

Excerpts:
THE SECRET OF MOANING CAVE

“. . . measuring three-point-two in intensity was centered in the Humphrey Peak region north of Flagstaff. The U.S. Forest Service reports no damage to the cabins and homes scattered throughout the Peaks area. Eyewitness News continues after this.”

Alisa had overheard the announcement of the earthquake on the T.V. as she walked in to the family room of her house on North Clark Lane. The Seegmillers, Novotnys, and Pattersons, all lived either on the lane or on Clark Road. The small exclusive residential area lay adjacent to Thorpe Park where kids could be seen playing league soccer, baseball, or football depending on the season. Her father, Courtney (everyone called him “Court”) sat in his brown leather recliner watching the news on KNAZ.

“Gee, Daddy, I hope the cabin is okay.” Alisa curled up on the sofa with a diet coke in one hand.

“I’m sure it’s fine, Lisee. We’ll find out on Friday, though. Is everything cleared for Alex and Seth to come with us?” Alisa’s two best friends had been a part of this annual ritual going on three years. Alex’s father agreed to ferry up the ATVs on the flatbed trailer he pulled behind his Dodge Ram 2500 pickup. The powerful Cummins diesel was more than up to the task.

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The next morning at 7:00 a.m. sharp, Alex, his father, and Seth pulled up to the Seegmiller house in a red pickup towing a flatbed trailer with two ATVs strapped down on the bed. Alisa ran out the front door and down to the curb.

“Hi, you guys! Hi, Mister Novotny. Thanks for bringing the trailer.”

“No problem at all, Lisee. Boys, why don’t you climb out and help Lisee’s dad with the other two four-wheelers while I drop the ramps down.” Rex Novotny climbed out of the cab and walked to the rear of the trailer where he slid the two loading ramps out of their storage hangers underneath the sixteen foot flat bed. Alex and Seth ran up the driveway to the Seegmiller garage where Alisa’s father raised the door.

“Hi, Mister Seegmiller. Can we help with anything?” Seth asked.

“Sure boys. Fire up the machines and take them down to Mr. Novotny’s rig, will you?”

They didn’t need to be asked twice. The ATVs had been fueled the day before and new oil added as part of the general tune-up in preparation for the trip. Alex and Seth climbed on board and thumbed the electric starters simultaneously bringing the two Hondas to life. They drove down the driveway and, under the watchful eyes of Alex’s father, expertly pulled them up the ramp and onto the trailer. Rex strapped the new additions down and shoved the loading ramps back into their slots.

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CHAPTER II

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“Okay, let’s go.” Alex led off, carrying one of the backpacks. Alisa walked alongside him and Seth brought up the rear with the other backpack. They followed game trails until they ended,

which took them nearly to the bottom of the arroyo. They broke trail the rest of the way, constantly checking their backtrail to keep their bearings. Finally, about an hour and a half after leaving the ATVs, they arrived at the base of the rocky cleft. They decided to maneuver up the narrow gorge from the bottom where the two sides converged. The hike was difficult, though. They had to climb over boulders and make their way past scrub oak, sage brush and a few cedar trees.

“Let’s stop here a minute, you guys. My socks are full of prickly pears.” Alisa stopped and pulled the balls of needles from around her ankles.

Seth licked his finger and held the digit above his head. “I feel a breeze coming from the top of the arroyo. The air is cooler down here. Do you think that’s normal, Alex?”

“Shouldn’t be. We’re not in the shadows. You’re right, though . . . the breeze is getting colder as we get closer to the end of this gully. Let’s keep going. Ready, Lisee?”

Alisa nodded and stood up. “Ready.” The three hikers struck out toward their destination: the source of the weird sound.

“. . .WHOOOooooAHWWwwoooo. . .” The ghostly wail trailed off as a gust of cold air escaped through the rock and brush-strewn wall in front of them.

“Help me clear away this brush.” Alex began removing sagebrush and scrub-oak. “This is too easy. This stuff isn’t even rooted to the ground. And these rocks . . . someone could have piled them here.”

The young explorers began pulling at bushes and hefting rocks off the pile like kids on Christmas morning foraging beneath the tree in search of their best-ever present.

“I think the earthquake dumped all of this stuff here. These bushes aren’t even dried out from being uprooted.” Seth noted as he examined the roots of one of the small scrub oaks.

“Hey! . . . I found something!” Alex pulled three large stones away from a tiny opening. “Give me a flashlight, dude.” He held out his hand and Seth placed the Ray-O-Vac into Alex’s palm like a scrub nurse handing a scalpel to a surgeon.

“This opening goes way back and . . . wait a sec!” Alex worked his upper body into the narrow gap. “It opens up into a cave. This is very cool!” Alex backed out and brushed the dust from his shirt. “Let’s pull some more of these rocks off. Who wants to go in with me?” Alex started removing rocks as fast as he was able. Seth joined him.

