

Past Mistakes
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Chapter One:

I figured I had all the time in the world, what was one little stop? The wind howled as I opened the heavy door and as it slammed shut behind me, I leapt into the musty antique store.

“Hello?” my voice echoed off the dusty collections. I called out again, still nothing. Nothing but the wind grating at the door and my breathing, but looking around there was plenty to see.

The antiques were various and random, as an antique store ought to be, I suppose. The smallest trinkets to the most inconveniently large looking pieces of rubbish, if figures I would find such a store in a city as large as New York. This trip should have meant nothing but parties, clubs and skimpy outfits if Regina and Chloe had any say, which they had all the say to be honest. Not exactly my kind of scene, but both my friends couldn't pass up the un-chaperoned opportunity and I couldn't wiggle out.

The dust was evident on the floor, as it was everywhere. Placing a polished index finger on the front counter, I created a long squeaky streak which revealed it was indeed glass. The dirt made it look as if it were made of cheap press board. Flicking the dirt off my finger an item caught my eye. A small hair comb with green pieces of stone on the handle and what seemed like ivory teeth was nestled in the tiny basket to the side of the counter.

The stones looked jade, though the luster of such a beautiful stone was lost in both the unkempt environment and poorly lit atmosphere. I leaned forward to peer at the various kabobs surrounding the hair comb and scoffed at my negligence as I pulled away from the dirty counter.

Looking at the damage I had done to my outfit, having leaned on the counter, my party frock was no longer a clean white but splashed with a long streak of years worth of filth directly across the center of the bodice. Looking around for anything to aid in my situation and to assess further risks to my appearance, I sighted a rack with numerous scarves and crossed the room to examine it more closely.

Picking up a soft beige thing, I began patting, almost beating the dust out of the front of my dress. Leaning against the nearby bookshelf for balance, the dust billowed up slowly, but I saw that the damage was done. All of the dust would not be removed.

Sighing to myself, I turned to place the spoilt scarf where I had found it. I was a little bitter at the dress now, as I had only just purchased it and there would not be time enough to get it cleaned. I would have to buy a new one.

I admired the other scarves displayed, placing a delicate finger to run over all of them. My hand stopped when it felt the wonderful feeling of silk. Crimson and lovely, it was heaven against my skin.

Placing the scarf around my neck, I took a step back to admire the accessory to my dirty dress in the standing mirror that was to my left. Turning this way and that, it seemed to compliment the outfit and myself.

“Humph” said a voice behind me.

Carefully out of the view of the mirror, a woman stood behind me watching the spectacle of vanity I had made of myself.

“Hello” annoyed, I thought that it seemed strange she had not answered before, though I had helped myself to trying on things regardless of her presence.

“It was meant to go around the waist.” She said, taking a few steps forward, as if she intended to be sure I wore the scarf correctly.

She was no taller than I, but bent over in her years. She couldn't have been much older than my grandmother, close to 80.

“Oh” I remarked, removing the scarf from my neck and reaching to place it back where I had found it.

“Don't mind me, try it on,” she said, almost irritated at my unwillingness to bond with the scarf.

Taking the delicate slip of material, I pulled it around my waist and pulled the bow tight and large in the back of my dress. It hid the dust effectively.

I turned to appraise her appraisal of my wearing the scarf, she had left to busy herself by the

wretchedly dirty counter. She seemed to be trying to shift the dirt around in an attempt to hide the clean spot I had made.

I looked over my appearance again in the mirror, satisfied with the look and noticing matching gloves on a close shelf of the bookcase. As I lifted the pair, I noticed what the gloves had lain upon. Beneath these delicate short, silk evening gloves lay a greatness of a book.

The cover glittered despite the apparent layer after layer of dirt, dust and debris. As I tried to situate myself around items to get a closer look, I picked up the familiar beige scarf and used it to wipe the grime from its cover.

Gold letters shone back in brilliance. The grand book whose cover was of metal, thick and seemingly heavy with hundreds of pages, was crafted in what looked like gold and silver with a large disk at its

center. While the book was small enough to be opened one handed and read, the cover appeared to weigh possibly four times its actual weight.

