

*A whisper wafts in the breeze upon a single black feather.*

Normalcy can shatter in a single instant. Sometimes for the better, and other times... for the worse. A break in and murder of common circumstances is not as it seems as it links six seemingly normal people together in a prelude to something much bigger than they could ever imagine.

*Wrongly accused...*

*A secret agenda...*

*Lost in dreams...*

*A discovery of what was once lost...*

*A choice...*

*A breaking of a contract...*

The world is changing around them as one filled with magic is anything, but dead while the darkness seeks out to swallow the other. Secrets are being revealed whether anyone is ready to face them or not. Nothing is as it seems and everything is about to collide. Whether to save the world or destroy it, the answer remains unknown until the final piece is in place.

*Is there still hope?*

## CHAPTER 1

*When I said I wanted a vacation, this wasn't exactly what I had in mind.*

Cheyenne Lightstone padded into the kitchen and grabbed a bag of ground coffee from the cupboard. She scowled at the clock knowing that it was no longer a concern much to her chagrin. She was what her employer at the museum so eloquently put, on an extended vacation until further notice.

Her amber eyes narrowed as she continued her menial chore of making her morning survival. Noon or not, she still needed the boost after the hellish day she had yesterday. With a fresh cup in hand, she sat at the table and reflected upon the event, subconsciously hoping she didn't break something if she lost her temper again.

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Her roommates, Samantha Darkwater, and Gina Waverly had long since departed for work. Cheyenne was just about to leave as well after pouring a fresh cup of sanity when her doorbell rang quite unexpectedly.

“Damn it! Who the hell could that be?” She wiped off the scorching hot coffee that had spilled on her hand, wincing at the slightly biting pain as she headed for the door. She inhaled deeply, trying to calm her anger. It wasn’t as though whoever was on the other side knew that she was in the process of transferring coffee into a portable mug.

Cheyenne peeked through the peephole then froze at the sight of two police officers standing with serious expressions on their faces. She frowned a moment then unlocked the door cracking it open. “Yes? May I help you?”

“Miss Cheyenne Lightstone?” One asked as the other silently studied her.

She kept her composure despite the unease that trickled down her spine. “Yes, I’m Cheyenne. Is something wrong? Did something happen?”

“I am Detective Tracy, and this is my partner, Detective Hanes. May we come inside? We have a few questions to ask you.”

Panic flashed through Cheyenne’s eyes. She had seen and read about this type of scenario all the time and knew it could relate to a multiple number of situations. Most of which were never good news. “Questions? What kind of questions? Is this about Sam? Or Gina? Are they okay? Did something happen to them or my sister?”

“No, nothing happened to them. We need to discuss another matter with you. May we come in or do you want to take this downtown?”

“Frank!” Hanes, who appeared a few years younger was as skinny as a beanpole with wide green eyes the color of a pine forest protested to his partner. He scratched the back of his neck

as he gave Cheyenne an apologetic smile. “Sorry, it’s been a rough morning, Miss Lightstone, but we’d appreciate it if you’d cooperate.”

“Right! I’m sorry, I wasn’t expecting anyone. This is so sudden and I’m not used to...Sorry, please come inside.” Cheyenne stepped back, allowed the two men entrance into the three-bedroom lakeside house then led them to the living room. “Um, would either of you like some coffee? I can make a fresh pot if you’d like.”

“That would be great,” Hanes nodded gratefully. “Frank?”

“None for me,” the senior detective grumbled as he took a seat next to his partner on the couch.

“It’ll be just a minute.” Cheyenne smiled cheerfully then ducked into the kitchen swearing under her breath. She went through the motions of prepping a pot of coffee while her mind raced with questions on why two cops had decided to appear on her doorstep. It surely wasn’t because they were making house calls wanting to chitchat over a pot of gourmet coffee and scones. Coffee she had. Scones she didn’t so why were they there and why did she feel as though she was about to be accused of something completely heinous like an overdue book she lost ten years ago? It wasn’t as though she had a mountain of unpaid parking tickets or something.

*This is bad. My hands are shaking. All I want is for this to be a dream and to wake up realizing that I overslept then will have to race off to work or even better that I overslept but it’s my day off so it won’t matter anyway! Ugh, I feel like I’m going to be sick.* She closed her eyes struggling to control her already rattled nerves. Usually she didn’t get shook up easily, but something about the situation made her uncomfortable.

Cheyenne pushed a strand of medium brown hair from her face then picked up two steaming hot mugs from the counter. She puffed up her cheeks, exhaling slowly, assuring herself that everything would be fine then returned to the two men.

“Sorry about that.” She handed Hanes his cup then glanced from his cup of black coffee scolding herself. “Oh, I’m sorry. Would you like cream or sugar with it?”

