

Exodus Episode

The Incarnations of the Americas

Volume VII



Exodus Episode

The Incarnations of the Americas

Volume VII



William Hrdina

Dedicated to My beautiful wife Victoria

And to Bob- Rest in peace- fnord.

And finally, to the real inevitable monkey

You chose the door that meant eternity and you were brought back here- doesn't
that tell you something

PART ONE

"Sarah, don't do it."

The unfamiliar voice startled Sarah. Except for her yellow Labrador Crosby, she was alone- standing in the middle of a field of green grass in the middle of a large, undeveloped tract of land.

She turned in slow circle- scanning the tree line.

"It was me." The voice said again.

She turned toward the sound and again there was only Crosby.

He was staring at her.

"Yeah. Me. I said it. Now please, just listen to me. You cannot do this."

Sarah was stunned- so much so she didn't really listen to his words. Her dog, the animal she'd spent most of her life with- was suddenly talking.

"It is done." Sarah said, staring hard at her dog, Crosby.

Crosby looked back at his oldest friend and felt an equal measure of the anger evident on her face.

Sarah was wrong. Nothing was done. Because of her obstinacy it was only beginning.

God would be free. And either The Machine would be his ally, or his master and either way, nothing good could come of it. With Ialtaboath's freedom in one universe came the enslavement of all of humanity. The first domino would begin to topple, the domino that could bring the collapse of the world- of all the worlds.

So vehement was Crosby's disagreement with Sarah's thinking that he broke a vow of silence which had lasted his entire life.

Reliance, Wyoming

Father Morgan Jacobsen stood in front of seven people scattered like flecks of dust across a small dilapidated church in Reliance, Wyoming. It was a chill Sunday morning and the sun glinted softly off of the white church.

Well, white-ish.

The wood slats were badly in need of a coat of paint, the whole structure listed a bit to the left, and the color in the stained glass windows was washed out from decades of bright sunlight and neglect. The church was clearly in need of maintenance, but to Father Morgan, it was home- or the closest thing he had to it.

The subject of Morgan's sermon was "The true spirit of Christianity." In it, Father Morgan reminded people of the value Jesus put on poverty and helping others. He linked the state of his own church to the spiritual state of the world.

"Our own faded windows and bad landscaping are a reflection of the poverty of teamwork in the modern American spirit linked to the downfall of the union movement over the past 40 years."

The seven parishioners stared blankly at Father Jacobsen as he finished his homily and moved on to the day's announcements and prayer requests. If his words had any effect on the people seated before him, they gave no sign.

Even though he had close to no parishioners, the reading of the prayer requests still took nearly five minutes. Morgan belonged to several online prayer groups and he never hesitated to use their lists to bulk up his own. Prayer was prayer whether the people he was praying for were part of his flock or not.

Flock. That wasn't quite accurate. Of the seven people sitting before him, only four looked vaguely familiar.

As Father Morgan read off the names on the prayer list, his voice worked on autopilot- the resuscitation of names stretched out like the roads in Nebraska- monotonously flat- and seemingly endless.

It wasn't always so.

When he was younger man, Father Morgan Jacobsen used to get very nervous in front of his parishioners. His voice had, if anything, too much emotion. This was especially true when the church was full- which, in the old days, it almost always was.

Because Morgan was a priest, he didn't picture everyone in their underwear to abate his nerves- to do so would've been sacrilegious. He didn't drink either, he was no Irish Catholic.

Instead, he fixed his eyes just over the heads of the parishioners. Doing this made him appear to be looking right at someone, when in reality his gaze was fixed on a massive stained glass window featuring Jesus overturning the money-changing tables.

Father Jacobsen was a good priest in those days; enthusiastic, funny, and more often than not, eloquent enough that many in the church hierarchy thought he would grow to become an important figure of wisdom amongst his flock.

His charm and eloquence made him a decent orator. But it was his mastery of the flinging of the HELLFIRE that made him a rising star in the eyes of the church.