I inspected the large disk on the cover of the book carefully. Blowing my hot breath on the disk, the moisture clung to the disk and I began to wipe as gently and quickly as possible. It was simply a glass disk, which had spectacular cuts in it that made it shine as a gem would. Small gems did shine, as they were intricately placed surrounding the disk.

I picked up the book, marveling at it's lightness of weight. Again at the expense of the beige scarf I proceeded to remove as much dust as possible. The filigree letters took shape as they curved around the glass disk.

“Grimorium Verum” **it** read. There were other symbols and fanciful designs. I studied the intricate details that had been hidden beneath the filth. Leaves

rolled on the cover as if flowing, almost moving and the gems sparkled as if a fire burned in them.

Something was amazingly appealing about this book as my fingers absently undid the latches of the cover. Old codex binding I was always fascinated with, ancient books that seemed to last forever and here I had found one. How amazing that I would find something so rare and beautiful.

I wonder who could have owned it in its creation. I began to pull the book's cover open and stared at the first page curiously.

“Blank” I said aloud to myself, startled by my own voice.

I flipped through the pages. The first had some strange symbols and a majority of the pages had half letters and missing paragraphs.

I skimmed the first page, then the second and third looking for the publishing and printing

information. None was found. On the third page however, a lovely scrawl of handwriting had written 'Grimoire' in perfect calligraphy.

I touched the ink, marveling that it didn't disintegrate at my slight touch. I continued to turn the page and was startled at what I saw. In very clear illustration, the store front of the antique store was etched lightly into the page. In an even darker line, was the outline of a girl pulling open the door against the wind? Confusion, fascination, sickening nausea at the coincidence began to take over me as I recognized the dress as a perfect depiction of the one I wore now.

I took a step back and my foot caught something. My eyes went wide and I began to fall. Instinctually pulling my elbows back behind me to brace what I knew would be the mirror I was falling into, the book somehow managed to take flight just in front of me.

And I closed my eyes in anticipation of the crashing glass around me only to see the frame of the mirror pass over me and I kept falling, into darkness.

Part Two: The Darkness

I could hear the wind still howling. My eyes still

closed, I was surprised I did not feel more pain. I shifted slightly, curious as to how much damage I had done to everything I had landed upon. It felt, now, as if I had landed on a mountain of rocks. My head felt heavy as I raised it, eyes still closed, shaking it clear. I began to blink out at the darkness, it seemed late but I had no idea I had been out so long. I must have hit my head on something. Strange that the old woman had left me here, I thought as I rubbed at my vision.

The fuzzy vision began to clear and I now saw that my dress was not covered in near as much dust as I had thought it would be. Looking at the lovely silk scarf around my waste, I felt my side and noticed a slight pain.

“So much for escaping unscathed from my clumsiness,” I muttered under my breath and then I noticed there were no cuts on me.

Knowing I should have destroyed the mirror, I looked up and behind me to see what I had done to the wonderful oval antique in my landing. It was nowhere to be seen. I slowly began to look about the room and realized the mirror was not behind me but in front of me and the antique store was rather an antique itself. So much dust, everywhere, piles of it, mountains of it, the ceiling falling in pieces to the floor, which is what I was atop now. I got up and walked around the mirror. It seemed I hadn't even touched it. It was as if I had fallen through it as a ghost would have.

“Hello?” I called out for the old woman with a great sense of *déjà vu*.

“Hello,” I said, “are you still here?” I guessed the repeat absence by the old woman was normal, though something didn't feel quite right. Looking outside, I realized it was time to get back to the hotel. I dusted

off my dress with my hands and my eyes went wide. I saw the book lying on the floor open to a page that seemed straight out of a nightmare. I knelt down to study the page that had taken me aback. There, in black and white, was a picture of a girl pulling open the antique store door. The picture was of me. On the next page was an image where I was falling, with nothing around me. I flipped through the rest of the pages that were mostly blank, less a few strange symbols and some light etchings of things I didn't recognize.

Though I felt bad, I decided I would take the book with me. I left a note at the register with my hotel information and that I would return the next day, not wanting to wait around for the woman if she decided to come back tonight. I heard the howling of the wind waiting for me. I felt the ferociousness of its force on the heavy entrance before I even opened the

door.

