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New York Times bestselling author of

THE PASSAGE

JUSTIN
CRONIN

THE CITY
OF
MIRRORS

A NOVEL

THE CITY OF MIRRORS

A Novel (Book Three of The Passage Trilogy)

Justin Cronin

Ballantine Books

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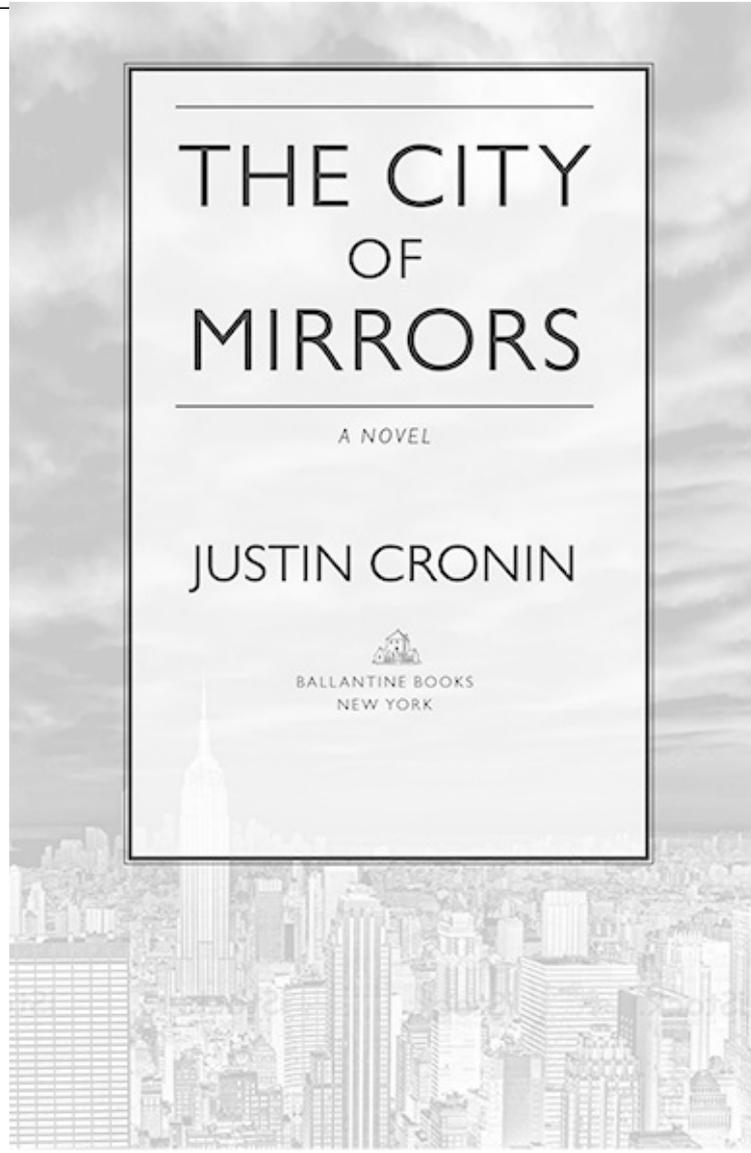
THE CITY OF MIRRORS

A NOVEL

JUSTIN CRONIN



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*And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.*

—A. E. HOUSMAN, *LAST POEMS*

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Prologue

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[Excerpt 2 begins.]

