”

Silence falls and Crystal can easily imagine her mother has stopped in her tracks and is staring at her aunt with a dumbfounded expression of disbelief on her face. After all, Crystal is pretty sure she has the same expression on her own face right now as well.

It was like an episode of the Twilight Zone. The dynamic between the two mothers of New Wave had long been established, refined, and honed over the years. Crystal and the others of New Wave's younger generation had literally grown up in the thick of it.

Crystal and Erik's mom was the more reasonable, levelheaded of the two sisters. If Sarah was upset or disappointed in you, you knew you'd fucked up. But if you could get her on your side, then you knew you were on the side of angels. Meanwhile, Vicky and Amy... err, Amelia's mom... well, she was less reasonable, quicker to anger, and prone to snap judgments that sometimes had to be overturned and undone by Sarah days later.

Privately, Crystal had always felt a little guilty for how good she and Erik had it compared to her cousins. When Amelia eventually left the family behind and changed back to her birth name, Crystal hadn't even been all that surprised. Carol was difficult enough to get along with as an Aunt and an employer. She couldn't imagine how hard it would be to have the woman as your mother.

But now... now she sounded downright subdued. Like she wasn't even going to fight to get Vicky back from Covenant. Could it be possible that she'd realized the same thing Crystal had? Biting her lower lip, Crystal leans on the door harder, listening for Sarah's response.

"... I'm the last one to advocate for your heavy handed version of parenting, Carol. Lord knows we've had enough conversations about it over the years. But where is this coming from, exactly? Last we spoke, you were bending over backwards to get Vicky into BBU at the end of the month. From the sound of it, she's turning her hero work into a full time job. Not going to have much time for University, will she?"

That was a very fair point. And frankly, that alone would probably raise Crystal's suspicions, even if not for everything else. Still, she keeps listening even as Carol lets out a defeated sounding sigh.

"No, she probably won't be attending now, I'd imagine."

"What the hell, Carol?"

"... I had my eyes opened, Sarah. I already knew I was a garbage human being when I cheated on Mark with Niel and betrayed both his and your trust in the process. But now I realize I was always a terrible mother as well. At this point, I don't have any right to tell Victoria what to do anymore.

All I can do is try and support her and hope that maybe one day she'll forgive me."

Crystal's eyes are wide as saucers, even as she hears nothing but shuffling for a moment, and then the sound of her mother sitting down heavily in a chair across from Carol. Neither of the two sisters say anything for a long moment and Crystal can only imagine the expressions they're making.

Just when she's wondering if she should stop eavesdropping and get back to her desk, however, Sarah speaks up in a subdued tone of her own, and the subject matter has Crystal listening in even more intently than before.

"What about New Wave, Carol?"

What indeed. New Wave was barely a shadow of its former self at this point. Vicky had been the only one doing nightly patrols most weeks, with Sarah as the second most active member. Crystal and Carol were here at the University, Niel was over in Boston, and Erik had joined the Protectorate.

Really...

"I think it's time that we accept New Wave is over, Sarah."

Crystal flinches, even if that was precisely how she felt as well. To hear it from her Aunt's lips however is... well, it's like a death knell. It makes it all feel extremely final.

"I never thought I'd be hearing that from you of all people, Carol. What happened to this being 'just a sabbatical'?"

“We both know I was always just in denial about that, Sarah. I’m never going back to the law firm, not really. As for New Wave... the day Amelia left was the day New Wave started to die. We were just too stubborn to see it.”

“You think it was that early, huh?”

“We wouldn’t have lasted as long as we did without her. Having Panacea on our roster not only provided us with healing but also shielded us from true retribution. It’s no surprise to me that everything fell apart after she left. And I’m not blaming her either... I’m fully aware that her departure was all my fault.”

Her Aunt is seriously saying all of the quiet parts out loud right now. Crystal doesn’t know how to feel about any of this. Part of her almost wishes that they still had that Cousin Group Text where she, Erik, Vicky, and Amy had all gossiped and shared with one another over the years.

Then again, the same reason that group text was now defunct was probably the same reason this conversation between Carol and Sarah was happening right now.

“So that’s it then? This is how it ends?”

Sarah’s tone is soft... but also surprisingly filled with acceptance. Carol nevertheless hesitates for a moment before responding in an equally quiet voice.

“... Yeah. I think it is.”

There’s the sound of shifting on the other side of the door, and then two people hugging as Sarah lets out a shuddering breath.

“I love you, Carol.”

“I love you too, Sarah.”

Realizing that they’re coming to the end of the line, Crystal hurries back to her seat, sitting down and bringing up her phone just in time for the door to Carol’s office to open up.

She makes a point of looking up and trying to feign curiosity, only to yelp when Sarah all but teleports over to her and scoops her out of her chair into a great big hug as well.

“M-Mom!”

“I love you, sweetie. With all my heart.”

Crystal flushes and hugs her mother back, relaxing into the warmth for a moment before stiffening up at Sarah’s next words.

“Even if you have been a sneaky little eavesdropper since you were very little.”

A squeak leaves Crystal’s lips as they both pull away. How had she known?! One look at her mother’s smug face lets her know the truth though... Sarah hadn’t known until Crystal’s reaction told her that she was right. Damn it all...

“Have a good rest of your day, Crystal. And you and Erik really should come around for dinner more often.”

Huffing, Crystal crosses her arms over her chest and glances to the side.

“That sounds lovely mom, but I’m not my brother’s keeper...”