I pushed on the door so hard that it whipped away from my hand. I tucked my head down and prepared to run into the fiery storm of Mother Nature. My force had been too great in my assault into the elements though as I stumbled out of the door into a calm street.

There was not wind in even the slightest. It was completely still. But beyond still, this busy side street in New York that had been bustling just a few hours ago was now dead quiet. Not one person anywhere, only the sound of my breathing. I looked around at the massive amounts of garbage on the street, more than usual and that is when I looked up.

Skyscraper after beautiful skyscraper was devoid of life and color. I never thought a building could look so dead, but the eyes of the buildings were burst out, glass in the street, a curtain here and there

floating menacingly from the open windows.

It was eerie; it was a nightmare, as all the buildings were the same. Monstrous gray buildings that had been glossy with glass and surrounded by foot traffic were now empty and alone. Some were even missing whole wall faces so you could see right into the cubbies left over. Something terrible had happened while I slept, something very terrible.

I wandered down the street, surprised that there were not even cars parked anywhere. Small cracks had formed through out the asphalt and plants were poking their creepy fingers out, stretching toward the pending moon. This feels too much like a nightmare, I thought to myself, though I still kept along down the road to take full advantage of the open streets.

I was in wonder at the great buildings with whole chunks ripped out of the sides of them. It was wondrous and amazing and made me curious. I

would compare it to having been bombed or a third world country after a great war. In the distance, down the road a bit, I could make out a small, dark figure.

I could see an outline of the figure and assumed it was a girl. How could it not be, she seemed to be wearing a short fluffy dress. It almost reminded me of a ballerina dress from this distance but longer and black. I waved my arms over my head in attention-seeking-greeting.

“Hello! Hello!” I said with no response or movement from the dark figure. As I got closer, I could make out her veil, short and stylish amazingly, around her black hair and her shoes were rather immodest, with a steep heel on them. She stood very still, very still to the point of unnaturalness.

As I continued to walk further down the road I paid less attention to my surroundings. It seemed she was turning away from me now and was walking

away. I tried to run a bit to catch up but she turned around a corner.

“Hey! Wait up!” Angry at being left behind I stopped and huffed a minute.

Had I been paying attention I would have seen her, but as I was not, I did not. She stood in the shadows, just to my right, inside the building. Her window to my actions was a great hole in the brick building. She stepped toward the street and paused, I still did not see her.

“You shouldn’t chase shadows you know.” She said to me, leaning against the wall and into the gaping hole so I could better see her.

She seemed to have some sort of band on her head, her hair long and black, slightly twisted and knotted, and she was ruggedly dressed. Her pants looked like they had lost a match with a tiger.

“What party are you going to?” I said sarcastically,

my tongue sharply getting away from me. I regretted it as soon as I had said it.

She just looked at me, shifted a little bit into the curve of the hole. Looking over her outfit, it was apparent that there were more useful items than accessories, one being a large knife on her belt.

“What did you say about shadows? Did I imagine her? Are you saying she wasn't real?” I didn't bother waiting for her response, “and if she wasn't real then how...you did see her?”

The girl gave me a quick once-over and a rather smug look as she seemed to be debating internally whether to indulge my questions.

“I would ask if you were living in the forest the last thousand years but I doubt you found an animal skin of woven cloth. You dress like them, but you sure don't act like them...” Her voice trailed off as if she had been talking only to herself, aloud. She took a

step back into the darkness and I didn't hear her again.

“Hello?” my voice had frantic written all over it. I had finally found someone to talk to me and I was becoming strangely suspicious that this was not a dream.

I looked down as I felt tugging on the book I carried and realized she was bent down examining it clutched in my hand. She was trying to tug it free of my hand, ignoring me entirely.

'What is that?' she asked me.

“A book,” I said in a voice of less than subtle irritation, “I don't know what it is. I found it at the antique store before I fell. I left a note...” I trailed off as I watched her take a quick step back and straighten up.

“Who are you and where did you come from?” she said in an accusing tone.

“Um...um.” I stammered to myself in shock at the sudden change of tone. “Arizona” I finished quickly as my brain sloshed around like mush.

“What?” she said, not seeming to recognize the reference to the Grand Canyon state I was visiting from.