There were few who could preach damnation with such fiery terror as Father Morgan. It was the contrast of his ranting to the easy charm of his calm demeanor that made his technique so effective. Morgan was raised at the knee of a tyrannical grandmother who would lecture him endlessly about the torment awaiting him after death if he didn't reject Satan and everything linked to Satan such as music, popular culture in general, and of course, the communists. This childhood environment provided Morgan with a ready-made catalog of horrific images and torments that would make Dante feel like an amateur.

And in those early days, he wasn't afraid to use them.

As a result, when Father Morgan talked about the eternal sizzling of flesh in hellfire you could hear the popping sounds as the capillaries burst. You could almost smell the bones charring. Those with weak stomachs would find themselves nauseous from guilt and fear.

Father Morgan's nervous tendencies around crowds were never really a problem when he preached the HELLFIRE- his eyes rolled back into his head and he just let the terrified imagery of his own childhood out into the congregation.

In the old days his parishioners would hear his sermons and they would think they should cut it off with their secretary, stop hitting the bottle, maybe put up a little longer with the incompetent husband if only to keep the HELLFIRE away. In the hands of an expert like Morgan, HELLFIRE could be a mighty powerful motivator.

There was always gossip that Father Morgan seemed to be looking into some other world when he talked- especially when he was preaching the HELLFIRE- you would think he could actually see the place behind his eyelids. In actuality, this was just a side effect of his habit of staring over everyone's heads.

But, this practice had a second, more profound unintended consequence.

Over time, the image in the stained glass started to get to Morgan.

The window was superbly crafted, made of thousands of small scraps of glass, expertly soldered with thin spider webs of black solder. The window was commissioned when the church was built in the 1950's by a Nicaraguan immigrant who thought of the depiction of Jesus overturning the power of the entrenched rich bourgeoisies by the proletariat Jesus. Of course, the man never explained this to his gringo bosses.

Morgan's grandmother would've been furious.

The Jesus in the picture was rugged; there was great frustration and anger etched across his handsome face. He flipped two tables at once, each of them depicted as thick, heavy looking pieces, yet they seemed to explode off the ground from his touch. Piles of gold coins were flying in every direction. The two visible Pharisees were blocking their faces with their arms- they looked terrified.

The crowd depicted observing this scene didn't have eyes full of lust for the fortune that flew everywhere around their heads. None of the assembled observers reached out their hands for the coins. Instead their eyes shone with righteous indignation. They were the faces of people who were observing justice being meted out at long last.

The young Father Morgan began to think about what the picture really meant- Jesus wasn't just a love and lollipops guy. He was a rabble rousing socialist who hung around working folk and whores and traitors- who drank so much wine with his buddies he needed to perform a miracle to keep everyone satiated. Jesus was the Lord of the World- of men- not of heaven.

And when he spoke of the earth he only regularly spoke ill of one group of people.

The rich.

Anytime Morgan forgot this fact all he had to do was look up at the image of Jesus, the tables full of money flying into the air.

Morgan would think about the Cadillac he drove from his palatial house to his mega-church every morning and his soul cringed. For nearly a year he lived the contradiction, knowing in his heart that sooner or later he was going to have to change.

To the priest's credit, he eventually did.

The focus of Father Morgan's sermons started to shift. The Hellfire began to cool, to lose its capitalization. Over time, he sounded less and less like a North American preacher and more and more like his South American counterparts who fought and died for civil rights and justice for the poor. Morgan began to rail against big corporations and the adolescent eagerness of America to use its military power. When the parishioners came up to him and asked him why he didn't preach the HELLFIRE anymore, Morgan would politely tell them that he didn't believe in the hellfire anymore and thought people

should be good to each other because that was what Jesus wanted. Not because they were trying to escape eternal damnation.