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Yea, cool.” Alex turned to face the cave entrance, The Secret of Moaning Cave raised his right hand and announced: “We christen thee ‘Moaning Cave’.”

“Sounds scary . . . gives me chills.” Alisa drew closer to Alex’s side.

They walked on, choosing their steps carefully. At times, the path they took narrowed to a two-foot wide ledge, often dropping off sharply fifty feet or more. A false step would have meant broken bones or even death, but the trio was so taken by the excitement of their adventure that the thought of injury didn’t occur to them.

“There’s water up ahead, guys.” Seth said. “Can you hear it?”

“Yeah. Look . . . it gets lighter, too.” Alex turned off his flashlight. “Turn your lights off.”

They extinguished their flashlights. From the direction of the path before them, where it turned to the right around a wall of stone, a faint shimmering light glowed. The blue aura reflected off the stalactites sending waves of subdued radiance playing tag across the uneven ceiling of the cave.

“Maybe there’s another opening up ahead. Is that sunlight bouncing off a pond or something? It’s beautiful!” Alisa snapped on her flashlight and scanned the pathway. “We can make it around that big column to the left . . .What do you think, Alex?”

They were hit by a blast of air that forced them to their knees to avoid being blown off their feet. The moaning sound accompanied the wind, echoing off the walls of the cave. This time noise came from behind them in the direction of the entrance. At the precise moment the wind ceased, the sound stopped as well and the wavering bluish glow flashed off.

“Guys, this is starting to freak me out. Something weird is going on.” Seth whispered, as though unseen ears were within listening range of their voices.

“I still want to find where the light was coming from. Let’s go.” Alex got to his feet and took Alisa’s hand to help her up.

“How far do you think we’ve come, Alex?”

Shouldn’t we be getting back to the cabin?” Alisa was a little spooked and wanted to get out of the cave and into the sunlight.

“Ten more minutes, Lisee. I promise we’ll head back. Keep track of the time, Seth. Okay?” Alex glanced at Alisa and Seth for their approval. Alisa nodded her head.

“Lead on, MacDuff.” Seth waved in a grand gesture and tapped the luminous face of his Timex. “Tick-tock, bro.”

“Mac . . . who?” Alex didn’t get the Shakespearean reference.

As they followed the floor of the cave around a large column formed by connecting stalactites and stalagmites they were stopped by a pond of perfectly still clear water. They let their flashlights play over the surface of the grotto and noticed how the reflected light danced across the limestone formations overhead. But, it was white with a slight greenish tint . . . not the striking aquamarine blue they had seen earlier.

“It’s beautiful, but not like before.” Just as Alex was about to say something more, he found himself without the ability to speak at all.

The stone face on the far side of the grotto began to emanate the familiar blue glow. The rock seemed to liquefy as the eerie glow pulsed and wavered like a mirage bending light on the flat surface of a desert highway. The wind hit them again, forcing them back against the cold stone. They couldn’t move . . . speech was beyond them. They stared transfixed as the wall solidified and the strange light darkened. The cave appeared perfectly normal once more. But the bluish glow, once emanating from the rocky face on the opposite side of the water, had taken on form, and the form moved gracefully in their direction along the narrow shelf forming the outer edge of the grotto.

“I want to go home, Alex. I’m really scared.” Alisa whispered as her fingernails almost drew blood from his palm.

The figure floated toward them, extending both hands in a welcoming gesture. As it came closer, the three eighth graders from Flagstaff Middle School were standing before a young girl. She appeared to be no older than their age, but was extraordinarily beautiful. Her flowing white hair seemed to blend into the loose gossamer robe she wore. The iridescent fabric fell away from her arms as she reached slowly toward Alisa in an entirely nonthreatening manner. A warm smile graced her ethereal countenance with skin of mother-of-pearl. Her entire body emanated a bluish aura which undulated as she moved and spoke.

“I am called Ayliiah. You are not of my people, yet you take a form like my own. How are you called?” Her voice was as the music of angels. Her blue aura grew brighter and expanded as if someone had turned up the power. She was clearly excited and a little frightened as well.

Alisa found her voice. “I am Alisa, and . . .” Before she finished the introductions, the blue apparition stepped back and lowered her head, folding her arms across her chest in an attitude of reverence.

“You are The Holy One? Please forgive me for looking upon you. I must return to my people.” Ayliiah ran, her feet seemed to not touch the ledge around the grotto. She stopped and turned to glance back at the strange threesome, and then disappeared into the face of the stone wall.

“Who? . . . what? Holy One? Oh, man . . . what just happened?” Alex put in not too eloquent terms the questions all three of the youngsters were asking themselves as they stood slack-jawed in dumbfounded amazement.