Chapter Five

- 1 Thus did it come to pass that Amy and her fellows returned to Kerrville, in the place of Texas.
- 2 And there they were to learn that three among them had been lost. And these were Theo and Mausami, his wife; and Sara, who was called Sara the Healer, wife of Hollis.
- 3 For in the place of Roswell, where they had taken shelter, a great army of virals had laid siege, killing every kind. And only two of their company survived. And these were Hollis the Strong, husband of Sara, and Caleb, son of Theo and Mausami.
- 4 And a great sadness was upon them all, for the friends that they had lost.
- 5 And in the place of Kerrville, Amy went to live among the Sisters, who were women of GOD. And likewise did Caleb do the same, to be cared for by Amy.
- 6 And in that same period, Alicia, who was Alicia of Blades, and Peter, the Man of Days, took up arms with the Expeditionary, who were soldiers of Texas, to search for the Twelve. For they had learned that to kill one of the Twelve was to kill his Many also, sending their souls unto the LORD.
- 7 And many battles were joined; and many lives were lost. But neither could they slay the Twelve, nor find the places wherein they dwelled. For such was not the will of GOD at that time.
- 8 And in this manner did the years pass, five in sum.
- 9 And at the end of that time, Amy received a sign; and this sign was a dream. And in that dream Wolgast came to her, appearing as a man. And Wolgast said:
- 10 “My master is waiting; and the place of his waiting is a great ship in which he dwells. For a change is upon the land. Soon I will come for you, to show you the way.”
- 11 And that man was Carter, Twelfth of Twelve, who was to be called Carter the Sorrowful; a man righteous in his generation, and beloved of GOD.
- 12 And thus did Amy wait for Wolgast’s return.

Chapter Six

- 1 But there was also in that time another city of mankind, in the place of Iowa. And this was known as the Homeland.
- 2 And in that place abided a race of men who had drunk the blood of a viral, so that they might live, ruling for many generations. And these were called Redeyes. And the greatest of these was Guilder the Director, a man of the Time Before.
- 3 And the viral from which they took their sustenance was Grey, called the Source. For in his blood was the seed of Zero, father of the Twelve. And Grey abided in chains, wherein he suffered greatly.
- 4 And in that place the people lived as captives to serve the Redeyes, doing all they wished. And one of these captives was Sara the Healer, taken at the place of Roswell, whose friends knew not that she lived.
- 5 And Sara had a daughter, Kate; but the child was taken away. And the Redeyes told Sara that her daughter had not survived, causing a great woe in her heart.
- 6 And it came to pass that the child was given to a woman of the Redeyes. And this was Lila, wife of Wolgast.
- 7 For Lila's daughter had died in the Time Before; and though many years had passed, the wound was still sharp in her mind. And she took comfort in Kate, imagining her to be the daughter she had lost.
- 8 And it came to pass that certain people of the Homeland rose up against their oppressors; and these were the Insurgents. And Sara joined with them. And she was sent to Lila to serve her in the Dome, wherein the Redeyes dwelled, that she might learn more about their ways. And in this manner did she discover that her daughter yet lived.
- 9 And in that same time also, Alicia and Peter discovered the lair of Martínez, Tenth of Twelve, in the place of Carlsbad; and there they did battle with his Many. But they did not find Martínez, who had fled from that place.
- 10 For Zero had commanded Guilder the Director to build a mighty fortress, wherein the Twelve should reside, to feed upon the blood of beasts and the blood of the Homelander also. For their Many had devoured nearly every living thing upon the earth, making it a wasteland, fit neither for man nor viral, nor any kind of animal.
- 11 And in accordance with this design, the Twelve told their Many to leave their places of darkness; and they died. And this was known as the Casting Off.
- 12 And the Twelve commenced their journeys to the Homeland, a distance of many miles, so that they might preside over the earth.

Chapter Seven

- 1 But there was one who did not heed Zero's words; and this was Carter the Sorrowful, Twelfth of Twelve. And he instructed Wolgast to guide Amy to the place wherein he dwelled, that they two might join against his fellows.
- 2 And Amy heeded this command and left the place of Kerrville for the place of Houston. And in her company was Lucius the Faithful, who was a helpmate to her, and a man righteous in the eyes of GOD.
- 3 And in the place of Houston, Amy found the ship, which was the *Chevron Mariner*; and in its belly Carter

dwelled. And many things passed between them. And when Amy emerged, her body was no longer that of a child, but of a woman; and in the company of Lucius she set out for the Homeland, to do battle with the Twelve.

4 And in that time also, Peter, the Man of Days; and Michael, who was called Michael the Clever; and Hollis, husband of Sara, likewise journeyed to the Homeland, to learn what was there. For they had come to believe that Sara was held captive in that place and many others also.