In his imagination, Morgan's moral awakening led him to even greater success. In reality, as he grew more radical, the pews began to empty. It seemed the more he learned and the stronger his conviction became, the more the familiar faces in the crowd began to disappear. It wasn't long before the church board held a special meeting. Morgan was asked to leave.

Crushed and shocked, Morgan left the church. He lived a quiet life of a normal man. Although tempted, he never married. He remained celibate, avoided excess and lived Thoreau's life of quiet desperation. It felt wrong not to be preaching, not to be saying mass and finally Morgan set aside his pain and returned to preaching.

Although he barely managed to keep the lights on, Morgan kept a church over his head and he kept preaching. He lived in a small apartment you reached by going through a door behind the altar.

Father Jacobsen looked out at the empty pews and felt sad. He had fallen so far since those days in the Holy Living Church of the One Lord and Savior.

He really missed that beautiful piece of stained glass.

One sunny afternoon Morgan borrowed a car from his friend Robert, dead two years later of lung cancer, and drove out to his old church. It was still there, and to his astonishment, whoever was currently running the place felt the need to add on three new wings to the already enormous campus. A tourist plaque in front of the church said the building was the 3rd largest structure in the state.

Morgan took several photographs of the stained glass window from the inside and the outside of the church. Once he was sure he'd taken enough to ensure a good print, Morgan climbed back into his car and drove away without talking to a single person.

He actually got several good photos of the window, but one in particular pleased him, the glass seemed to practically shiver out into 3 dimensions. Morgan spent the money to get the photo blown up to 30x20 and put it up on his refrigerator. He looked at the picture every day, and it bolstered him.

The stained glass in his current windows lacked the craftsmanship he'd been afforded in his old mega-church. Instead of realistic scenes from the Bible, he now made do with simple crosses. Pretty in a simple way, but ultimately without the intense spiritual lessons inherent in the glass of his old church. Morgan recognized the irony in the contradiction between the expense of the window that taught the lesson of poverty- but he was helpless to resolve it.

In Morgan's mind's eye he could still see himself in his early days. Back then, when he looked out over the sea of people in his church there was admiration and respect in their eyes. As long as he told them all they had to do was love Jesus, believe, and be very, very afraid of hell; then the people came in droves. Just these 3 easy things and they would be forgiven of their every sin and invited into the everlasting house of God.

When he changed his tune- when he told them they had to actually be good, to sacrifice, and to possibly even suffer against the yoke of oppression they might not deserve- the masses lost interest. Worse still, they turned against him, ran him out of the church like he was preaching the glories of Satan. At times, when the death threats were at their height (and yes, there had been a time that the death threats came into his phone

fast and furious), Morgan thought preaching the devil might've brought a mellower response.

Now he had seven parishioners- and he was having a good day attendance wise.

All of this brought Morgan low, but it didn't destroy his faith. He would still get up his courage on some days and try.

Thinking about the photo on his run-down fridge, Morgan decided to give his seven parishioners a bit of what he still had left inside him. In the middle of his sermon he stopped, gave up talking disinterestedly about the importance of faith and began to talk about politics.

Not specifically, philosophically. The priest's words were spoken from his heart, but the way they came out of his throat made them weak, powerless.

He stopped and took a deep breath. This soulless orator was not him, and he refused to be laid low by time, or a lack of audience, or even by the inevitability of his lonely death. He knew the people in the pews probably wouldn't hear a word he was saying, but for that brief few minutes Morgan didn't care. The HELLFIRE had come back into his heart, and he had to admit it felt good. Better than standing and preaching had felt for a long time.

