

Yesterday's Ghost

by Marcus Rowland

© 17-May-10

Rating: K+

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This is a Buffy / DC universe crossover, another sequel to my story *The Return*. Knowledge of previous stories isn't essential, but you should be aware that this is a world in which the events of the movie *Supergirl* occurred in 2001, a few weeks after Superman left to find Krypton, with Supergirl returning to Earth in 2008, nearly two years after the events of *Superman Returns*.

Spoilers for Buffy the Vampire Slayer season 7.

Kara was flying over desert in the late afternoon when she saw the girl, sitting cross-legged by a fire in the middle of nowhere. She looked around for a vehicle but couldn't find one; just the faint tracks of some sort of off-road vehicle, leading to a highway five miles away, twenty miles from the nearest town. There was nobody any closer. She listened, hearing the wind, and the beat of a single human heart, slow and regular. Whoever this was, she didn't seem to be in any distress, and Kara could see she had bottled water and a sleeping bag. Nevertheless Kara landed nearby and said "Good evening. Are you all right?"

"Oh... hi," said the girl, looking inquisitively at her visitor. She was a brunette teenager, about sixteen or seventeen, and wore jeans, a long-sleeved check shirt, and hiking boots.

"Do you need help getting out of the desert?"

"I'm fine, thanks. We'll go back to town tomorrow."

Kara wondered why the girl said "we"; there was nobody else there, and said "If you don't mind me asking, why are you here?"

"I'm on a vision quest," said the girl. "Sooner or later a spirit guide is supposed to show up, give me some sort of sign, a hint of my destiny. Buffy got a cougar; the only thing I've seen so far is a road-runner, and unless my destiny is to dodge Wile E. Coyote that isn't going to get me very far."

Kara wondered if it was a custom she hadn't heard of, and said "Maybe it means you'll be very fast."

"But I'd hate to have to make 'beep-beep' noises."

"I can't see much else around here," said Kara, looking around. "There are some mice, and a rattlesnake about half a mile to the east, right now that's all that's around."

"Well, it isn't a problem now you're here."

"I'm sorry?"

"You're my spirit guide, of course."

"I really don't think so."

"Sure you are," said the girl. "A flying woman dressed as Superman, not exactly subtle."

It's about as clear a vision as you can get."

"You don't know who I am?"

"I'm guessing some sort of avatar of feminine strength I've dreamed up."

"Are you sure you're okay?" asked Kara. "Most people know me. I'm Supergirl."

"I don't mean to be rude," said the girl, "obviously my subconscious wants you to think that. But Supergirl was a hoax, everyone knows that. Someone made you up a month after Superman went missing."

"I'm real enough. See for yourself." Kara moved closer to her, and held out her hand. "Touch me. I'm not a figment of your imagination."

"Sure you aren't." The woman reached out to touch Kara. Her hand went through Kara's arm as though it wasn't there. "See?"

Kara snatched her hand back and said "What in Rao's name was that?"

"Told you so."

"Now that's just weird." Kara touched a large boulder, and was relieved to find that it was solid. She rapped it with her knuckles; the stone shook slightly, a large chunk flaked off, and a concentric shockwave blew a circle of dust into the air. "Okay, I'm really here. Are you?"

"Hell yeah," said the girl. She reached out to rap on the rock. And her hand vanished into it as though it wasn't there. "Crap. What the hell is going on?"

"I don't know," said Kara. "The stone's real to me but not to you. Let's see..." She reached down to touch the sleeping bag, but her hand went through it as though it wasn't there. The fire was still burning brightly, surrounded by a wide ring of stones. She couldn't feel any heat, but the stones were real to her touch, so were some cold charred sticks that crumbled to ash at her touch.

"I think," said Kara, "You were here, but some time ago, not now."

"What the hell? Are you saying I'm a ghost?"

"I don't know enough about ghosts, and it doesn't feel quite right. You said you were on a vision quest... I think that somehow you've dreamed your consciousness into your future. What I don't understand is why I can see you."

The girl suddenly looked scared, "Am I dead? Am I going to die?"

"How would I know?" asked Kara. "Let's see... I think that the fire was a good while ago; most of the ash has blown away. When did you get here?"

"February 23rd said the girl. Almost as an afterthought she added "2003".

"It's April 2011."

"Fuck."

"A lot's happened since you were here. Amongst other things, my cousin is back, and so am I. Do you mind if I try something?"

