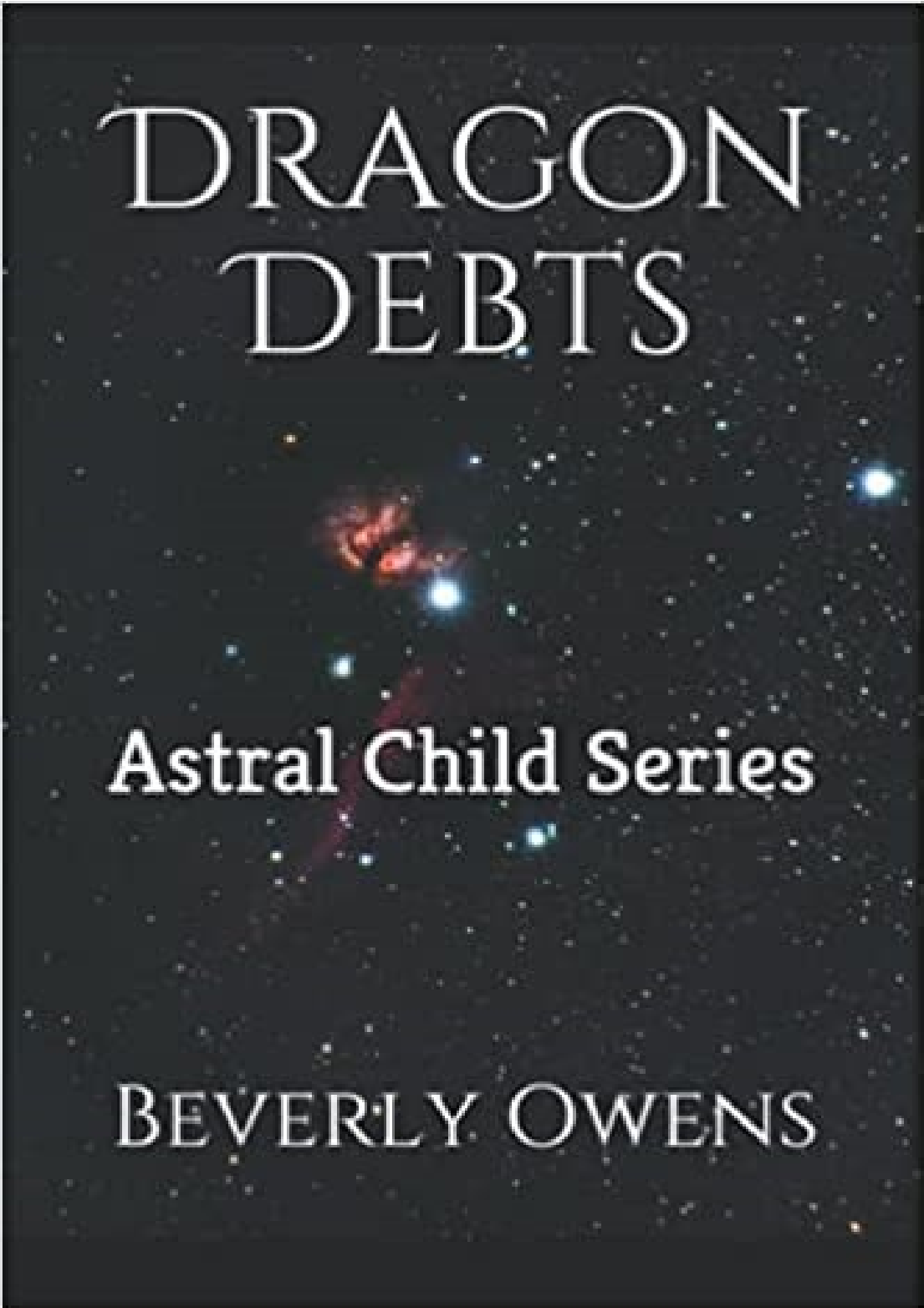




DRAGON DEBTS

Astral Child Series

BEVERLY OWENS

Chapter One

Arryn Walsh sat alone at a small table for two in the neighborhood coffee shop. She checked her phone for the lab report as she waited to hear the barista call her name. Tapping the message on her phone she read as her ears kept alert for her order. Reading the report she scratched her head. *How can that be?* She thought. *How can the sample test negative for any pollutants? There is something really wrong with the soil on that site.* She lifted her head when she heard her name being called.

“Arryn your black eye is ready,” the barista called out trying to stifle a giggle, “a black eye for Arryn.”