“No, no this is great. Thanks.” He smiled at her as he accepted the cup and received a scowl from his partner. Hanes cleared his throat as he sat up. “We’d like to ask you some questions if you don’t mind. You might want to have a seat.”

Cheyenne looked at the armchair positioned next to the fireplace. Normally it was a place of sanctuary where she often indulged in curling up with a good book during a particularly chilly or rainy evening with a hot cup of tea. Instead, it looked very unwelcoming. She clasped her hands around her coffee cup sinking into the chair.

Tracy lifted his head pulling out a small notebook and a recorder. “We have some questions for you and to keep this a bit formal, we’ll need to record this conversation for records for your protection as well as our own. Is that alright, Miss Lightstone?”

“That’s fine.” Cheyenne nodding staring blankly at the small recorder as he stated the revised miranda.

“Do you have any questions concerning your rights or obligations in this matter or feel a need to have an attorney present?”

“No.”

Hanes cleared his throat as he placed his cup on the coffee table. “You work for the Seattle Art Museum, correct?”

“Yes.”

“What position?”

“Director of Antiquities.”

“Why did you decide to work at a museum of all places?”

“I have a great love for history.” Cheyenne maintained an even business-like tone as her curiosity gnawed at her spine. What did it matter where she worked? She never did anything wrong.

“How long have you worked there?”

“Two... three years next month.”

Hanes rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Do you unpack new shipments often?”

“It’s part of my job; I am involved in approving and signing for every item that is under consideration for display.”

“Recently?”

Cheyenne nodded. “A few days ago I think. We’re gearing up for an exhibit on myth and fantasy. Why do you ask?”

“Do you remember any of the items you had last come in contact with?”

She leaned back in her chair. “Some swords, pieces of armor, a few other antiques like crystals, and rocks.”

“Anything in particular that stood out in your mind?”

“Not that I can really think of,” she shrugged. “I love art so I tend to appreciate each piece in its own unique way.”

Tracy lifted his eyes to a small ornate vase on the mantle. The intricate carvings were not of something commonly found in the area let alone the country. “You seem to have quite an

elaborate collection, Miss Lightstone. May I inquire how you came about acquiring such valuable looking pieces of art?"

She too looked at the vase then smiled at it. It had been a very treasured gift from her sister. "I either got them at auctions, funded excavations, or they were gifts."

He snorted at her response. "Don't they seem a little out of the price range for a single woman who works as a Director of Antiquities at a museum?"

Cheyenne bit the inside of her cheek at his snide remark. She had to keep her temper in check. "My finances are quite fine. My parents had established a dowry for my sister and I which has been passed down from generation to generation."

Hanes sipped at his coffee then crossed his legs. "Yet you chose to live in a small house with two other people?"

"I like the location and they are my best friends. Just because I am rather well off doesn't mean they are."

Tracy leaned forward as though taking a closer inspection of the woman. "Where were you last night between the hours of midnight and four am?"

She blinked as if he had just slapped her. She had read too many mystery/suspense novels to not know what the questions would lead up to. "Home in my room asleep. Why are you asking? Did something happen?"

"Can anyone validate your whereabouts?"

"No. My roommates saw me go to my room, but they always go to bed shortly after I do. Why are you asking me these questions? I don't understand what this is this all about..."

Tracy narrowed his dark eyes at her. "Someone broke into the museum and killed the evening security guard last night."

## CHAPTER 2

“Killed?” Cheyenne’s face went pasty while as any sign of a temper threatening to burst free vanished. She knew everyone who worked at the museum on some level. Some she cared a great deal for and others... she did not. Like or not like, she would never wish harm on anyone no matter how badly they treated her.

She liked the security guards and would often pause to chat briefly with them before departing for home. It was indeed a tragedy. She only hoped that whoever it was didn’t suffer.

Closing her eyes, she dropped her head in her hands. A moment later she lifted her face up then sank deeper in the chair. “Can you tell me who it was?”

“Mr. Dudley Fleming. Everything else is confidential,” Tracy eyed her carefully as she nodded in agreement.

“Dudley?” Cheyenne choked on the name, instantly mourning the newly deceased. An image of his charming chocolate brown eyes framed by equally dark hair with a wicked smile entered her mind. His corny jokes now seemed so sad. To know that he was gone, that she would never get to talk to him ever again was almost unbearable. Unshed tears begged to fall

from her sorrow-filled eyes as she squeezed them tight. “You’re just trying to rule me out, right?”

“Everyone at the museum is a suspect, Miss Lightstone. We have been advised that you were the last person seen with the victim as well as the stolen artifacts.”