“Arizona? Sun devils, Valley of the Sun....really hot?” I offered the random descriptions that I could associate with my home.

“SUN devils?” Her eyes were lit up in confusion and fear all at once. “What do you mean Sun devils?!”

She started eyeing me warily, taking half steps back and slightly to the side. I thought she was getting ready to run away, but then I noticed she was circling me.

“Are you *hunting* me?” I asked incredulously.

She froze at the direct accusation of what she was doing and the strange way I had phrased it as,

'hunting'. She stood up straight again and walked over to the building she had come from.

“Please don't go!” I pleaded

“The moon is coming up fast. You should go back to where you came from.”

A man was suddenly walking out of the building she had been in.

“What's this?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she replied, looking at him and then looking back to me and my terrified look, “Just local livestock.” she said and she melted into the shadow of the building in a smooth movement.

“Please, don't go!” I called after her in the loudest whisper I could manage, pleading.

I looked up at the man with dark chocolate eyes and soft light brown wavy hair. It seemed to float around his face though there was not a breeze. My eyes said everything I could possibly plead in them.

He moved to follow the girl and hesitated, tilting his head curiously.

“Where are you from?” he asked me.

“Arizona.” I said stiffly.

He raised an eyebrow quickly in surprise.

“Doesn't anyone know where Arizona is? Or is everyone here too involved in their snobbish New York status whatever?” I was obviously irritated and I was ranting to no one in particular, least of all any snobs.

He smirked a little, looking me over quickly. “You should go back” he said.

“I would love to,” I drawled sarcastically. Thinking better than to irritate the only person left around, I opened my mouth to apologize.

“I'm sorry, I didn't...” but he was already gone, “...I didn't mean it.” I finished quietly. A small breeze tore down the empty street and whipped my dress

around me. I shivered and looked to the moon making its way over the horizon. Suddenly, I felt the advice I had received, getting home, was exactly what I needed to do that exact moment. I turned back to the direction I come from with no real idea of where I was heading.

Reaching the antique store, nothing had changed. Rubble was still on the floor along with the ceiling and there were mountains of dust everywhere. The clouds began to move in front of the moon, blocking the last source of light with no stars in the sky. I quickly ran into the store slamming the door behind me. *Déjà vu* alright.

The dark began to settle. I clutched the book tighter to my chest and that is when I noticed the light. I pulled the book away from me cautiously, looking it over. The light had stopped. I stared at it warily.

I stroked my hand over the cover, and every gem that I touched began to glow a light glow, until I reached the large disk in the center. A burst of light showered from the disk in an amazing dance of color and brilliance when my finger touched it.

As I jumped at the light coming from the cover, the disk fell right out of the front of the book. I expected it to fall to the floor and shatter. Instead, it fell within inches of the floor and hovered, a slight glow in it.

I crouched down to look at it, scared to touch it. What kind of book is this? What is this stone that glows and hovers? I asked myself

I reached a finger out to touch it and it began to drift toward me as I countered by quickly falling back over myself to get away. It floated toward my face and stopped within inches. I stared in awe. The disk seemed almost liquid. It began to change from a

round ball to a disc, to a round ball, to a starburst that emitted endless amounts of light. I could not help but reach toward it.

Something in me said to stop, screamed it actually. This was not natural, there was something terribly wrong. And in the instant I touched the wondrous light it burst into a thousand pieces and sizzled out. It had shocked me horribly and my hand felt on fire.

I began frantically rubbing my hand and that's when it began to glow. A strange pattern had developed on my palm, almost too faint to see, almost the color of my skin, but it seemed to vine over my arm and it looked as if it was spreading. I felt the smooth ridging it was creating and was shocked to touch a spot that was ice cold. I stared at my skin as it glowed, in strange fascination.

The ice cold spot was as small as the gems on the book cover, as intricate in design and somehow didn't protrude from my skin, as if it were part of me. I ran my hands over the area, watching as my hand continued to glow brighter and brighter, finding more cold spots along the way that had slight luminosity to them as I glowed. I ran my hands over the area, watching as my hand continued to glow brighter and brighter, finding more cold spots along the way that had slight luminosity to them as I glowed.

