



BEHOLD WHAT CANNOT BE SEEN.
THE SOUR.
THE SWEET.
THE TRUTH OF US.
AND FIND THE MAGIC.





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The winter wind, called the Hawk by the people of this city, whips my long coat and thrusts icy talons under my dress, greedy for my warmth. Last I was here it was a lively summer breeze; now it's a harbinger of death.

As I start up the steps to the Chicago Art Institute, a lean man in a black overcoat sidles from behind one of the snow-blanketed bronze lions that stand guard. He eyes me, and then targets me with a video camera.

I snatch the sides of my hood together to cover my face before his camera penetrates my disguise. All I want to do is go inside to say a last farewell to Graeme, and then end my pain.

But centuries of hiding won't let me ignore the danger if his camera lens pierces the "Annie the tourist" illusion I've created for outsiders to see. Who might he tell if, instead of the freckles and springy red curls his naked eyes see under the influence of my *glamère*, his camera's objective electronic eye shows him the pale skin and limp brunette tresses of my *truself*?

The clans cannot risk a breach of our anonymity. Pulling my hood tighter, I trot up the stairsteps.

Please, no trouble now.

His lips move, and the wind carries his words to me. "I think I got one."

I flick a glance at him and he jerks the camera away. I *see* a

lie blossom—streams of bilious yellow-green streak through the aura around his head. He wants to hide his purpose.

But how can it have anything to do with me?

Besides, I will die today.

The Hawk tears at a banner that runs across the front of the institute to announce a 19th Century American Art exhibit. I'm eager to see a portrait there—Graeme and me, painted by the extraordinary John Singer Sargent in . . . was it 1874 that we did that? There's no knowing if I will see Graeme on the "other side," or even if there is another side, but I want to leave life with the image of that happy time in mind. A last comfort for my soul.

My soul. There's not much left of it—I have not felt alive in the months since my Graeme was taken, the random victim of a crazed homeless man. I so miss my man's little-boy-lost vulnerability, the hold-me look that made me want to wrap my arms around him.

But Graeme's murder wasn't random, was it?

I was there.

I was more than there.

If only I had . . . if only I had not . . . They say pain diminishes with time, but I can testify that the ache of guilt grows until it eats your life.

Today it gets its last bite of mine. After the museum, I will surrender to the cold and let the eternal chill that I brought upon my husband be the waiter that serves up my just desserts.

But that's a lie, isn't it? Death is not my punishment, it is my escape.

When I pass the lean man he again trains his camera on me. This time the *lessi* doesn't bother to pretend that I am not the focus of his interest. Instead, burgundy tendrils of hostility join the nasty green of deception in his aura.

Why? I can't be known to him, I have done him no harm.

Still, the sense of being prey prickles the back of my neck. I hurry up the steps. He tracks me with the camera, but I don't think it can catch my face.

The Institute lobby welcomes me with an expanse of beige marble that prompts admiration for its grandeur, although I would rather see the meadow that once opened here, cloaked with snow in wintertime, its future a summer of green grass and golden flowers. There was a time when I walked a deer path through that meadow to the lake beyond that seems as vast as an ocean.

Now the meadow is crushed by the Institute's massive pile of stone, its future void of life. The lake no longer spills onto a sandy shore but lashes at concrete revetments, its waters the color of metal instead of crystalline blue. My old resentment at the unbridled swarming of the *lessi* rises in me—but soon it won't matter anymore, will it?

A voice behind me calls out, "Jimmy! Stop!" A boy of about seven zooms past and glances back, grinning. His foot hits a spot of melt from tracked-in snow, and I wince at the thud when his head slams the marble floor.

Two long strides and I kneel beside him. His eyes widen, tears spill, and a loud cry starts. I stroke his head and then slip my *sight* under his scalp and locate a growing contusion. Drawing on the streams of *lledri* energy coursing around me, I clear out the damaged cells and stop the inflammation. Soon pain nerves quiet and the injury is on the way to healing. The boy stops crying just as his mother arrives and drops to her knees beside him.

She says, "Are you okay?"

The boy snuffles, glances up at me—I smile—and he nods. The mother says to me, "Thank you."

I nod and then rise to make my way to the cashiers. Having seen his fall, I instinctively take care on the slippery floor—and

then grimace at the irony. What matters a bruise to a corpse?

I pay admission and then find a sign for the American art exhibit that directs me down the long hall to the Institute's other building. I pass exhibits of medieval armor that look like little metal men.

Like them, my former father-in-law is short of stature and iron-hard. I wonder if Drago's venom toward me has lessened in the last year. Though why should it? I led his son to his death, did I not? I shake my head and narrow my focus to this moment; Drago will have to find some other target for his rage and bitterness.

Just ahead of me, a thick-bodied female museum guard hurtles into the lobby from a stairway to the lower level. I have never seen an Institute guard hurry—they are usually older people who meander, wearing bemused half-smiles at their good fortune to be paid to spend their days surrounded by treasure.