Color slowly returned to Cheyenne’s face. “Dudley and I always talk between shifts. I’m ending my shift, he’s starting his. He is-was a nice guy that wouldn’t hurt a fly to be cliché. As for the artifacts, I already told you that it’s my job to unpack the shipments.”

“What were you two discussing?” Hanes inquired in a friendly tone.

“He- he wanted ideas for his niece’s birthday. He didn’t know what to get her so I gave him some suggestions.”

Tracy practically snorted. “Why would he go to you for information? I’m sure his sister or mother would have been able to give better advice than a single twenty-something year old.”

“Tracy!” Hanes smiled apologetically at Cheyenne over his partner’s gruff attitude. “Did Mr. Fleming ever make any sexual advances towards you? Exhibited any behavior that was unprofessional or that made you uncomfortable in any way? Did he make any threats of any kind towards you or any of your co-workers or patrons?”

“No! How could you even ask something like that? He’s a nice kind of goofy guy. Kind of geeky, but sweet. We’re friends. That’s all. He doesn’t have a mean bone in his body,” Cheyenne murmured her heat aching with each memory that flooded into her head.

“So nice that he might help you sneak into the museum to steal a few items that caught your eye?”

She immediately broke free from the grief and shock that were slowly consuming her. “No. I left the museum at 9pm and had not returned since.”

Tracy leaned forward as a sneer crossed his lips. “Since you two were so chummy perhaps you formed a partnership to steal some goods only Fleming decided to back out or threatened to turn you in instead so you offed him.”

Cheyenne ground her teeth together. “I already told you, I have not seen him since shortly after closing at 9 pm yesterday. We discussed gift ideas for his niece. That is all. This is very insulting to both of us. I would like you to leave now.”

Tracy rose to his feet followed by Hanes. “Right. You might want to look into a good lawyer, Miss Lightstone. I don’t think everything is all sunshine and roses with you if you catch my drift.”

His partner grimaced then glanced at her sternly. “It’ll be best if you stay in town. Until we find more evidence on what exactly happened last night, we may need to talk to you again sometime soon.”

Cheyenne kept her face stern as she trailed after them to the door. Once the two detectives were gone, she collapsed against the door then slid down to the floor. Dudley was gone and she was a suspect in his murder and a robbery. It was going to take a while to compute. Instead, she felt an urge to be sick.

Work. She snapped out of her stupor cursing. How late was she? She would have to call and explain the circumstances. Given the tragedy, her boss should understand, right?

She picked herself off the floor then headed into the kitchen. Just as she reached for the phone, it rang.

Cheyenne stared at it dumbfound as it rang a second time before she answered it. “Hello?”

“Hi, is this Cheyenne? This is Tamara,” a female voice said on the other line.

“Tamara! Oh, I am so sorry I’m not there yet.” Cheyenne rambled suddenly feeling very flustered about speaking to her boss. “Some cops wanted to talk to me about Dudley’s death. Is his family all right? Is everyone else okay?”

“You have some vacation time coming up, right?”

She paused. It was a question she wasn’t expecting. “Yes, in a week. I was just going to take a mental vacation so if you want me to reschedule I suppose I could-”

“No, no. You don’t need to reschedule,” Tamara cut in. “In fact with this whole situation, I think it’s best if you take, we’ll call it an extended vacation, until further notice. It’s just for precautionary measures with the whole theft, murder and all.”

Cheyenne choked. Her voice went hoarse as realization dawned on her. “You don’t actually think I did it... Tamara, I’m not a murderer or thief.”

“No, no, dear. All are innocent until proven guilty is I think how it goes. There are other reasons behind it too such as I’m sure you need some time to get over Dudley’s death. You two were good friends, right? I don’t think working will be too good for you with how much shock you must be in.”

“I’m fine.” She protested.

“It’s for the best for everyone. I must go now. Take care.”

Tamara hung up before Cheyenne could even say goodbye.

“Oh, my God!” The phone fell from her trembling fingers as she braced herself on the counter. What just happened? What was she going to do? She had a bad feeling that there was more going on than what anybody was telling her. Was she the prime suspect? Did someone point the finger at her?

She couldn't go to jail. She had a hard enough time hiding what she was. She wasn't human that's for sure. To say that she had a prolonged life was a major joke. She was far older than anyone could imagine.

*Breathe, Cheyenne. Don't blow up. You can't blow up... oh, hell with it!* She let out a fierce roar; her brunette locks ignited into a deep red. Amber eyes flashed crimson, as she let out what she could of her inner dragoness without fully transforming into the beast. She raked her fingernails like claws on the counter and dug them in until the fury subsided.