5 And with them were two companions. And the first of these was Lore, who was Lore the Pilot. And the second was a criminal, called Tifty the Gangster.

6 And in that same period, Alicia likewise made her way to the place of Iowa, pursuing Martínez, Tenth of Twelve, whom she had vowed to slay. For Martínez was the most evil of these demons, a killer of many women, and a scourge upon the earth.

7 But Alicia was taken captive at the Homeland, and endured many tribulations at the hands of the Redeyes and their helpmates, who were called Cols. And the worst of the Cols was Sod. But Alicia was strong and did not yield.

8 And when one night Sod came to her cell, so that he might have his dark way with her again, Alicia said: "Loosen my chains, so that you may take your pleasure more easily." And she wrapped the chains around his neck, killing him in this manner. And she made her escape, slaying many others.

9 And in the wilderness beyond the walls of the Homeland, Amy appeared to her; and Alicia saw that she was now a woman in body as well as mind. And Amy comforted her; for they were sisters in blood.

10 But Alicia had a secret; and this was the blood-hunger. For the seed of the Twelve was growing strong within her, making her a viral. And this was a great heaviness in her heart, for she loved her fellows deeply, and did not wish to be apart from them.

11 And in that same time, Sara was discovered by the Redeyes; and she was made a captive, and suffered many violations. For Guilder the Director desired that all who had risen up against him should know his wrath in fullest measure.

12 But the hour of reckoning was at hand; for Amy and Alicia had joined with the Insurgents, to take arms against the Redeyes. And among them a plan was hatched to liberate the people of the Homeland and destroy the Twelve and rescue Sara also.

Chapter Eight

1 And it came to pass that Peter and his fellows arrived in the place of Iowa, so that all were in attendance, making a mighty force. And the greatest of these was Amy.

2 For she had surrendered to the Redeyes, saying: "I am the leader of the Insurgents; do with me as you will." For it was her design that Guilder in his fury should unleash the Twelve to kill her.

3 And all did come to pass as Amy had foreseen; and the hour of her execution was established. And this would occur in the Stadium, a great amphitheater from the Time Before, so that the people of the Homeland might see.

4 And Alicia and the others concealed themselves in that place, so that when the Twelve were revealed, they could use their weapons upon them and upon the Redeyes also.

5 And Amy was brought before the crowd, and bound in chains; and upon an armature of metal she was made to hang. And Guilder took great delight in her suffering, exhorting the multitudes to do likewise.

6 But Amy would not give him satisfaction. And Guilder commanded the Twelve to devour her, so that all in attendance might know his power, bowing down before him.

7 But Amy saw that she was not alone; for among the Twelve was Wolgast, who had taken Carter's place, so that he might protect her. And Amy said to the Twelve:

8 "My brothers, hello. It is I, Amy, your sister." And no more words were spoken by her.

9 For she began to shake, and her body became as a bright light shattering the darkness; and with a furious roar Amy became as one of them, taking the form of a viral, mighty to behold. And this was the Letting Go. And one to see was Peter, and another Alicia, and a third Lucius, and all the others also.

10 And the chains were broken, and a great battle joined; and a great victory was won. And many lives were lost. And one of these was Wolgast, who sacrificed himself to save Amy; for his love for her was like unto a father's for his child.

11 And in this manner the Twelve perished from off the face of the earth, freeing all its people.

12 But of Amy's fate, her friends knew nothing; for she was nowhere to be found.

I
The Daughter

98-101 A.V.

There is another world but it is this one.

—PAUL ÉLUARD

Central Pennsylvania

August 98 A.V.

Eight months after the liberation of the Homeland

The ground yielded easily under her blade, unlocking a black smell of earth. The air was hot and moist; birds were singing in the trees. On her hands and knees, she stabbed the dirt, chopping it loose. One handful at a time, she scooped it away. Some of the weakness had abated but not all. Her body felt loose, disorganized, drained. There was pain, and the memory of pain. Three days had passed, or was it four? Perspiration beaded on her face; she licked her lips to taste the salt. She dug and dug. The sweat ran in rivulets, falling into the earth. That's where everything goes, Alicia thought, in the end. Everything goes into the earth.