The vines carried everywhere it seemed. I got up from the floor and walked toward the place where I knew the mirror was. I stood in shock the moment my eyes caught sight of my reflection.

There in the mirror, before my very eyes, I stood aglow. The vines were slightly lit and they went all over me. I touched my face and saw as my

amazement grew, so did the glow on my hand, as if I had a torch. I looked at my hand realizing that was not what was actually glowing, but a ball of light in my palm.

Hurriedly, I went to the book still on the floor. The cover, devoid of all but the gold embellishments, seemed dull now. I turned the pages and began to see more of the symbols, as they changed right in front of my very eyes.

I could almost feel the sun begin to slip by the inch and the light in the antique store began to snuff out. Fearing the coming of the dark, I began testing the lights in the shop, but found that none worked.

I shivered and began to cry silently. That's when I heard a slight noise. Scared, I looked around into the dark straining to hear anything. The noise hadn't been close, but I had heard it. As I hugged the book closer I noticed that, oddly enough, the ball of light began to flicker to life. And as I held my hand up,

watching the light dance and lick the air, my eyes adjusted at what was just past the ball of light, watching me.

There before me was a wolf like beast with eyes red and a terrifying smile. Its mouth pulled back to reveal rows of teeth and as my eyes met the animals a low growl rumbled from deep in its throat. At that moment, the light was gone and I could hear the sound of its feet as it lunged. Recoiling in fear, I felt something nock into my head and was knocked out cold.

Only out for a moment, as I began to wake up in the dark, I noticed small spots on my hands were glowing softly.

As I looked at my hand in wonder I remembered the eyes, the beast that had lunged at me. I held out the palm of my hand, directing the light around the room to see what I could. There, just in the

doorframe of the tiny antique store, was a silhouette of what I first thought was the beast, hunched down and tearing at something.

As my eyes adjusted and the light reached the silhouette, I realized it was the man that had been with the woman earlier. He was bent over the beast, tearing at pieces of the carcass. He noticed the light and turned his attention to its source.

“I thought you would end up in trouble.” he said in a low voice. His eyes were blinking at the light coming from my hand curiously.

I sat up, a bit slowly, looking at the carnage in front of him in horror.

“The Liken would have destroyed you in a matter of a few minutes,” his eyes looked to both sides of me. As I shown my light towards both sides of me I noticed two other corpses. I had been surrounded. I moved away from the carcass of the

creature that was merely a foot away from me.

“They can't hurt you now.” he said, a hint of laughter at my motion, “I am surprised though. You said you are from Arizona...” his voice trailed off, his eyes squinted as though scrutinizing me.

“I am from Arizona,” I said, my head nudged up a little defensively.

“Maybe you are, maybe you are not,” he looked down at the remains of the corpse he had quartered into what seemed like useable and unusable sections. “But if you are from Arizona you would have to be one of the Order because that place hasn't had life in 6,000 years.”

Again, he looked at me strangely, tilting his head sideways as he looked at the light coming from my hand, 'But you don't act like one of the Order...' his voice seemed to trail frequently and I was quickly becoming irritated.

“What are you TALKING about?” I asked in what I recognized as the beginning stages of hysteria in my voice, “The Order? Six thousand years? I flew here just yesterday.”

I could only imagined how the hysteria sounded to anybody else but me, I couldn't control my pitch or my volume. My eyes snapped to him quickly, “Wait. Are you on drugs?”

My eyes were the ones squinting now, scrutinizing, judging, and fearful.

“Quinn said you would be trouble,” He half said it to himself because I could barely hear him.

“The girl you were with? When you guys left me to wander around this horrible place?” I said it more as an accusation than as a question.

His eyes just watched me now, his mind obviously in thought. He rose from the animal and crossed the expanse between us. I scooted away from him, backwards, until the bookcase met my back with a sharp thud in my spine. My breath caught, anticipating his next move as he paused and observed the spectacle of my behavior.

“You really should try to get out of the city. They will start hunting.” he picked up the animal to the left of me and swung it over his shoulder as if it weighed nothing.

“But they are already dead,” I said, looking at the animal still to my right. It was quickly gone as he swung that animal over his shoulders as well.