"The world we see around us is a choice. We don't have to define ourselves by the size of our wallets and might of our military. But we do. Why? Why, you ask, do we build ourselves a box and then look surprised when we find we've lost our view? There are lots of reasons. Some good, some bad. I don't need delineate them here. Every man and woman has their own favorite set of excuses, which one you hold dear doesn't matter. Not really. What matters is that you understand, deep in your hearts, that there are other ways of doing things. We all know it. We feel it in our hearts when we see a sunset or watch squirrels running and playing around a tree. I speak of change. I speak of a new dawn of man. I speak of community. I speak of deliberate thoughtful acts of kindness in the face of the darkness of man. We all know, each and every one of us, we know when we are doing something stupid, something that makes Satan smile and throw up his hands with joy. When you go to the store and you spend the extra bit of money on something because the label on it says it's more special than the exact same item for two dollars less without the label- we are doing the bidding of Satan. On the other side of the same coin, we know it when we shop at a store that mistreats its workers both here and abroad just so that we can save a buck or two at the register, we are dancing in the pitch black of the devil's soul. These are all choices and no matter how narrow they seem to be defined for us by others, the truth is, each and every one of us chooses to either accept this sort of mild and insidious oppression; or we don't. There are some of you out there who may think I'm trying to say God wants us to rebel against this world we've created for ourselves. To join with those kooky Islamo-terrorists and get all jihad on everyone. That's not it either. I am advocating novelty, creation, and ingenuity. I'm advocating that you understand that all the things wrong with our world are simply choices we make. Stop making these choices and the world changes, the same way that if you apply pressure to an orange it becomes orange juice. That's how things really happen in the real world, one person at a time- even if the movies don't make it seem to be so."

Father Morgan stopped speaking and frowned. One by one he tried to meet the eyes of his parishioners. The old man in the second row with liver spots on his face was staring at the floor. The thin, middle aged woman in the middle of the church seemed to

be sleeping, her chin resting on her blue cardigan sweater. Each one of his seven parishioners weren't really listening. No one cared. Even when he found his passion, it was too late. These seven were already dead. Zombies, breathing air and walking around and buying microwave pastry puffs, but dead.

He said the final amen. Normally, after a mass, the priest will stand by the door of the church and shake the parishioners' hands wishing them a good week and thanking them for coming to the service. Instead, he walked straight from the altar to the confessional. Before stepping inside he announced he would be available for confession for the next couple of hours. Without any further ado, we went into the small closet sized room and closed the door behind him.

Morgan never saw the man standing next to the window on the side of the church. He didn't know that not all of the cars pulled out of the parking lot when the parishioners inside the church took their amens and went home.

Instead, Morgan sat in the confessional and seriously considered taking a nap while he waited patiently for no one to come.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Corey Inglewood felt like he was waking up from a nap in a blender. His head hurt and his body felt heavy, uncooperative- a rusty machine with a desperate need for several cans of WD-40 to get it moving again. He knew his eyes were closed, but he was afraid to open them for fear the mere act of lifting his eyelids would engender pain.

The last thing Corey could clearly remember was being shot in the head in the innermost sanctum of a company called Reincarnation Industries.

It was a fatal shot. He was dead. Gone.

There were fleeting memories of the time between- a flickering image of a painfully beautiful palace full of doors. He could see his own hand reaching out for one of them and then there was nothing until...

Corey opened his eyes. Above him was a ceiling- it was white and bumpy- nothing special. He turned his head over and was looking at the soft leather upholstery of an expensive couch. He could hear a television or radio playing across from him. Corey turned to look for the source of the sound and discovered it was a television- but not the type he was used to seeing. Instead of the paper thin plasma devices he was familiar with, this one appeared to be old- thick, with a small screen. It was showing a game show. An overweight woman was jumping up and down in either elation or supreme disappointment- Corey couldn't really tell which.

A pleasantly disembodied voice came from the far side of the couch where his vantage point was cut off. "It's about time you woke up. I was starting to think I was going to have to toss cold water on you or something."

Corey sat up, swinging his legs to the floor. He looked back over his shoulder and saw an attractive young woman in her early 20's sitting at a mini bar wearing shorts and a t-shirt. She had her feet up and appeared to be painting her toenails.

"Where am I?" Corey asked, unconsciously feeling his body and confirming it felt basically the way it always had when he was alive.