But Sarah just shakes her head, her smile becoming somewhat... nostalgic.

“If not us Crystal, then who?”

With those parting words, Sarah shakes her head and squeezes Crystal’s shoulder before leaving the office behind. With Carol having already closed the door of her own office, Crystal is left alone again, standing there behind her TA’s desk biting her lower lip.

After a moment of the guilt getting to her, she sighs and shoots off a text to Erik, making it clear in no uncertain terms that they ARE going to dinner at mom’s this week. Once she gets back reluctant agreement a moment later, Crystal sits back down... and goes right back to rewatching the Joint Press Conference between the Protectorate and Covenant.

Never mind that Vicky had joined another group without telling anyone... Aunt Carol was kind of right that New Wave was basically already dead, so there wasn’t really anyone left to tell in Crystal’s opinion. But the fact that Legend had to come all the way down from New York to handle the shitshow that Covenant had uncovered... that was pretty wild.

Director Calvert being the supervillain Coil... that sent all sorts of shivers of disgust down Crystal’s spine.

But more than any of that, Crystal finds herself pausing and replaying a specific few seconds of the Press Conference over and over again. It’s not even one of the questions that they asked Portent or Legend or anything like that. Nobody is talking. Rather, it’s the moment where Portent steps

away from the podium to give it back to Legend. He turns in just the right way that the camera catches his ass, outlined in his heroic costume.

... She's such a fucking pervert. Shame and embarrassment fill every pore of her being and judging from how hot her face feels, Crystal is currently bright fucking red right now. There were a million ways she could have put two and two together and got four. In hindsight, it was just so damn obvious when she thought about it for longer than five seconds.

So why... why in the fuck was it seeing Portent's ass outlined in his costume for like a second at most that had helped Crystal connect the dots and realize that was Jason up on that stage?! Groaning, Crystal bangs her forehead into her desk a few times.

Of course, she knew why, in the end. It was because she'd caught herself staring at Jason's ass over the months they'd known each other often enough to be very aware of precisely what it looked like, even when it was outlined in a way she'd never seen before.

That was definitely Jason. Everything else lined up too, especially the fact that while Portent was there giving a Press Conference the night after the biggest villain bust that this city had seen in years, Jason wasn't here and had in fact called in to say he wouldn't be here today.

Combine that with him being Vicky's tutor and... ugh. It was obvious in hindsight. Crystal thought she might even be able to hear Jason's voice through Portent's mouth, though she wasn't entirely sure. He sounded different, either because his costume made his mouth move differently or because he was trying to put on a different voice. However, with her surety that that was definitely Jason's ass came a familiarity she simply couldn't shake the more she listened to Portent speak.

... Admittedly, she should have shot her shot ages ago. When she'd invited Jason out on that date to the coffee shop, she'd fully intended to ask him out properly on top of giving him the offer from Carol to be Vicky's tutor. However, she'd chickened out at the last second and now... now he was apparently on a team with two women, one of whom was Vicky, and they were sponsored by Amy, or rather Amelia.

What if she'd missed her shot? What if he was already dating Vicky? Or even that other chick Weaver? Crystal bites her lower lip, staring down at her phone in between her legs as she rests her forehead against the cool wood of her desk.

... Fuck, what was wrong with her? She was trying to get out of the cape scene. She hadn't been on patrol in months. Sure, she'd used her powers here and there for small stuff to keep the itch at bay, but she'd been doing pretty good at putting that life of danger and violence behind her.

So why the hell was she now considering whether or not she should try to join Covenant? It wasn't just because she wanted to get closer to Jason... was it?

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!

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A/N: Will try to keep this up to date at the end of every chapter, get on me if I forget please. Though if it gets too out of hand, might have to change it at some point.

Jason's current banked points:

400 Celestial Points

Jason's current banked power:

= Second Skin (600 Points)

Jason's current powers:

= Flash Air (Gained in Chapter 1)

= Transformation Pendant (Gained in Chapter 4)

= Keen Eye (Gained in Chapter 4)

= Blood, Death, and Demons (Gained in Chapter 6)

= Alchemical Prodigy (Gained in Chapter 8)

= Staff of Magnus (Gained in Chapter 13)

= Bind and Seal (Gained in Chapter 17)

= Hero of a Hundred Faces: Everyone's Leader (Gained in Chapter 20)

= Minor Regeneration via Blood Empowerment Ritual (Gained in Chapter 23)

(Taylor got Major Agility, Vicky got Major Intelligence)

= Restraining Order (Gained in Chapter 25)

= Focus (Gained in Chapter 28)

= Scarborough Fair (Gained in Chapter 30)

= Chaos Magic (Gained in Chapter 36)

= Major Regeneration via Blood Empowerment Ritual (Gained in Chapter 40)

(Taylor, Vicky, and Amy all got Minor Regeneration)

= A Collection of Magic Rings (x6 Cursed Rings, x12 Drawback Rings, x6 Buff Rings) (Gained Chapter 44)

= Jason: T3 Armor Ring + Blue Ring, Taylor: T3 Armor Ring + Expert's Ring, Vicky: Red Ring + T2 Heart Ring, Amelia: T3 Armor Ring + T2 Heart Ring (Handed out Chapter 46)

= Lucky Charm (Gained in Chapter 51)

(Currently worn by Jason as of Ch. 51)

= Presidential Suit (Gained in Chapter 52)

(Currently contained in Jason's Transformation Pendant for later as of Ch. 52)