She walked up to the counter to retrieve her drink. The name on the disposable cup read Erin. She rolled her eyes. She decided not to say anything because the girl behind the counter had used the common spelling of the name. Arryn was actually surprised they had gotten her name this close to correct. She didn’t have enough fingers and toes to count how many times her cup had read Sharon or Karen or some other name that rhymed with Arryn or Erin. The genius with coffee couldn’t know the disappointment Arryn had felt when she was a girl when all her friends found fun little trinkets with their names on them but there was never one with hers. Arryn had never had to worry about some stranger knowing her name from the little badge she wore or the necklace or any of the cute things her friends had while she was growing up thanks to her mother’s penchant for all things different. Arryn had spent the last 43 years trying to cope with people never getting her name right. It was one of those hang-ups she had never been able to let go of. Why would today be any different? She placed her phone over the pay console, pressed her finger on the screen for ID, and grabbed the cup. “Thanks! This should keep me awake.”

“Yeah,” the girl behind the counter said. “Not many order the black eye in here. That is a whole lot of caffeine in that cup! I’d be jittery for days with a dose of that. Thanks for making my morning; it was fun calling out your order. You have a nice day ma’am.”

Arryn cringed at the word. She was getting called ma’am more and more lately. She knew it was a term meant to show respect but in her mind, it was meant for someone the age of her mother or grandmother and not for a forty-something like herself. Arryn started for the door when she noticed her State Representative sitting in the corner. She had been trying to talk to this woman for months. The woman had made campaign promises but so far had not kept one single one of them. She turned from the door to walk over to the Representative thinking, *it is going to be difficult for her to ignore me now while we are in public and all.*

Before she made her way to the table where the politician sat a woman stood to block her progress. “Excuse me; Representative Carr is occupied at the moment. If you wish to have a word with her you can call the office for an appointment.” The aide to Representative Susan Carr reached into her pocket to pull out a business card.

“Well, you see that is the problem,” Arryn said in a quiet voice. “I have tried calling the office for an appointment and never have any luck getting one. I’m told she is booked solid for months. I’ve tried

writing letters; those go unanswered. She never had a problem talking to anyone while she begged for our votes but now that she is in office she is unreachable, it seems. She said in more than one campaign speech that if elected her door would always be open.” Arryn put her hand on her hip, “So did she have her fingers crossed when she said it? Her door hasn’t been open to me. I have some information that might help her with a vote that is coming up. I don’t need a favor from her and I won’t take but just a minute of her time.” Arryn handed her business card to the aide.

The aide looked over Arryn’s card. She saw the business name was Earth Notes and the woman in front of her must be Arryn Walsh an Environmental Protection Technician. “I like the slogan you have on here. ‘The solution is less pollution.’ That is catchy. Let me see if I can get you a few minutes with Representative Carr.”

Arryn watched as the woman approached the table where Susan Carr sat drinking what looked to be a frappé. She moved her feet a few steps in anticipation of being called to join the politician. She stopped cold as she heard the elected official say in a biting tone, “I don’t want to talk to some tree-hugging radical this morning, Jennifer. I don’t recognize this name as one of my advisors. Who is Arryn Walsh and why should I talk to her? Can’t people just let me drink a coffee in peace?”

Something snapped in Arryn’s mind. She had a career in saving trees but she wasn’t a hugger of trees. Her mood shifted from slightly irritated to full-blown triggered. She threw up her hands as her blood began to boil. “Cheese and rice, that is rich! Who is Arryn Walsh? I am not a radical or a tree hugger. I’m not sure why who I am would matter but let me see if I can tell you who I am. I am one of your constituents; you know the ones you said your door would always be open for. I am also one of the Gen Y’s you so purposefully targeted to vote for you. Although, if I am honest, I actually identify more with the Gen Xers than the Ys; you could say I was born on the cusp of those two generations. Never mind, it is not important! My husband just left me for his secretary who has the IQ of a crayon. My doc just told me this morning that I am in the early stages of perimenopause; whatever the hell that means. I haven’t had time to ‘google’ it yet but I already know it is a stage of adulting that I want no part of! The hot flashes and the leg cramps that wake me up screaming in agony are already driving me bonkers. According to the doc, this is only the beginning; she says I’ll have something called night sweats, too. That sounds pleasant!” Arryn stopped as she realized she was having a meltdown in the coffee shop and everyone was staring at her. “Who is Arryn Walsh and why should you talk to her? I am an EPT who could show you the things that are wrong with that environmental bill you are about to vote on. I could help you gain in those poles you pay so much attention to because you did the right thing to help give the young the future they deserve. I could but I have decided that I won’t. I thought you were different but you aren’t! You are just another politician who will say anything to get elected. Let me remind you of something Representative Susan Carr, our votes hired you and our votes can fire your ass.” Arryn turned and quickly stomped to the door. The shop was so quiet she could have heard a butterfly whisper when just as she pushed on the door to exit she heard one person behind her clapping. She couldn’t believe she had just exploded as she had. *What is wrong with me, she thought. Was that one of those mood swings the doc talked about this morning? Cheese and rice, I need to take a chill pill or something. That was freaking insane! Fun but a little demented.*