The woman smiled at him. "That's a tough question to answer- I guess the short answer would that you are be right where you wanted to be."

Before he could respond, she got up from her chair and crossed the room to the couch. She offered him her hand and he shook it- it was warm. "I'm Sarah Throckmartin- I'm going to be the instructor for you apprenticeship."

"My what?"

"Your apprenticeship. Don't worry- it is perfectly normal to find yourself a bit discombobulated when you first step back into material existence. It will all come back to you after a while. The human brain isn't actually designed to handle a rebooting of the type it has just been through- it makes the first few days a bit dicey."

"The first few days of what? I remember dying. I took a bullet in my head. I was dead. I can't be here."

Sarah looked impressed. "And yet you are. Hmmm. I guess that should tell you that you have some new things to learn. Shot in the head huh? Wow. That's a very dramatic way to die. You'll have to tell me the details sometime." Her tone belied sarcasm. "To answer your question- you did indeed die, and thus, I am referring to the first few days of your new life here on a wholly new earth. The rebooting I referred to is your rebirth into full adulthood. As I am sure you're aware, normally we humans start life as babies- but you are, as I think you may already have figured out, a very special case."

Corey stared at Sarah, he was waiting for her to smile, to give some indication that she was kidding with him. The indication didn't come. She was serious. And as absurd as it seemed, Corey had to admit her explanation did explain why he no longer felt dead.

"You're saying I was dead, but now I am alive again? I've been reincarnated?"

"Uh, not really. That is one of the options in the brochure, but you, my friend, you checked a very different box. Reincarnation involves a total wipe of the memories and experience of your former life, the only baggage reincarnation carries is karmic. You, my friend, have been reintroduced to the world exactly as you were before you took that bullet in your brain. Well, okay, you used to be a bit of an alcoholic so we filtered that part out, so let's try not to let that happen again, okay?" She smiled.

Corey could tell she was being coy, and enjoying being so. He got up off of the couch and walked on only mildly trembling legs to the window. Stretched out beneath him was a large city, ringed on all sides by mountains. Beneath him lay a stretch of buildings that sparkled like a cheap plastic jewel in the daylight. He could only be in one place.

Las Vegas.

"Is this Las Vegas? He asked almost rhetorically.

"Sin City." She agreed. "We're going to need a fairly hefty amount of cash and this is the easiest place to get it." She paused and grinned, "Well, not the *easiest*, but certainly the most entertaining."

There was that coyness again.

"You said I was going to be your apprentice. Is that what I'm here to become? A gambler?" Corey was stalling for time, trying to get his bearings. The problem was, he didn't know what sort of bearings he was stalling to find. He'd been shot. He'd been dead. Something happened that he couldn't quite remember, and now he was here in this strange hotel room.

Sarah laughed at the idea. "No, you're not here to become a gambler. You're here to become a Traveler."

"A what?"

"I told you, the first few days are going to be discombobulating. Just relax and trust me, everything is going to be fine."

At the sound of his paws on the hardwood floor, Corey looked over to see a yellow Labrador retriever come out from the direction of the bedroom. The dog appeared to be totally normal.

Until it spoke.

"Please don't mind my young partner- she's really into the mystery of things."

Corey did a double take, decided it was insufficient, and upped his reaction to a triple take. He pointed and started to stutter out a question.

"Before you ask, yes- the dog just talked. His name is Crosby."

"Nice to meet you." Said Crosby.

"I'm dreaming." Corey said. "Or I'm dead. Or crazy..."

Corey reached down and pinched himself in his leg.

It hurt.

"I can assure you this is really happening. Sarah and I are going to be your teachers." Crosby said, sitting down in front of Corey and wagging his tail vaguely.

Corey noticed the dog's lips didn't move when it spoke, his voice just appeared in his mind; as if by magic.

Corey worked his way up to a quintuple take.

"Show off." Sarah said. She walked back to the mini-bar, reached across it and came up with what appeared to be a tennis ball. She held it up over her head for a few seconds and then threw it across the room.