Calmer she glanced down then swore at the deep gouges her nails had made. Well, if she was now on vacation, might as well make use of it and try to fix things. Starting with the mess she had made out of the counter.

With a deep sigh, she grabbed the now cold coffee that was still in her travel cup, made a toast, and took a deep drink.

*Yeah, this is really going to suck.*

## CHAPTER 3

Gunmetal gray eyes sparked with interest from the brim of a dark hat. A single man stood in the shadows of a building across from the museum. Cops, which had previously swarmed the building investigating a particularly gruesome crime scene, were now indulging in the common fare of coffee and donuts.

The darkly clothed man often found that what one could deem as priceless, others found meaningless. He clutched the smooth object in his hand. Everything had its price, some were just a little more steep than others.

“Pitiful,” Vincent muttered under his breath as he headed deeper into the alley.

The security guard’s blood had spurting quickly as the deadly blade severed his jugular. It was a fast strike, but the death itself was not necessarily painless. He had gurgled and convulsed as the blade stole his life. There was so much blood though. Bathing the floors as it painted the walls and display cases a vibrant red.

The poor sap never saw it coming. Vincent remembered the horror that had flashed in the man's eyes as he realized that his time had come to an end. His family would grieve then move on as was custom.

He knew that things couldn't be helped. His job had taught him that. Even though it sometimes ate at him, he just had to accept it. He had a job to do and that was then end of that.

He lifted the brilliant onyx from his pocket and gazed at the phoenix etched deep inside, surrounded by bursts of color. Archeologists had marveled at the beauty of the artifact, puzzling over how anything could have been carved inside such a delicate stone, but show no sign of having been melded together in some form.

He knew that there were others similar to that of the onyx. That much he had been told. They had to be located quickly then stashed away until they were needed.

Across the street, a door of a small house perched near a lake opened. Two police officers departed as a woman stood at the threshold, watching them leave.

Vincent nodded silently as he studied her amber eyes framed by shoulder length brown hair. She looked devastated and a bit in shock. He felt a pang morose over her situation. The foolish humans had chosen her as a suspect purely from circumstantial evidence. He didn't doubt her ability to kill, but the act was in some way, beneath her. He knew she was a dragoness, but chose to lead a peaceful existence. She didn't align herself with any of the underground societies of magic that were completely oblivious to all humans. She wasn't even registered, though her possession of magic was not unknown. There were those who knew of her abilities, but because she rarely ever used her power except when her anger boiled over, the results were minimal in the form of energy spikes and her hair turning red.

However, now that she was a suspect in a murder, things wouldn't be easy anymore. He knew she would be contacted by one of the magical law enforcement groups. Hopefully she would cooperate and not show her stubborn side as was her tendency.

As old as she was, Vincent was surprised that they had never crossed paths until this moment. Even then, he was only looking at her. More than likely, she didn't know of his existence.

*So, Cheyenne. We finally meet. Shall it just be this one moment or will there be more than one acquaintance? I am entertained by the thought of sharing a conversation with you. Perhaps someday, it may become reality.*

He only hoped that any future meetings would not be job related. His duty was one secret best left unrevealed.

He couldn't consider her for much longer. It was time for yet another to die. It was imperative for him to arrive on time to complete the job.

Sometimes Vincent wished he could have a different line of work. His job definitely wasn't for the weak at heart or stomach.

With one last thought, he disappeared into the shadows.

## CHAPTER 4

“Where is it?” Sam Darkwater scowled at the stack of haphazardly stacked cassette tapes, struggling to not pull her hair out.

The radio station for WYLD 99.9, which normally bustled with energy, was like a funeral home. Most of the crew were at the grand opening of the newest entertainment sanctuary, Hit Play, leaving her to her duties in solitude.

She was supposed to pick up her boss, Darren Cougar earlier that morning, but his flight had been postponed due to a freak snowstorm. Sam didn’t necessarily mind. It just meant that she would have to pull out an old recording of his morning show then select a playlist of music to play between the recording and commercials.

Much to her distress, the key to the cabinet where the recordings were held was nowhere in sight. She searched to the point of ransacking the community office. No luck; it was about as good as a snowman’s chance of surviving in the desert.

“Crap, I only have five minutes before air time!” Sam’s stress increased at the sight of the clocking that seemed to mock her efforts. Time was running out fast. It was too late to call for a fill in. She pushed at the disarrayed red strands of hair that fell in her face, fighting the growing urge to scream like a victim in a slasher flick.

No one helpful was around. Anyone that could have given her aid was either at Hit Play or had called out sick. She wished that she could be among them. A bout of the flu couldn’t be nearly as bad. At least she would have a nice warm bed to curl up in; she was already ill to her

stomach. No panic attacks for her. Someone else could pace the floor muttering curses with the threat of dead air time loaming over their head.