“These aren’t the hunters, these are scavengers. The Order are the hunters.” he gave me an uncertain look

as though I should have known that, as though it were common sense. 'You should head into the forest and try to sleep, nothing will bother you in the forest.' he looked down over me.

“The forest? The forest is the safest place I can go? Where will I sleep? What will I do?” The hysterics were coming back.

“Sleep under a tree...” again with the trailing, I looked up at him, looking into his face as I could feel my eyes begin to well with tears. Before I was blinded by my panic, I noticed the beautiful brown his eyes had. There was just a touch of light in them so they seemed to sparkle and dance.

He began to leave the antique store and turned back around, looking around the room, “You are strange,” he said, “no one else would wander in the city at night,”

“You did,” I pointed out, exhaustion and fear setting over me. He gave one short nod to confirm what I said but not to explain.

“You manage to find a place that has things in it that have never seen the hand of time...” he looked around at all the things in the store, “that looks empty from the street,” he mumbled and looked again toward me, “I don’t know your story but if you are from Arizona, from another time, how do you glow?”

I blinked the tears back, trying to take in everything he said.

“I, I, I don't know.” I said. He nodded as I said this.

“I fell into that mirror right there and hit my head....but I didn't break anything.”

He looked at me like I was speaking a different language or had something growing out of my ears.

“And, then, then I woke up and everything was dirty and it was almost dark and I still had a hold of this stupid book.” I waved the book in a haphazard circle

to show him, looking at it in disgust, “and then I touched it and...” I started to realize how crazy I sounded.

I looked at him expecting a more extreme look of incredulousness on his face, only to find his face shadowed and almost fearful. He wasn't looking at me though; he was looking at the book I was waving about. I looked at the book and then back at him. I waved the book again, watching his eyes follow it, certain then that he was looking at it and not me. Irritated at being ignored, I chucked the book onto the floor between us.

“And then the stones on the cover melted and turned into liquidly light stuff and I touched it and I couldn't get it off and then those wolf things jumped at me.” His eyes met mine and I stared back at him. My face perplexed and confused, his mouth was half open in confusion and shock as well. In an instant he seemed

to compose himself. His lips tightened and pressed together and he straightened up almost formally.

“You should head for the forest, nothing will bother you.” and he was gone. I closed my eyes for a few moments to keep from crying.

Fear lurched in my chest into my throat and the light seemed to glow even brighter, to the point that a light bulb would burst. And as my surprise overwhelmed my fear, the light began to dim. I reached down to pick up the book and realized it was gone. He must have taken it with him somehow.

I bid it good riddance but still felt extremely afraid. He had said so much about time and the Order hunting. Suddenly, I realized I needed to get to the tree line, where ever that was, before something else bad happened. *Apparently, the city is the place people go when they want to become a food source around here.* Looking around the little antique store I

found a small bag and tried to find anything I could put in it that would be helpful to have.

I found a few provisions, including a neat looking and sharp little dagger. If I ran into another wolf thing I needed the illusion that I could defend myself.

There were a few other things I found, though no food. My stomach grumbled and I realized that I hadn't eating in a while. I had watched plenty of survivor shows on TV at home but after seeing those wolves, there was no telling if there was anything small enough for me to catch. I stuffed the things I found into my knapsack of a bag and headed toward the door. As I reached for the handle, my light flickered a little on and off and then stayed off. My heart skipped a beat.

There was no way I could make it out there if my light was gone. I didn't even know how the stupid thing worked. I tried to feel scared, but there was no way I could be more scared than I already was so that

wasn't it. I took a deep breath as my eyes adjusted. The moonlight was lighting the street and I could see barely, but I could see. I guess it is best this way. If there is a hunter out there I don't want to be a Lady Liberty, the glowing target with a torch. I jerked the door open and stepped into the moonlit street.

Chapter Three:

The city stretched for miles. The darkness crept as if alive. Wind howled and leaves rustled. As I peered at the empty, ghostly buildings, the many windows reminded me of the people that probably used to look out of them. It sent a shiver down my spine. I could see the end of my journey ahead. The road just ended, broken into rubble for a while but forest had encroached almost to the very edge of the city where the asphalt stopped.