Corey watched as the dog's head snapped to follow the ball's path across the room. It bounced and ricocheted off of the wall.

"Damn you." Crosby growled before chasing madly after the tennis ball. He made it up to full speed before attempting to slam on the brakes as the ball hit the furniture and changed trajectory. The dog scrambled but in moments its legs were akimbo and he was skidding into the wall with a thud.

"You have to do that sometimes- it keeps him from getting too uppity." Sarah said, doubling over with laughter.

Crosby retrieved the ball and came trotting back across the room. He dropped the ball at Sarah's feet.

"That's just rude. You know I can't help myself." He said, plopping down on the floor and scratching absentmindedly at his ear.

Sarah laughed even harder. Corey did too, in spite of himself.

Once she'd regained her composure Sarah said, "So like I say, the first few days are going to be a bit of a transition. I imagine you're pretty hungry- getting reborn takes a lot out of a person. Luckily for you we're in Vegas so we can get pretty much anything you want- it's the first meal of your new life- so I suggest something tasty."

Corey realized he was indeed quite hungry. "I've always liked Italian food." Corey said.

"Italian it is." She agreed and walked into what Corey was assuming was the bedroom.

The prospect of going out for a meal caused Corey to consider the clothes he was wearing. He looked down and wasn't impressed with what he saw. He was dressed in a generic gray t-shirt and a blue pair of loose fitting sweatpants. He wasn't wearing shoes or socks.

"I think I may be a little underdressed to go out to a restaurant." He said.

From the bedroom Sarah called back, "I picked out some clothes for you already, hang on."

Sarah walked out of the bedroom carrying a pair of slacks and a shirt that appeared to be made of some sort of very expensive material, but neither held a label of any kind. She handed them to him.

"Thank you." Corey said.

He rubbed the fabric between his thumb and forefinger. It was made of some kind of silk, but it didn't have the cheesy shimmer that usually accompanied the fabric.

"It was no trouble." Sarah got a mischievous smile on her face. "That's probably the first thing you're going to have to establish in your head now that you've started your new life. The normal things you used to concern yourself with- things like money, clothes, and shelter- they're not going to be a problem anymore. We have much more important things to do now- making money in the traditional sense of the word isn't one of them."

"Like what?"

"We are, for all intensive purposes, forces of evolution. Our job is to present various incarnations of society with choices."

He waited for Sarah to elaborate and when she didn't Corey said, "Very cryptic."

"Yeah. She's always like that." Crosby agreed. "But to be fair, you're not really ready to hear the whole truth yet."

"Besides, we don't even know what the whole truth is, so we couldn't tell you even if you were ready." Sarah interjected.

"True enough." Crosby agreed. "For now, I would just relax and enjoy the scenery. Time's another one of those things you can lay off of for the time being."

He was trying, but Corey was having a very hard time accepting that Crosby was speaking to him.

"No offense. But dogs don't talk."

"Well, then I guess I'm not a dog."

Corey took him seriously. "Then what are you?"

"He's a dog." Sarah said.

"But..."

"I'm a dog." Crosby agreed. "Sorry if my being a canine upsets your delicate sense of reality. But believe me- I can pretty much guarantee that as time goes on, my talking dog bit is going to seem like a fairly mundane thing. Your conceptions of the world and reality are going to be obliterated by the end of the week."

"But that's a good thing." Sarah added.

Corey wasn't sure he wanted his conceptions of reality to be obliterated, but considering the source of the news, he had to admit to himself that what the talking dog said might indeed be true.

"Okay. I guess first I should lay out the basics to alleviate a bit of your anxiety over what the hell is happening to you. Then we can go have a nice dinner." Sarah said.

For a minute Corey considered telling her to save any details for after dinner, but his curiosity just wouldn't let him. He nodded for her to continue.

"First of all, you were indeed dead. You were shot in the head by a man with no name."