"Go ahead."

Kara reached into a concealed pocket in her cloak and got out a slim cell-phone, and took a picture with its camera. As she'd half-expected, the image showed the desert, the old fire, but no sign of the girl.

"Okay... this is apparently subjective. I can see you, and you're visible to my visual powers, but not to the camera."

"Then maybe you're dreaming of me."

"It's possible."

"Pinch yourself, maybe you'll wake."

Kara tried it. Nothing changed. "Okay, I seem to be awake. Let me try something else."

She called a familiar number, and spoke rapidly in Kryptonian when the call was answered.

"My cousin should be here in a few minutes."

"Superman? He's coming here?"

"Yes."

"Crap." The girl lifted the sleeping bag that Kara hadn't been able to touch, pulled out a shoulder bag, and got out a mirror and comb. "I look like I've been dragged backwards through a hedge."

"He won't care."

"I do." She busied herself with comb and makeup.

Five minutes later there was a sudden soft boom and dust rose into the air about twenty feet away. Superman walked out of the cloud, and said "Kara, Miss...?"

"Amanda."

"You can see and hear her?" said Kara.

"Yes, of course."

"Try touching her."

"Okay." Clark reached out gently. His hand passed through Amanda's arm. "That's odd."

"Definitely," said Kara.

"Lame," said Amanda. "I'm some sort of ghost, and the best you can come up with is 'That's odd?'"

"It's not something we come across every day."

Suddenly there was another girl, a brunette about the same age and height as Amanda, but prettier. She walked through Clark, obviously not seeing him, and said "Amanda, who are you talking to?"

"Can't you see them, Dawn?" asked Amanda, "Supergirl and Superman?"

"What? Where?"

"Right there." She gestured towards Kara. "I've been talking to them."

"Superman and Supergirl? Yeah, right. I think you've had too much sun."

"Really," said Amanda.

"Okaaaay," said Dawn. "We're gonna be heading back to town a little earlier than planned, let's get you packed." She began to roll up Amanda's sleeping bag.

Distracted, Amanda looked away from Kara and bent to pick up her shoulder bag, then glanced back, saying "They were there just a second ago."

"Sure they were," said Dawn. Both girls slowly faded into darkness and silence, and the firelight vanished with them. Night was falling fast.

"What do you make of that," asked Clark, once it was obvious that they were gone.

"I know her," said Kara.

"Amanda?"

"No, Dawn. She's Doctor Dawn Summers now, teaches linguistics. Someone pointed her out to me on campus. She's one of the youngest PhDs at UCLA, but her other claim to fame is that she's one of the survivors of the Sunnydale cave-in, left on the last bus out as the town collapsed. About three months after Amanda was here."

"The crater's only fifty miles away," said Clark. "And they were talking about heading back to town..." He rose into the air; Kara followed him. Moments later they landed beside the crater, near a memorial wall covered with framed photographs of the victims of the disaster. There was nobody else around.

"Here," said Kara, a few moments later. "Amanda Hagan, 1986-2003. She died rescuing

classmates from the high school."

"Aged seventeen," said Clark.

"Rao keep her. I wonder if there's anything we could have done or said to save her."

"Maybe if we'd warned her... but she died rescuing classmates, how many more would have been killed if she hadn't been there? There's a reason Jor-El didn't want me to tamper with time. We're not wise enough. Nobody is."

"I guess so," said Kara. "Do you think we should talk to Professor Summers?"

"I can't see much point in reminding her of the disaster; it must have been traumatic."

"I guess you're right."

"Let's just keep it as our own ghost story."

"Yes... wait, no. I need to know. Did we help her, or did we cause her death? Did it really happen at all, or was it some sort of shared hallucination?"

"Do you really want to know?" Clark asked.

"No. But I think I need to."

"You're braver than I am. Let me know how it turns out."

"Doctor Summers?"

Dawn Summers hadn't heard her office door open. She looked up from the papers she was marking and rose to her feet as she recognized her visitor. "I've been half-expecting you, Supergirl. I expect you have some questions?"

"It really happened then? Your friend saw into the future?"

"Since you're here, I think it's safe to assume that she did. Amanda was a little... I suppose the word is psychic, though it isn't a term I like. She told me all about meeting you, said it would be April 2011. I didn't really believe it at the time, but I think it helped her."