Arryn walked around the block to her office. She smiled when the building came into view. She and Dylan had been so excited when they found it available fifteen years ago. It had been perfect for them. 32 Sycamore Street was only one block off of Main Street where most of the shops, restaurants, and businesses in Croyston were located. Many of the buildings on this part of Sycamore were former residences that had been rezoned for business and commercial use. At the time the four-bedroom 1930s Dutch Colonial had seemed like a gift from the universe for the soon-to-be-married couple. She and Dylan could live in a part of the house while using the other part to run her new and flourishing business. Dylan had graduated from law school a few years earlier and had found a job in a small law firm. He wouldn't need to use any part of the house for his work. Back then, Arryn was one of the few EPTs in the area. She had decided not to try to work for one agency but instead work for them all. Even before she and Dylan found this place she had built a nice business for herself. Her clients were the state and local governments, consulting firms, real estate developers, and testing laboratories. She collected water, soil, and air samples for some while others needed for her to inspect businesses and public places for potential environmental hazards or set up monitoring systems. She was generating a nice income while Dylan was up to his eyeballs in college debt at the time. It had been one of Arryn's clients who let them know about this place on Sycamore. It had sat empty for a few years as the owner tried to purchase surrounding properties to level and build upscale apartments. The other property owners refused to sell and the public fought against any approval to allow the apartments to be built. Her client had lost interest in the project and offered to sell Arryn the house for a price less than market value just to get out from under it. She had used the substantial inheritance from her grandfather to purchase the house so that she and Dylan could start their marriage with a mortgage-free home. She thought they had been happy here and they had been for a while. She couldn't put her finger on just when it all started to fall apart; all she knew was that at some point her husband stopped being the man she had fallen in love with and became Dylan the Dick.

Reaching into her bag for her keys, Arryn thought of the lab report she had read just before she had made a fool of herself inside the coffee shop. She still wasn't clear why she had blown her cool so easily. She was usually pretty good with people skills; finding ways to be diplomatic even when she didn't feel it. Her fuse had been a short one today, though. As she walked through the door to her living room and then turned left to what used to be a bedroom but was used as part of her office now she decided to look at the report again. She went to her desk, opened her laptop, and called the report up. Letting out a long sigh she pushed her back against her chair. The site in question was an old warehouse where fertilizers and pesticides had been housed. It seemed impossible that no pollutants or contaminants showed in this report. There should be not just traces but considerable amounts. She hadn't been concerned for the building as a whole or even the parking in front of the building. The floors were concrete and so was the parking area. Although there was visible pitting in the concrete from the spills of fertilizer and chemicals over the years, those would be taken care of during the demolition process. Her concern had been the ground around the building. There was an area near the back that butted up to a wooded area behind the building that she was concerned about. It didn't look right and it didn't smell right. There was something wrong with that ground but according to this report, there wasn't.

As she looked over the results one last time, she decided there might be something shady about this job. She normally collected the samples and did most of the testing here in her building. She could test water and soil easily and usually did. It was only the air samples that she would send to an Air Analysis Lab. Her client for this job had insisted that he wanted her to send everything to an outside lab after she had collected the samples and then she could write the report for him when the results came back. He knew her well enough to know she would never fudge on numbers to make things look better than they were. She suspected that he had paid someone in that outside lab to falsify the findings. He probably thought she wouldn't think twice about the results. Arryn made up her mind. She was going back over to that abandoned warehouse; she would collect more soil and test it here in her little lab in the back room. Closing the lid on her laptop, she went to the back to get a soil sample kit and locked her front door. It was such a nice day; she decided to walk to the site in question. It wasn't too far away and she could use the exercise.

The five-or-so-block walk was pleasant except for the incident when she suddenly felt so hot she thought she was going to melt into a puddle of human goo on the sidewalk. The feeling passed almost as quickly as it had begun. *Cheese and rice that was intense*, she thought. Turning down the next block she reached into her bag to pull out a bottle of water. Taking a sip she noticed a child on the property. She walked a little faster to reach the front parking area. "Hey, Pipsqueak, you shouldn't be here. This is not a playground; I haven't proved it yet but I think the ground is contaminated with something. It isn't safe for you to be here." Arryn moved closer to the child who had her back to her.

