

## EXCERPT: *The Ninth Day*

She stood by my desk, holding out her hands and beckoning me to come closer. She looked about Dagmar's age—bronze skin, gold-flecked hazel eyes highlighted with white eyebrows and nearly invisible eyelashes. No make-up. No jewelry. She wore a floor-length beige wool robe and an ochre headscarf that hid most of her white hair. Maybe she was part of a cult. Maybe she was from some exotic country.

Miryam Tikvah. How could she know my Hebrew name? And how had she opened the window and closed it so quietly? Maybe she wasn't really there. Oh, God, not another flashback!

I took a breath and stared at her, waiting for her to start glowing or turn into some bizarre creature.

She didn't change.

Keeping her in my sight, I dug into the pile at the foot of Dagmar's bed and closed my hand around one of Dagmar's clogs. And I let it fly.

She caught the clog a second before it would have slammed into her stomach. Her eyes widened in surprise. "I have done nothing to harm you. I come in peace. Why do you insult me with the throwing of a shoe?"

I felt my shoulders relax. Better to be visited by a stranger than a flashback. "First of all, my name is Hope. Second, I threw the shoe to see if you were really here. And third, get out of my room."

The words gushed out of my mouth without a glitch. Weird.

She sat on my bed, put Dagmar's clog on the floor, folded her hands in her lap, and beamed at me. "Then I, too, shall call you by this name in your place and time. Hope."

I inched closer to the bedroom door, ready to escape. There was something really off about this girl. She was probably one of Dagmar's friends, maybe someone from our temple, which was why she called me Miryam Tikvah. Her voice had a guttural quality to it. Israeli? She was probably stoned or worse—on LSD, which should be illegal in California but isn't. Lysergic acid di-whatever. Since my first and only trip, I'd renamed it Lethal-Suicidal-Deadly.

"I'm going to bed now," I said, pointing to my pajamas. "You'll have to wait for Dagmar outside." No stutter again, which sometimes happens when I am over-the-top angry. But I felt more frightened than angry, and fear usually makes it harder to push the words out. Crazy.

"I am not waiting for your sister Dagmar. I am waiting for you."