Less than two minutes. Sam hoped that her roommates were dealing with their day much better than she was. Cheyenne was probably deciding on what to use for new displays about now and Gina would be filing documents.

“To hell with it!” She marched into the recording booth, slid on a pair of headphones as she perched on the chair in front of the microphone. She did a radio show in high school. It couldn’t be too much different. She held her breath for the last thirty seconds then did her first and probably last greeting to the city she loved.

“Good Morning, Seattle! This is your very own Cinderella, Sam Darkwater, coming to you for the first time ever. I’ve lost my slipper and Prince Charming has yet to return. So, until my Fairy Godmother can make my dreams come true, I’ll be here with you.”

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Sam grinned as she took another commercial break. She had forgotten how much she enjoyed the radio. Given the amount of callers, people seemed to like her as well. She wished it could last forever. Her own show. She sighed. That was a pipe dream if she ever saw one. Come tomorrow she would be reduced to nothing more than Darren’s go-for.

She sighed as she glanced down at the computer screen then narrowed her blue-green eyes at a breaking news flash that popped up. Apparently she wasn’t the only one working this morning. She opened the message then bit back a squeak. Someone had been killed last night at the museum where Cheyenne works. There were no solid leads, but the museum was going to be

closed that day due to the investigation. She had to make a mental note to contact her roommate and make sure everything was okay once her shift ended. Until then, Seattle needed her.

## CHAPTER 5

*I am so bored.* Alec Wood flicked the glow from his flashlight from left to right then sighed. Being a security guard for the night shift at his grandfather's shipping warehouse was not all it was cracked up to be. Sure the pay was good, but the long hours spent patrolling the building were dull and very isolating.

Alec tugged on the brim of his cap tossing the flashlight with the other hand as though it were a baton. Sometimes he considered trying to find work elsewhere but the feeling of being unqualified for anything worthwhile usually quenched that urge in an instant. Instead he stuck with what he knew despite how tedious it was. But hey, someone had to do it. The crates couldn't just guard themselves.

He stifled a yawn as he headed towards the small backroom, the only room he had yet to scan. He directed the light lazily around the threshold then entered.

Nothing seemed amiss; the entire building felt as silent as a tomb. Green eyes glanced at the battered metal desk, the beaten office chair that no longer had a back, and several reams of paper stacked haphazardly against the wall.

Alec almost turned on his heel to hit the soda machine for a pick-me-up when the beam of light fell upon a small crate tucked in the corner stamped with the local museum's address and logo.

"What the hell?" He stared at it as though he had never seen a box before. Alec knew his father mainly handled antiquities for private collectors, but he had never dealt with the museum before. Something did not feel right.

Maybe it was nothing, but Alec's imagination running away with him. Either way, he knew his mind wouldn't stop racing until he saw for himself just what exactly lay inside.

All he had to do was open it, take a peek then reseal it. No one would ever know.

Setting the flashlight down, Alec set to the task of opening the crate as carefully as possible. To his surprise, however, it didn't take much effort to release the lid.

With a deep breath he lifted it up then froze in horror. It was empty. That couldn't be right. Why would someone send an empty box unless... His stomach turned uneasily.

Quickly he resealed and positioned it just the way he had found it. He didn't know what was going on but something told him that it might be best to look into a new line of work and fast. It seemed evident that his grandfather may have more secrets than he thought.

## CHAPTER 6

Lightning crackled, the wind howled like a savage beast as torrential rains fell heavily to the earth. Wrapped in a blanket, a baby stared out unafraid despite the foreboding darkness and glowing eyes that seemed to stalk in the shadows. The child must be protected. Her parents would have to continue on without her. Reunion was very unlikely, at least for the moment; child and parents were to travel different paths. It was such a pity. The one to be known as Hope would be lost until her calling.

Kind hazel eyes gazed tenderly down upon the child. “You shall live up to a great destiny.”

The child blinked up at the woman, but time somehow shifted. The infant girl had become a woman. Sapphire eyes glared coolly at a group of strange cat-like birds. Swiftly, she unsheathed a short bladed sword striking her foes as they pounced. Quick, deadly slashes was all it took. Each strike was precise and powerful. Golden hair flew as she spun gracefully taking out two other creatures who attempted to attack her from behind.

“Very good!” A high pitched voice cheered from afar.

The woman sheathed her sword, then walked away, ignoring the spectator.

“Wait for me!” The voice cried out from a white blur.