As the last glimmer of light and comfort became simply a fading glow I almost thought against the

pursuit I had set about. The man had said I must go to the forest so that was where I intended to go, the forest.

The city was barren of people, barren of everything. I remembered the silhouette of the woman in black and took a deep breath. The forest almost seemed to lean toward me as I weighed my decision. I let out my breath sharply and turned on my heel, prepared to return to the city and seek out the mysterious mister and his friend.

“Strange you would pick the Order over the forest” said a slippery voice.

I practically broke my neck from whiplash my head came up so alertly, whipping around frantically to find the voice. There was nothing there. I waited a moment, looking carefully in all the shadows closest me.

“Now I am hearing things. Great...”

“Would you rather be alone?” responded the voice again. It sounded closer somehow but I couldn't see a thing and the moonlight was beginning to slip away behind a cloud again. While the words were inviting, the voice sounded dangerous. It sounded almost as if the voice had a lisp...and something else.

I took a careful step toward the broken road a few paces behind me. Somehow, the thought of touching the asphalt made me feel like I would be safe.

“They will come looking for you, you know?” the voice said puzzled, “or do you know?”

I squinted into the dark, my eyes not entirely adjusted just yet. I still couldn't see anything. “Know what exactly?” I pressed the voice. I listened intently, looking for the direction of the voice.

“That they will come for you.” the voice sounded almost irritated at the obvious common knowledge he had to spell out for me.

I had the direction of the voice though. It was slightly to my right, to the right of a light impression of a trail where the tall trees bent over, watching their path. I took a step in the direction the voice had come.

“You're not from around here are you?” the voice asked, hitting the obvious right on the nail head.

“No.” I said simply, “I am from Arizona.”

I heard a hiss suddenly from the voice. I faltered a few steps back toward the road. The hiss had changed to the left of the road in a matter of seconds. It sounded like it had come from the voice.

“Wait, wait! I believe you.” the voice was to the right again.

“Well where are you? Why won't you show yourself?” I demanded to know, my impatience, my fear, my frustration all bellowing out of me at once. I was tired and my head was starting a gentle pounding at all the day's events. “Alright, Let me simply state that I am a friend,” the voice was joined by rustling

leaves. Out from the forest, onto the path beneath the trees, stepped the silhouette of something three feet tall with an unproportioned body for any human I would have recognized.

The dark did little for my eyes that had failed to adjust, but I could see plainly that the voice had eyes now. Almond slanted eyes burning red with such temperature. They seemed dangerous yet still soft.

Everything my nightmares have ever been at a young age, this is what looked out at me from the night. My lips let out a loud gasp and I took a step behind me to turn and run but only managed to trip and fall. I shrieked in pain as I landed on a fallen and rotting tree branch. I put my hands over my head defensively and pulled into a ball, waiting.

“Don't eat me!” I said in panic, disappointed I didn't have a more pleading voice to work with other than despair and fear.

A shallow and low hiss came from the left side of the path, along with the low chuckle of the now clearly defined baby dragon before me. Its scales glimmered as it stepped into the light of the moon off the trail, closer to me. The soft pad of his clawed feet hit the ground. His spiked tail swung at each step as he neared.

“That wouldn't be very diplomatic of me now would it?” the voice chuckled as he came closer, “and I would get a swatting towards my backside should I decide to snack so close to dinner, junk food at that.” He continued to chuckle at the obvious inside joke he was having with himself. This was obviously not a baby but more like a miniature poodle, except a dragon.

“Not that I don't love to be tall for a change, but you really should get out of the dirt. Heavens knows what has died there recently.” his humor continued.

I slowly pulled my hands from my head, letting my fetal position relax. I moved slowly to rise from the ground, curious as to what I could actually do to defend myself in the dark now that I was so far from any resemblance of safety.

“You're right, we should get back. The Order will be sniffing around and I don't feel like being a stuffed anything tonight.” the little dragon turned, his tail barely clearing my leg as it swished behind him.

“I didn't say anything.” I replied.

“Oh, my apologies, I was talking to Marianne. You are welcome to join us. It would probably be for the best. If you are from where you say you are, well...” the dragon whistled, “there will be plenty of conversation. That is for sure.”