The pile beside her swelled. How deep was enough? Three feet down, the soil began to change. It became colder, with the odor of clay. It seemed like a sign. She rocked back on her boots and took a long drink from her canteen. Her hands were raw; the flesh at the base of her thumb had peeled back in a sheet. She placed the web of her hand to her mouth and used her teeth to sever the flap of skin and spat it into the dirt.

Soldier was waiting for her at the edge of the clearing, his jaws loudly working on a star of waist-high grass. The grace of his haunches, his rich mane and blue roan coat, the magnificence of his hooves and teeth and the great black marbles of his eyes: an aura of splendor surrounded him. He possessed, when he chose, an absolute calm, then, in the next moment, could perform remarkable deeds. His wise face lifted at the sound of her approach. *see. We're ready.* He turned in a slow arc, his neck bent low, and followed her into the trees to the place where she had pitched her tarp. On the ground beside Alicia's bloody bedroll lay the small bundle, swaddled in a stained blanket. Her daughter had lived less than an hour, yet in that hour Alicia had become a mother.

Soldier watched as she emerged. The baby's face was covered; Alicia drew back the cloth. Soldier bent his face to the child's, his nostrils flaring, breathing in her scent. Tiny nose and eyes and rosebud mouth, startling in their humanness; her head was covered in a cap of so

red hair. But there was no life, no breath. Alicia had wondered if she would be capable of loving her—this child conceived in terror and pain, fathered by a monster. A man who had beaten her, raped her, cursed her. How foolish she'd been.

She returned to the clearing. The sun was directly overhead; insects buzzed in the grass, a rhythmic pulsing. Soldier stood beside her as she laid her daughter in the grave. When her labor had started, Alicia had begun to pray. *Let her be all right.* As the hours of agony dissolved into one another, she had felt death's cold presence inside her. The pain pounded through her like a wind of steel; it echoed in her cells like thunder. Something was wrong. *Please, God, protect her, protect us.* But her prayers had fallen into the void.

The first handful of soil was the hardest. How did one do it? Alicia had buried many men. Some she'd known, and some she hadn't; only one she'd loved. The boy, Hightop. So funny, so alive, then gone. She let the dirt sift through her fingers. It struck the cloth with a pattering sound, like the first spits of rain upon leaves. Bit by bit her daughter disappeared. *Goodbye,* she thought, *goodbye, my darling, my one.*

She returned to her tent. Her soul felt shattered, like a million chips of glass inside her. Her bones were tubes of lead. She needed water, food; her stores were exhausted. But hunting was out of the question, and the creek, a five-minute walk down the hillside, felt like miles away. The needs of the body: what did they matter? Nothing mattered. She lay on her bedroll and closed her eyes, and soon she was asleep.

She dreamed of a river. A wide, dark river, and above it the moon was shining. It laid its light across the water like a golden road. What lay ahead Alicia did not know, only that she needed to cross this river. She took her first cautious step upon its glowing surface. Her mind felt divided: half marveled at this unlikely mode of travel; the other half did not. As the moon touched the far shore, she realized she had been deceived. The shining pathway was dissolving. She broke into a run, desperate to reach the other side before the river swallowed her. But the distance was too great; with every step she took, the horizon leapt farther away. The water sloshed around her ankles, her knees, her waist. She had no strength to fight its pull. *Come to me, Alicia. Come to me, come to me, come to me.* She was sinking, the river was taking her, she was plunging into darkness ...

She awoke to a muted orange light; the day had nearly passed. She lay motionless, assembling her thoughts. She had grown accustomed to these nightmares; the pieces changed but never the feeling of them—the futility, the fear. Yet this time something was different.

An aspect of the dream had traveled into life; her shirt was sopping. She looked down to see the widening stains. Her milk had come in.