Blackness flooded the world. Streaks of blinding light flashed brilliantly as what sounded like a battle raged in the darkness. A scream howled in the distance. Inaudible voices called out, muffled by something that resembled static. Somewhere a heartbroken cry echoed mournfully as darkness swallowed the diminishing light.

A spark glowed from afar. Faint but bright enough to see. A soft feminine voice flowed gently from it. *"We have doomed everyone...This is all my fault. I...am sorry."*

A young boy stared blankly into nothingness holding a large black onyx in his trembling hands. The image etched on it seemed as though it were smeared. *"Do you know who I am? I think I am lost. Please... do not forget me."*

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Ethan Darkwater sat up in his bed rubbing at his face. It was another strange dream with more odd creatures and once again the boy. There was something about him that made Ethan feel uneasy. Not necessarily the boy himself but his words. Did he know him? Was he a kid that Ethan knew when he was little? Maybe an old friend or relative? He couldn't remember anyone that actually fit the boy's description. The woman also made him feel uncertain. Was she the one who said it was her fault or was it something else? How had they doomed everyone? Did any of it really matter or was it all just some odd ongoing fabrication of his subconscious?

It seemed the longer time passed the more vague the dreams became. Ever since they started he had kept a journal complete with sketches. He had over twelve years worth of material never shared with anyone, not even his half sister Sam.

*But it feels like that kid is starting to get desperate. Maybe I should tell Sam.* Ethan shoved a tangle of blonde hair from his blue eyes as he turned his bedside lamp on. With notebook and pencil in hand he began to write.

## CHAPTER 7

Cheyenne put the phone down as she grabbed a mug of coffee, taking a deep gulp. She turned to a pretty strawberry blonde haired woman sitting on her sofa then smiled. “Sorry, Zana. Sam got wind of the murder at the station and freaked out so she had to call.”

“It’s okay. I practically did the same thing only I rushed over since the museum is closed.” Zana Diamond scowled in her Diet Coke. “I can’t believe that you’re a suspect! The nerve of those assholes. And to accuse Dudley of being involved in the theft when he can’t even defend himself really ticked me off. Poor guy. He didn’t deserve it.”

“Yeah. I wish there was something we could have done to prevent it. Wait. Weren’t you interviewed too?”

“Yeah, but not to the degree that you were.” Zana shivered then turned to her best friend. “Things should work out though. I mean there’s no proof that you did it. No solid evidence. Hopefully they’ll whoever’s responsible and make them pay. It’s only fair for Dudley.”

Cheyenne ground her teeth together. “The whole thing just pisses me off. One of the cops wasn’t so bad, but the other made it sound like he found the murder weapon with my fingerprints

on it. Just because I collect things doesn't mean I did it." She pressed a hand to her forehead with a groan. "Damn it. All this crap is giving me a headache."

Before Zana had a chance to offer any further condolences the doorbell rang. She winced, glancing towards her co-worker. "Do you want me to get that?"

"No, I'm already on my feet anyway," Cheyenne drew a breath as she approached the door. She swore as she glanced through the peephole then opened the door with much reluctance. "Can I help you?"

"Cheyenne Lightstone?" A tall light-brown haired man asked. A woman with a riot of blonde curls stood next to him. Both were dressed neatly; oozing professionalism.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" Cheyenne's stomach twisted tightly in her belly.

"We are Detectives Pierce Everett and Ophelia Livingston. We would like to talk to you."

"I already spoke to Detectives Tracy and Hanes."

"This case is now ours," Pierce explained flashing an FBI badge.

Cheyenne's blood ran cold as she nodded, stepping aside to allow them entry.

Zana stood up with a nervous smile. "Um, I don't want to intrude so I'll be going."

"Are you Miss Diamond? I think I recognize you from a photo," Ophelia inquired.

"Yeah, that's me. Do you need to talk to me also?"

"If you don't mind." Pierce nodded then explained, "We are interviewing everyone connected to this case over again. We prefer to go by our own notes rather than someone else's due to potential bias."

"That makes sense. Please have a seat. Do you want anything?" Cheyenne struggled not to wring her hands. "I still have some coffee. I brewed it a few minutes ago."

Ophelia nodded, her expression blissful. “That would be great. I’ll have mine with cream and sugar if you have it. Pierce?”

“Just black, thanks.”

Cheyenne grinned then pulled Zana into the kitchen with her. “Since when do two sets of detectives do interviews on the same day?”

“Maybe the other guys screwed up.”

But these people are Feds,” Cheyenne hissed, pouring coffee into two clean mugs.

Zana shrugged. “Perhaps that’s not all they are.”

“You caught that too.”

“These two are not the same as the others. They’re like us. They have signatures of magic.”

Zana paused as she grabbed a box of cookies then dumped them on a tray. “Wouldn’t magic signatures appear at say a crime scene if it was misused? Kind of like fingerprints?”