As the person she spoke to turned to face her, it said, "Well, I can see that someone could use a refresher course in a sensitivity class. There are a few acceptable words you could use but Pipsqueak is not one of them. Neither is short-stuff, shrimp, or runt acceptable. My goodness you are a tall one, aren't you? I've been waiting for you. Grenza Micklepickle at your service," the woman said as she bowed from her waist.

Arryn's jaw dropped as she looked at the woman who stood in front of her. She couldn't be more than three feet tall if she was an inch. Her skin was the color of a walnut after the green pulpy stuff was removed. Her eyes were the strangest color Arryn had ever seen. They almost looked to be turquoise in color. *Oh great*, she thought, *Doc didn't tell me that I would hallucinate with this perimenopause thing*. She blinked her eyes but the tiny woman was still there. "Did you say that you have been waiting for me?"

"Yes, it is about this soil. I know you noticed it and you are correct there is something wrong with it but it isn't what you suspect." Grenza said as she pointed to the dirt below her feet. "It is as I feared; it is leeching out to your realm. You must come with me so that we can get the balance back before it is too late."

"Whoa, hold on little lady. I'm not going anywhere with anyone." Arryn planted her feet firmly on the concrete she still stood on. "I came here to test the soil to see if the lab made a mistake. Who did you say you were again and how do you know about this ground?"

"I told you, I am Grenza Micklepickle." She blinked her eyes at Arryn. "The Fae Council sent me to retrieve the Astral Child. A Runemaster Staff has been taken from the Cosmic Crown. Only the Astral Child can retrieve it to restore balance to the Cosmos." Grenza began to walk toward the wooded area. "Come, they are waiting for us."

"Look, Glenda, you have me mixed up with someone else." Arryn swept her hand from her chin toward her feet. "I am not a child; I am a grown-ass woman. I don't know anything about any staff or crown or any of the other stuff you just said. I don't even know where to tell you to look for this child you are looking for but it isn't me. I'm a professional and I can assure you what is going on here has nothing to do with staffs or crowns or kids for that matter. Something chemical has affected this ground and I'm going to figure out what that is with another test."

"My name is Grenza Micklepickle; a fine and honorable name for a gnome. It is not Glenda; although that is a nice name, also." The woman looked Arryn up and down. "To be clear Astral Child is a title. In the Fae Realm where most of us live to be centuries old, you are a child to us. Are you not Arryn daughter of the Moon Elf Conall Mundion from the House of Phiarlan who bears the dragonmark of shadow and his human wife? I am sure I have the right one; we have watched you since the day you were born."

"Well, that is just creepy! I am Arryn and I am the daughter of Conall Mundion but he is not an elf. Lady, you must have smoked some interesting weed because none of that stuff is real. You are in the city of Croyston on the third rock from the sun known as Earth. You are either high or I am from all that caffeine I drank earlier. Sorry to disappoint but I have work to do." Arryn looked in her purse for the soil sample kit she had brought with her.

Grenza shook her head, "It is a disappointment that Conall did not share your heritage with you. It is understandable but disappointing. The appearance of the Astral Child is a rare event. There are plenty of Half Elves but only a child born from the union of a Moon Elf and a human produces the Astral Child. I see why you are skeptical, but we are wasting valuable time. I can have your father summoned to the Fae Realm to clarify all this but right now we need to get through the portal before it closes."

Arryn watched as the small person with the funny last name who claimed to be a gnome walked into the woods. She thought her eyes must be playing tricks on her. It was either that or this perimenopause thing also affected your vision. She could swear there was a section of the trees that appeared almost wavy as if it was moving but that wasn't possible. She glanced from side to side. Both sides looked normal but the middle looked very strange. She gasped when she saw a walnut-colored hand come through the wavy area. The index finger of that hand motioned in the universal signal for someone to come closer. *Oh, what the hell*, she thought, *I might as well follow her. It isn't like this is real; it must be from the sleep deprivation those leg cramps have caused.* Arryn closed her eyes and grabbed the hand.

Thank you for reading this sample chapter from my book [Dragon Debts!](#)



Beverly Owens lives in Central Indiana with her husband. She is the proud mother of two daughters and the doting grandmother of two of the sweetest little girls on the planet. Growing up in a small town has given her an insight into the many characters who share everyday life across a few square miles of space in any given area. Having worked in the antique industry for several years she is an advocate of recycling and up-cycling household items rather than filling up the landfills of the world. She is an avid reader and loves to crochet items for her family. Her interest in the possibility of the paranormal and spirituality can be found in the themes of her books.

Click on her image above to see a list of her books currently available on Amazon.