Staying was not a conscious decision; the will to move on was simply absent. Her strength returned. It approached with small steps; then, like a guest long awaited, it arrived all at once. She constructed a shelter of deadfall and vines, using the tarp as a roof. The woods abounded with life: squirrels and rabbits, quail and doves, deer. Some were too quick for her, but not all. She set traps and waited to collect her kill or took them on her cross: one shot, clean death, then dinner, raw and warm. At the end of each day when the light had faded, she bathed in the creek. The water was clear and shockingly cold. It was on such an excursion that she saw the bears. A rustling ten yards upstream, something heavy moving in the brush; then they appeared at the edge of the creek, a mother and a pair of cubs. Alicia had never seen such creatures in the flesh, only in books. They prowled the shallows together, pushing the mud with their snouts. There was something loose and half-formed about their anatomy, as if the muscles were not firmly stitched to the skin beneath their heavy, twig-tangled coats. A cloud of insects sparkled around them, catching the last of the light. But the bears did not appear to notice her or, if they did, did not think she was important.

The summer faded. One day, a world of fat green leaves, dense with shadow; then the woods exploded with riotous color. In the morning, the floor of the forest crunched with frost. Winter's cold descended with a feeling of purity. Snow lay heavy on the land. The black lines of the trees, the small footprints of birds, the whitewashed sky, bleached of all tone: everything had been pared to its essence. What month was it? What day? As time wore on, food became a problem. For hours, whole days even, she barely moved, conserving her strength; she hadn't spoken to a living soul in nearly a year. Gradually it came to her that she was no longer thinking in words, as if she had become a creature of the forest. She wondered if she was losing her mind. She began to talk to Soldier, as if he were a person. *Soldier*, she would say, *what should we have for dinner? Soldier, do you think it's time to gather wood for the fire? Soldier, does the sky look like snow?*

One night she awoke in the shelter and realized that for some time she'd been hearing thunder. A wet spring wind was blowing in directionless gusts, hurling around in the treetops. With a feeling of detachment, Alicia listened to the storm's approach; then it was sudden upon them. A blast of lightning forked the sky, freezing the scene in her eyes, followed by a

earsplitting clap. She let Soldier inside as the heavens opened, ejecting raindrops heavy as bullets. The horse was shivering with terror. Alicia needed to calm him; just one panicked movement in the tiny space and his massive body would blow the shelter to pieces. *You're my good boy*, she murmured, stroking his flank. With her free hand she slipped the rope around his neck. *My good, good boy. What do you say? Keep a girl company on a rainy night?* His body was tense with fear, a wall of coiled muscle, and yet when she applied slow force to draw him downward, he allowed it. Beyond the walls of the shelter, the lightning flashed, the heavens rolled. He dropped to his knees with a mighty sigh, turned onto his side beside his bedroll, and that was how the two of them slept as the rain poured down all night, washing winter away.

She abided in that place for two years. Leaving was not easy; the woods had become a solace. She had taken its rhythms as her own. But when Alicia's third summer began, a new feeling stirred: the time had come to move on. To finish what she'd started.

She passed the rest of the summer preparing. This involved the construction of a weapon. She left on foot for the river towns and returned three days later, hauling a clanking bag. She understood the basics of what she was attempting, having watched the process many times; the details would come through trial and error. A flat-topped boulder by the creek would serve as her anvil. At the water's edge, she stoked her fire and watched it burn down to coals. Maintaining the right temperature was the trick. When she felt she had it right, she removed the first piece from the sack: a bar of O1 steel, two inches wide, three feet long, three-eighths of an inch thick. From the sack she also withdrew a hammer, iron tongs, and thick leather gloves. She placed the end of the steel bar in the fire and watched its color change as the metal heated. Then she got to work.

It took three more trips downriver for supplies, and the results were crude, but in the end she was satisfied. She used coarse, stringy vines to wrap the handle, giving her fist a solid purchase on the otherwise smooth metal. Its weight was pleasant in her grip. The polished tip shone in the sun. But the first cut would be the true test. On her final trip downriver, she wandered upon a field of melons, the size of human heads. They grew in a dense patch tangled with vines of grasping, hand-shaped leaves. She'd selected one and carried it home in the sack. Now she balanced it atop a fallen log, took aim, and brought the sword down in a vertical arc. The severed halves rocked lazily away from each other, as if stunned, and

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