“I don’t know. That’s a possibility I guess.” She looked at the refreshments then sighed.

“Come on. We mustn’t leave our guests waiting too long.”

Zana trailed after Cheyenne back into the living room. “We thought you might like cookies too,” she said placing the tray on the coffee table as Cheyenne handed out beverages.

“Thank you. We appreciate your hospitality.” Pierce accepted the coffee then took a sip.

“We have some questions for the two of you, and as I’m sure the other detectives explained, just as before we’ll need to record this conversation.”

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Zana collapsed on the couch with a long exhale. “I think that interview went a lot better than the last one.”

Cheyenne stared at the door which the two agents had left through moments ago. “Why would they want to know my whereabouts on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and August 20<sup>th</sup>? There’s more going on than anyone is telling us.”

“Like crimes? I was just wondering that.” Zana fluttered her icy blue eyes in thought. “As long as your name is cleared I don’t think it matters. I just wish we knew what other connections there are. It’s kind of like a really juicy murder mystery novel. Hey, maybe you’ll find some hot guy mixed up in the mess and you can solve the crime together.”

“I don’t think so. As long as I don’t go to jail for a crime that I didn’t commit, I don’t care either way.” Cheyenne paused sinking into a plush chair. “Poor Dudley. He didn’t deserve to get killed. He was such a nice guy.”

“Yeah. I flirted with him sometimes. Nothing major. He was really cute.” Zana shook her head with sorrow. “I hope he didn’t suffer.”

“You and me both.”

## CHAPTER 8

Ferio narrowed his amber eyes at the sleek black Firebird. He never understood why people, men in particular classified such things as luxurious or classic. All he saw was a cramped shiny machine that would crumple like a tin can if it ran into something bigger than it was. Yet they were still revered among the elites, and those who drove them were equally esteemed.

The window rolled down. Gunmetal gray eyes regarded him before the man spoke. “The job is complete.”

It was not a question, but a statement which confused Ferio. How did the man know? He didn't see him at the museum which despite a few close calls, he managed to escape undetected. He did not understand why Vincent had given him such elaborate details on how to go about the task. At least it proved successful. “Aye, it was a bit troublesome, however all is well for now.”

“Good.” The man gestured for Ferio to join him inside the car.

Shoving a strand of red hair from his face, he obeyed his companion's wishes. It felt strange sitting next to the raven haired man known as Vincent Thyme, who was also known as the owner of one of the best pizza joints in town. He shifted in the rich leather seat. “I have a question.”

Vincent looked at him wordlessly.

Ferio ground his teeth together in mild annoyance before asking anyway. “How does a man in your profession run a pizza place? What is the point?”

A snort was his answer. Vincent cleared his throat, lightly stroked the steering wheel as though it were his favorite pet. “It’s easier to hide in a crowd rather than in the shadows.”

“But pizza?”

“It always gave me comfort.”

Ferio’s eyes widened. He understood his boss even less than sports cars. How did one find comfort in pizza? That was more than likely a question he would never find the answer to.

“What else do you wish to ask me?”

When Ferio stared at him dumbfound, the mysterious man only sighed.

*How did he know? Who exactly is this guy?* “You are correct. I do have a request.”

Vincent inclined his head, as though saying “go on.”

“Since I did this job for you, I would like you to do something for me. In maybe a week, a girl, faery princess to be exact, should arrive in Seattle. You shall recognize her by her royal seal; take care of her for me.”

## CHAPTER 9

“It is coming...” Myvalia closed her eyes as a gentle breeze played with her raven curls. Her aunt had advised for her not to go out onto the balcony, but she couldn’t resist. She wanted to see the city, breathe in the fresh air, and feel the wind on her face.

“Myvalia!”

She spun around only to find herself pulled back into her bedroom by her cousin. “Toren, I was fine. Leave me be.”

“It is not safe out there,” he shook his head, thick ebony locks brushed against his pale face. Brushing past her he locked the door tightly behind them.

Myvalia scowled as he covered its ornate carved glass with the heavy curtain. She hated being treated like a child. She was a grown woman yet her seventeen year old cousin possessed more freedom than she could ever dream of. It was days like that which made her wish she could run away. “The palace walls can protect me.”

Toren blew out a breath, mild annoyance etched on his face. “You have a visitor. I thought it best to meet in the drawing room. Come.”

“A visitor?” Her brows knit in confusion. That was the last thing she expected. “At this time of night?”

“Stop arguing and start walking.”

“All right.” She sighed trailing after him. Myvalia knew that all was not peaceful in the Faery Courts; she could sense it. Unfortunately she was a long way from taking her place at the throne which was being ruled by her uncle and aunt until she was deemed ready. She was unsure if she would ever be ready.