"Helped?"

"There was a bad situation in Sunnydale," said Dawn. "A lot of violent gangs and some of them targeted women. My sister was one of the ones who fought back. She set up a martial arts club and self-help organization for teenage girls; we trained them to be more self-reliant. The trip to the desert was part of it, team building and meditation, and just getting out of town for a couple of days to get away from the gangs. Amanda really got into it, especially after she'd seen you."

"Did that lead to her death?"

"I don't think so. She and most of the other girls were practicing downstairs in the high school when the place started to collapse. I was upstairs so I didn't see what happened myself, but the way I heard it, she helped save some of the others, then was killed so suddenly that there was no way anyone could save her. I guess she might have survived if she hadn't taken the lead, but the ones who got out of there were the fighters, the ones who took the initiative. Amanda was unlucky, she was killed anyway, but if she hadn't been a fighter she would have probably been dead anyway. That wasn't a situation for quitters."

"You can't be sure of that."

"If she'd been a quitter she would have stayed at home. And she'd be dead anyway, because her home ended up at the bottom of the crater. You have nothing to be sorry for."

"I wish I could believe that."

"Well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble, but I'm pretty sure that Amanda would have been there with or without your encouragement." For the first time Dawn sounded angry. "She was my friend, and a hero, and she died like one."

"I'm sorry, I didn't think of it that way," said Kara.

"Don't sweat it. If you want to look at it more positively, Amanda's vision ended up helping to put a couple of hundred girls through college."

"I don't understand."

"Amanda was very observant. She described you in a lot of detail. In passing she described your phone pretty well, including the logo on the back. So at the end of 2004 a friend was in a position to advise an educational foundation that wanted to re-invest a lot of money, and I suggested that Apple shares might be worth a try. They got the paperwork done about a week before the iPhone was announced. After that it was a bumpy ride, but it ended up paying off big-time."

"That's..."

"On top of that, I made quite a bit betting that you'd come back."

Kara stared at her.

"Seriously. The iPhone was the first hint Amanda was right; then Superman came back. I took a flight to Britain, where the government regulates the bookies and keeps them reasonably honest, found the best odds I could get on your return, and bet the farm. It put Amanda's sister through college, paid off the last of my student loan, and the change covered a cornea transplant for a friend."

"I'm not sure if I should be pleased or appalled."

"I can promise you two things. No, three."

"Go on."

"Amanda would have wanted a cut, and she would have thought the whole thing was hilarious. And she would have wanted us to be happy about it, not sad about her."

Kara thought about it then smiled tentatively. "I guess I can live with that."

"Great. While you're here, can I pitch a book idea to you? There are a lot of scholars who would love to know more about Kryptonian, and the way it differs from Earth languages. What we really need is a dictionary and primer, and I can't think of anyone more qualified to write it. Would you be interested? I think you could almost name your own fee."

"I'll think about it," said Kara, "if you'll answer one question."

"Fire away."

"Why do I see a green glow when I look at you?"

"Seriously?" said Dawn, looking worried. "Green?"

"Yes."

"Crap. Okay, you really want to know?"

"Yes."

"Take a seat," said Dawn, settling down in her chair. "The explanation's a doozey, and it takes a while. You probably won't like it. Are you sure you just don't want to leave it as a mystery?"

"No."

"Last chance. Are you sure you want to know?"

"Yes."

"Don't say I didn't warn you. There's a traditional way to tell this story, and I think I might as well go with the classics." She took a deep breath. "The world is older than you know. Contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons..."

END

Author's note: I was planning to steer clear of supernatural elements in this series, but I've

been reminded that both the DC universe and at least one of the other crossovers in *The Return* have ghosts; there's a ghost in the *Bones* season 4 episode "The Hero in the Hold" which is later assumed to be Booth's hallucination... except that the final scene of the episode shows Brennan interacting with it. This is never explained. There are also hints of a ghostly presence in *NCIS* season 3 episodes 1-2, though that's probably just daydreaming.

Amanda was one of the Potential Slayers seen in *Buffy* season 7, a native of Sunnydale and friend of Dawn Summers. She died in the final episode. Amanda's surname is never revealed in canon – I've used the surname of the actress that played her, Sarah Hagan.

Dawn Summers is/was The Key, a mystical object made flesh. She looks normal to most people but her true nature is a ball of glowing green energy.