This guard is younger than the norm. Thirtyish. Broad-shouldered. Short black hair. Her aura also radiates the yellow-green of dishonesty. And she too carries a video camera. A museum guard with a video camera? The woman stops, and then sends her gaze prowling through the lobby.

Are her actions linked to the man out front? Did he see my *truself* through his camera and somehow report my deception to her?

Chilled, I hurry past her, my eyes averted.

At the end of the hallway, I glance back. The guard moves toward me, leaning forward as if she runs even though she walks. Is she after me?

Nonsense, Annie. No *lessi* has known of our existence for centuries, and no word has come of a breach in our concealment. There will be no return of the persecution that burned my great-grandmother at a stake for being a witch.

Unless I am exposed here.

My back tightens as if expecting a blow.

Another exhibit sign directs me through the Sculpture Court to the second level. I need to thwart the guard's unwanted attention, so after I turn the corner from the hallway I change my *glamère* to the regal dignity of a white-haired society matron I once chatted with in Brussels. Now the museum guard won't know me.

I decide not to change the appearance of my clothing so that an accidental touch cannot reveal that the reality does not match the perception. When my childhood playmates and I practiced our *glamères*, we longed to change our bodies to become real wolves and pumas, or, my favorite, a pony. To our regret, our true forms remained underneath the deception. We were stuck with being human, no matter what our abilities.

I stroll past a bronze replica of the Abraham Lincoln memorial statue in Washington. It captures the man's strength, but not his wit. How his dark eyes had twinkled, what mischief his quick, playful mind had devised.

How like the *lessi* to kill the best among them.

After I climb the stairs to the exhibit, I glance back. The female guard looks up at me from the Sculpture Court.

She can look all she wants, she'll never see the real Annie.

Inside the exhibit, a dozen or so visitors wander the displays. They pay me no mind.

I go to the painting I seek. Graeme and I pose, *truself* of course, otherwise there would have been no reason for a portrait. Life size, he looms in shadows behind me, arms folded, his gaze directed down at me, no doubt thinking about nibbling the back of my neck. He was such a lusty man . . .

Oh . . .

I swallow against the emotion welling in my throat. I can't attract attention by letting sobs burst out.

If only . . .

In the painting, I gaze out, one hand on a saucily cocked hip. I had dressed for the portrait as if for an outing—a floor-length white linen skirt, a jacket over a pleated blouse, and I hold a straw boater in one hand. The artist captured the golden gleam of my necklace, a delicate thing made of fine strands of woven gold that had once graced the neck of a Celtic ancestor. Other than my clothing, I look the same now.

For all I know, the necklace's former owner is still alive, although I doubt it. While clansmen bodies seldom fail, our minds eventually do. What would the woman think of me, so ready to surrender the life I was taught to value so highly?

I don't have to ask. I feel my ancestor's disdain, even across the centuries.

The stocky guard appears at the entrance to the exhibit, her full cheeks flushed, her body tight, clearly on the hunt. Can she, impossibly, be after me?

I sidle closer to a man of my height.

I cannot be discovered. My *glamère* has to work.

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The whisper shivers in KB Volmer's earpiece. "I think I got one." She steps out of the gallery of art done by Irish kids. Their stuff didn't look any better than her crap that her mother had put on the refrigerator when she was a kid.

Speaking just loudly enough for her collar mike to pick up her words, she says, "Again."

"I think I got one."

She snaps into focus. There's only one thing he can be talking about.

The whisper comes. "It's heading for the entrance."

KB zings him. "It would be helpful if I knew who this was and where you're stationed."

"Schultz, by the big lion outside the Michigan Avenue entrance."

Does Schultz's voice shake from the cold or from excitement? His words sure as hell send a thrill through KB. She hopes to be the first of the couple-hundred Homeland Security agents staking out museums across the country to catch one of the Intruders—she knows in her gut that they are bad guys.

She says, "You're sure it's an Intruder?"

"Gotta be. Compared to everybody else out here, infrared output looks like a bonfire."

The thermal imaging cameras Homeland Security has

been testing since an ETA terrorist blew up a roomful of Goya masterpieces in Madrid's Prado National Museum are about to pay off. Yesterday, agents at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art spotted two bright infrared "blooms" strolling in—and then lost them in the crowd. KB isn't going to make that mistake.

Excitement clutches her. Even Schultz sounds tight now; his voice has lost that lame whine—no more bitching about working in the cold, no more muttering that the Intruders haven't done anything so why the big hunt?

Yeah, they haven't done anything . . . *yet*. That's the way terrorists operate, staying low until it's time to strike.

They aren't going to get away with it on KB's watch.

KB says, "What do you see? Your eyes. Did you look with your eyes?"