She followed her cousin down the dark hallway, her mind circling around who could be wishing to see her at such a late hour.

Only once Toren paused to open the door then escort her in did she gasp in surprise.

Ferio?” Myvalia couldn’t mistake the man’s bold, fiery red hair for anything in world. A delighted smirk curved his lips at her bewildered expression.

He rose from his chair grinning, holding a hand out to her. “Myvalia. I was worried that you would refuse to meet me.”

She blushed as he kissed her hand. “Toren did not tell me it was you. I have not seen you in ages!”

His amber eyes sharpened as he returned to his seat. “I am afraid that my visit is not in the best terms.”

Her smile faded. She clasped her hands together fighting to ease the dread stirring in her stomach. “What do you mean?”

“The Whisperer has taken control of my kingdom and seeks to use my people to destroy your own, including you.”

“What? But-”

“You must flee the city. Most likely also the country, for your own well being as well as that of the Faery Courts. Only you can put an end to this madness, but you must be alive in order to do so.”

Myvalia paled. Her violet eyes widen with horror. The Whisperer, who actually called himself the Prophet, was a being like no other. The dark power he possessed struck fear in those who knew of the horrors he had inflicted on those who opposed his rule. Others naïve enough to listen to his words would find themselves influence to do his bidding, no matter the cost. The fact that he had taken control of Ferio’s kingdom made Myvalia every nervous. “What about my people? What about you and Toren? I cannot just leave-”

“Toren and I will do the best we can however, you are our first objective.”

“Please, Myvalia,” Toren asked in an almost pleading voice. “There is no other way. You are the rightful ruler as well as the Whisperer’s biggest threat. You do not stand a chance against him. Not now.”

“I do not wish to leave everything behind,” she said mournfully.

“If you want to live, you have no choice.”

Ferio stood, pausing in front of Myvalia. “It is not a selfish choice if it is for the good of the people. Otherwise you will be no better than a sacrificial lamb.”

She glanced up as he and Toren left.

“I have to leave? How can I defend my people if I am millions of miles away?” Blinded by the questions racing through her mind she wandered the hallways and returned to her room.

Blankly she sat at her vanity then stared at her own reflection.

“Mother, wherever you are, what should I do?”

## CHAPTER 10

Cheyenne sang along with one of Pat Benatar's hits as she wiped down the kitchen counters. It had been several weeks since Dudley had been murdered and her life as Director of Antiquities at the museum came to a screeching halt. Rather than continue feeling sorry for herself she decided that she had to take charge of her life. Her first order of business was to tackle the kitchen.

She wrinkled her nose at the cluster of crumbs, dust and whatever else had been living under the microwave probably since the microwave had been purchased. She'd have to make a mental note to clean it more often.

Cheyenne gritted her teeth scrubbing at the grime. How long would it take for Tamara to take her off the so called extended vacation? Her name had been ruled out as a potential suspect days ago. The more time her employer dragged their feet the more aggravated she became.

She threw the sponge in the sink then took a seat at the table where she left a cup of cooling coffee. She glared at the mug as she fixed her short ponytail. Her amber gaze traveled to the

pile of mail on the table. The persistent frown turned into puzzlement as her name scrolled in gold glinted at her.

Just as she reached for the envelope the phone rang. Cheyenne grumbled as she picked up the receiver from the wall. "Hello?"

"Cheyenne, it's Tamara," the voice on the other end began.

"Oh, hi--"

"Listen, I know that everyone at the museum has been ruled out for the murder, but we think it might be best for you to remain on vacation for just a while longer."

"How long?"

"Oh, maybe a month or so. Just as a precaution."

Cheyenne gritted her teeth, fighting to rein in the fury that wished to rage through and rip out her boss's throat. "That's not fair! I'm innocent. Captain Everett--"

"I know, but it's for the best..." Tamara continued her ramble.

Cheyenne held her breath, tearing into the envelope as the irritating woman's voice became white noise. She pulled out what looked like a scrap of parchment paper; a seal glowed unearthly in the left corner. *The Faery princess...*

"Cheyenne? Are you still there?" Tamara inquired from the phone.

"You know what Tamara? Forget the vacation time. I resign. You don't seem to want me there anymore anyway." She pressed the off button and set the phone down still staring at the letter. It seemed if her sister Raya's letter was any indicator, she wouldn't have too much time left to waste on a mundane job anyway. She just hoped that this wasn't a sign of things to come.

Authors' Note: The case is closed but the story will continue in the upcoming novel this story is the prequel to. More information will be provided in the future upon publication.