I looked around the forest.

“Just a hop, skip and a jump, love” said a smoother voice from the trail; another short dragon was swinging its tail as if in impatience. I assume this was

Marianne. “I don’t see any lights.” I said. I was hesitant at best. It is not the best advice to follow a couple of dragons into the dark wood. Hansel and Gretel would have a few words for me if I was in their woods, I was sure.

“That’s the whole idea my dear. Lights would attract the Order this close to the city.” The male dragon said, “I am Gregor by the way, apologies at seeming to startle you. You do seem rather odd for these parts. You understand how cautious we were.”

“We thought you were going to wander into the forest,” said the smooth voice of Marianne, “we thought you were one of them.”

I watched the pair of them start to walk toward the trail, their tails began swinging in unison as Gregor reached Marianne and their steps mirrored.

Marianne paused and looked back at me, “Come along then, at least get under the trees so they wont see you. They will be out soon.”

I hurried behind them, stopping a few feet from where they stood looking at me curiously.

“Who are ‘They’ you keep talking about and why would they want to ‘get’ me?” I asked.

“The Order, of course, who else hunts the city at night?” said Gregor, “Though, I think you would perplex them as you do look just like them. Where did you get your dress, if I might ask?”

“It's mine,” I said surprised at his question, “I just got it today from this little store by...well, I don't know where really. I started in Time Square, so somewhere near there.” I picked my brain, trying to remember the turns after turns I had made. The

undistinguishable buildings and streets had been vague with little in the way of markings other than street signs of numbers and some letters, like a grid.

“Time Square?” Gregor stared at me incredulously, “must have been one heck of a find. I don't know one store that isn't completely looted and covered in soot

these days. Your dress looks far too clean to be from Time Square.” he chuckled to himself.

“Let's hope you keep up your luck, my dear.” said Gregor. “It's a dark day for even the likes of the star children.”

“What the heck are star children?” I asked skeptically, looking at the little dragon, realizing that I was talking to a dragon and I was questioning its knowledge of a foreign place as if my knowledge was somehow superior in this situation.

“Sorry,” I said, “what are star children?”

“You, love.” said Marianne. Her eyes sparkled in the brightly lit moon that had come out from behind the clouds, finally. “You are one of the star children.

Why? What did you think you were?”

“Um, human of course.” I replied.

The two dragons looked at me and I swear they had their mouths hanging open as if perfectly astonished

at what I had said. Gregor looked at Marianne and back at me.

“Time to get back,” said Gregor in sudden haste, “we'll talk about it when we get back.”

Marianne and Gregor both seemed to be looking around as if expecting a mortal enemy to jump out at anytime.

“Where are we going?” I asked confused by all the evil looks the dragons were giving to the dark forest. I figured it was fine for me to give those looks to the forest, but I didn't see how they could possibly be afraid. After all, they were the things I was scared was lurking in the dark. What could two dragons possibly be scared of coming out of the forest, kittens?

“You will see when we get there. Better hurry now, dinner should be done soon,” said Marianne.

I had a sudden ball of anxiety in my stomach at the mention of dinner by two dragons I was following into the woods.

“Dinner?” I asked. My voice was unexpectedly shrill.

“Oh,” said Gregor, “she thinks we mean her, Marianne!”

The two dragons fell down and literally rolled around on the floor in balls of laughter. It was a scene to be seen with slippery giggles and a lot of dirt floating up. I coughed lightly, swatting at the cloud they created.

The two of them got up and dusted each other with reciprocating light pats of their tails.

“I haven’t had a laugh that good since you fell out of that tree you thought you could climb last spring, trying to get at the apples.” Marianne said, still a large, teeth filled smile on her face.

Gregor's laughter ceased at the mention of what I assumed to have been a reference to a moment of great embarrassment.

“The tree wasn't very strong,” he defended.

“So you are blaming your weight...?” Marianne shifted her teasing effortlessly into what seemed another sensitive subject.

Gregor hissed under his breath, “Let's just get a move on. WE don't need to be so close to the city this late.”

And with that, I followed a couple of dragons into the wood, their tails swishing softly back and forth in unison, as if nothing in the world was out of place.

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By Karisha Prescott

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