"Just a glimpse. Female. Red hair, curly. Tall and slender. Wearing a dress and a long black coat with a hood up. The camera just shows the glow."

Oh, man, this is it. Reflex sends her hand inside the navy blue blazer. Just beneath the Art Institute logo her Walther 9mm automatic waits, snug in its holster. Posing as an Institute security guard is perfect cover, but she hates the skirt—it makes her legs look heavy, and putting one on always feels like a demotion. Damn cold in the wind, too.

Her earpiece crackles. Schultz says, "It's going in."

Time to saddle up. She says, "I'm headed for the lobby. All stations, be alert for a tall, slender female that lights up your camera."

Aching to break into a trot, she forces herself to keep to a hurried walk, as near as she can come to the dawdle of a real museum guard. But when she reaches the stairs she goes up two steps at a time, charged with energy, electric, as if she is going into combat.

Who's to say this isn't combat? The war on terrorism is personal with her, and the enemy can be anywhere, is everywhere.

Upstairs, she scans the lobby, and then a tall figure in a long black coat, a hood hanging down the back, hurries past her. Curly red hair, a youngish woman heading down the hall with the knights. KB follows.

When the woman gets close to the end of the hallway, she glances back at KB and then increases her speed.

KB aims her thermal camera. A bright glow flares in the viewfinder. Gotcha! She hustles after her quarry. She wants to run, but doesn't want to alarm her target. The woman rounds the corner, and KB stretches her legs to close the gap.

She says to her collar microphone, "I am on a suspect, a real hot spot in my camera. Schultz, move inside and guard the Michigan Avenue doors. Use the camera on people leaving." She'll need evidence later. "Did you record this one coming in?"

His "damn" answers her question. She says, "Don't forget to record if you see something. Bailey, you on the Columbus Drive exit?"

KB would know Bailey's voice anywhere, deep and full of the rhythms of Chicago's black south side. She says, "Yeah. I got the doors." A pause, then, "This really it?"

"Looks like. Be on the lookout for a tall, skinny female, long hooded coat over long dress." Might be smart to have backup. "Sanchez, where are you?"

He whispers, "Second level. They got a painting with a locomotive steaming out of a fireplace. Weird."

"Get moving to the other side. I'll locate the subject, then we'll take 'er."

"Okay. But what's the big deal about these hot people? They don't do nothin' but go to museums."

"Are you walking or talking?"

“Walking. I’m walking. Jeez.”

KB passes a suit of armor and feels a connection with the soldier who had worn the iron uniform. Like him, she’s a protector, her mission to stand between her country and evil, and she will do anything to carry it out. She touches her pistol again.

She can’t hold back a tight little grin.

When she reaches the Sculpture Court, the woman isn’t there, but movement on the second level catches her eye—someone tall in a black coat entering the American art exhibit. KB pounds up the stairs.

At the exhibit entrance, she runs her gaze across the visitors. The curly-haired woman isn’t there. Had the face she’d seen been a disguise? She eases her thermal camera up.

In her viewfinder, the infrared images of people, so much warmer than their surroundings, are lighter forms against the dark grays of cooler walls and floor, and clear enough to distinguish facial features. She pans the room until she comes to a bright white shape near the wall.

She jerks the camera from her eye; where the flare had been three people stand before a humongous painting of an old-time man and woman. There’s a skinny, pimply-faced guy; a white-haired, snooty-looking older lady; and a fiftyish blond with short hair. The guy and the senior citizen both wear black coats.

KB steps close to the wall to get a better angle on their faces. She raises the camera, focuses on the glowing spot, and turns down the gain. The glow dims and she zooms in until a woman’s profile emerges. She glances KB’s way; her face is oval, with delicate features and big eyes like a fashion model. Twenties or thirties, the age of the redhead in the hallway, but not one of the three faces she saw a minute ago.

So which one is she?

Okay, maybe there's another way. She turns up the gain until the Intruder's image becomes a bright blur and the two figures next to it show up. The Intruder is between the two normal images.

She lowers the camera. The center person is the white-haired woman. How the hell does she do it?

No matter, KB's got the Intruder now. She stifles a rush of delight, but not before tasting it, just a little. There'll be time to celebrate after she has the Intruder in handcuffs. Backing away from the entrance, she whispers into her collar mike. "Sanchez! Where are you?"

"I'm coming. Some old woman wanted to know where the antique paperweight crap is."

"Get your ass in gear. The American art exhibit upstairs. Now!"

KB goes to the top of the stairs and peers into the Sculpture Court. She doesn't see Sanchez's bow-legged stride. She returns to the exhibit entrance. She'll explode if she waits for Sanchez. Maybe she can talk the Intruder out of the room, separate her from regular visitors. She has never met a female she couldn't handle. Or a male either, for that matter.

She slips the camera strap over her shoulder, slides a hand under her blazer to make sure her weapon moves easily in the holster, and enters.