Corey saw a flash of a man in a suit- he saw the muzzle flash; he remembered a moment of intense pain.

Sarah continued, "Second, while you were dead you lived what we like to call a 'middle life.' This is the time between death and whatever comes after death for your individual packet of consciousness. The Tibetans, who know more about these things than most, call this transition phase the Bardos. It was during your middle life that you won the ability to come here to this world with us. In the Bardos you faced several demons, all of which were representations of your own human hang-ups. Unlike 99.9999% of humanity you were able to best both Variocana and Heruka. In doing so you earned passage to the palace that lies at the heart of the mystery of individual consciousness."

"Wow. I did that huh?" Corey asked, looking pleased with himself- even if he didn't really understand what Sarah was talking about.

More details of his previous life came flooding back to Corey. He was in Reincarnation Industries fighting to reunite Ouisa, the woman he loved, with the man that she loved. In many ways Ouisa had betrayed him, but she was doing what she felt she needed to do in order to get back to man and even though it wasn't easy for Corey to put the selfish aspects of his love for her behind him, but he'd done it because more than anything he wanted Ouisa to be happy. He'd died so she could get back.

"Did everything work out for Ouisa and Ben? After all, it was for them that I gave my life."

"It worked out fine- in fact it was your role in that caper that went a long way toward you're being allowed to choose this life."

Corey frowned. "I don't..."

"Yeah, I know- you don't understand. That's fine. It's because you don't remember it. You will in time. Anyway, you chose the door that led you here to sunny Las Vegas. You should be very proud of yourself, the door isn't offered to just anybody."

Never/Now/Forever

The image of the door flashed through Corey's head.

Sarah continued, "You are no longer dead. You are alive. You can die again of course, and probably will sometime. But now you are more than merely human, you are a Traveler. Actually, an apprentice Traveler. Our apprentice."

She gestured to Crosby. The dog nodded in appreciation of Sarah's inclusion of him as her partner in their endeavor to teach Corey what it meant to be a Traveler.

It was important that Sarah acknowledge Crosby's role as an equal because while they'd been close friends for a very long time, Crosby didn't always talk. Speech was a fairly new development in their relationship and there could be no understating the amount of change it brought.

No longer were they merely owner and pet- they were friends, equals.

Even though Crosby never flaunted it, they both knew he was the wiser of the two. The difficulty of Sarah's early years left scars she was still sorting out. Crosby knew this, which was why he remained silent for the first 8 years they worked as

Travelers even though he could've started speaking as soon as they entered the front gate of the mystical city of Agharta. Instead of speech, Crosby stuck with barking and snarky facial gestures.

But that was before what became known between them as 'The Incident.'

It was in a doomed attempt to prevent The Incident that Crosby first spoke to Sarah, and she didn't listen to him. Afterwards, Crosby actually offered to become silent again- to try to go back to the way things were. But after a long discussion that involved tears on both sides, they decided it was better than he remain in his elevated status as equal partner in the team.

This was two years earlier, and while much of their old friendship had healed over the time, there was still tension. Sarah admitted to have gravely erred on the occasion of the Incident, but she didn't think she was all wrong. She still didn't necessarily trust the Elves and Crosby knew it.

Corey was oblivious to the tension between them. He was trying very hard to accept what he was hearing, and it wasn't easy.

"Okay, so I earned my way to this afterlife. Vegas is supposed to be some kind of a reward or something? I don't even like gambling." He sounded disappointed.

Crosby laughed and Sarah jokingly shushed him.

"No man. I told you. We're here to pick up some money- maybe catch a magic show."

Crosby snuffed. "Don't tell me you plan on messing with that poor magician again."

Sarah shrugged. "It is pretty fun."

"What?" Corey didn't know what they were talking about.

Sarah shushed Crosby. "Don't tell him- I want to show him what we can do."

And so it was that the first place Corey visited in his new life was a magic show at Circus Circus.