

# 1: THE LOST PAGE

I didn't know which kept more secrets: the vault or the keeper of the vault.

Mr. Grimoire had been acting even more strangely than usual ever since Anji and I had recovered the artefacts that his former apprentice Rebecca had stolen. Aleister Crowley's *Book of Spells* was back on the shelf with the other dusty books. The enchanted music box was safely locked in its cabinet. The bag of Dragon Teeth was tucked away behind something that looked like a crocodile skull.

Everything was back in its place, exactly as it should be.

Still, Mr. Grimoire continued to check and double-check the collection of ancient curiosities that were under his care. He examined the locks on display cases, sifted through chests full of valuable trinkets, and counted all the items in the vault. If ever Dylan or Anji or I tried to help, he'd just wave us off, like we were annoying mosquitoes instead of his apprentices who'd already risked their lives for him and his artefacts.

Today, he decided to take down the *Book of Spells*.

"Can I get you a cup of tea, sir?" I asked as he flipped through the pages.

"No. I'm fine."

I leaned closer.

"Is there anything I can do to help, Mr. Grimoire?"

He covered the pages with his arms. "Sure, Kristina. Why don't you count the Yellow Emperor's Dragon Teeth?"

"Okay. There should be thirty-six, right?"

"Yes. Thirty-six." His arms remained resting on the pages and his gaze locked on me until I backed away from whatever secret spell he was reading.

I sighed as I picked up the black pouch from the table and poured out the gnarled yellow fangs. The odour punched up my nose.

Anji and Dylan crowded around the table. She pulled her black hair into a ponytail while he rolled up the sleeves of his plaid shirt.

Dylan waved the stink away. "Oh, man. They smell worse than my cousin's hockey bag at the end of the season."

"Why would Rebecca steal these?" asked Anji.

"If you plant one of these teeth, you can grow

twelve warriors every full moon," I explained. Anji was still pretty new at this apprentice job. "Rebecca could literally have grown herself an army to have at her command."

"Now we're stuck counting these stinky things," said Dylan. "Maybe we should grow the soldiers and make them take a bath."

Anji laughed.

"Don't encourage him," I said. "He'll never stop."

"Well, it's the least they could do for us after we went to the trouble of saving them."

"We?" I said. "Dylan, I don't remember you risking your life in Rebecca's grandmother's house."

"I was there in spirit," he said. "Plus, I helped carry her luggage to the cab."

Anji snickered. "Yeah, the hero always helps the old lady to the airport."

"Hey, if I could have been with you guys, maybe we could have managed to actually catch Rebecca."

"Anji's trolling you, Dylan."

"I knew that," he mumbled as he pushed a dragon tooth back and forth on the table. "Do you think Rebecca will join her grandmother in Victoria?"

"No idea. I hope so."

"Don't count on it," Mr. Grimoire growled. "My former apprentice is up to no good."

I hastily swept the teeth into the bag. "All done!" I said brightly. "Thirty-six teeth, as expected. So, what's next?"

Truth was, the subject of Rebecca and her escape wasn't something I wanted to dwell on. Like Mr. Grimoire, I had secrets to keep. Sure, Rebecca had stolen the book, the teeth, and Dr. Von Himmel's Music Box. But when I learned that she was trying to raise money to help her ailing grandmother, and once I met her face to face, I was pretty sure she wasn't the evil villain Mr. Grimoire made her out to be.

So I'd let her escape.

Suddenly, Mr. Grimoire slammed his hand on the book. "No! This book is missing a page!"

"What? Are you sure?" I asked as the three of us rushed to his side.

Mr. Grimoire stabbed at the loose stitching in the middle of the book.

"Maybe the page was missing before," Dylan suggested. "After all, it's a pretty old book."

"No, they were stitched securely into the spine of the book. I've read it many times. This is a recent loss. See the loose strands of hair? And the fragment of human hide?"

I had to choke back the bitter taste of bile at the back of my throat. "The book was made of skin?"

He nodded.

"Do you know which spell is missing?" Anji asked.

He closed the book. "A summoning spell. With it, Rebecca can bring forth the Nightshades."

"You mean those weed things with the purple flowers and poison berries?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Aleister Crowley was a warlock with knowledge of the dark magical arts. He discovered an ancient scroll from the Deristos, a civilization that time has since erased. The scroll allowed Deristosian dark magicians to summon deadly creatures from the netherworld. These dark forms had substance but could hide within the shadows. The Deristosians called them Nightshades. These creatures were able to sneak into enemy fortresses, assassinate rulers, and defeat those who stood against them. The Nightshades work best in dark alleys where few eyes can see. Imagine your own shadow rising up to destroy you."

"If they're so powerful, what happened to them? Why haven't we heard of Deristos or Nightshades?" Anji asked.

"They were defeated by a group of warriors who could command light. According to legend,

these warriors used piercing light to banish the Nightshades back to the netherworld.”

Dylan let out a low whistle. “Okay, flashlights for everyone.”

Mr. Grimoire walked over to a glass case that displayed a rack of gems. He lifted the lid and retrieved a few gems. “These are Star Crystals. They are what the warriors used against the Nightshades. They will ward off the creatures.”

He handed one gem to each of us. The golf ball sized crystal felt lighter than I thought it should have been. The surface was smooth and warm in my hand.

“How do we make the crystals work?” I asked.

Mr. Grimoire held a crystal in his hand and said, “*Ku-fi-laz.*”

Light exploded from his hand, blinding me temporarily. The heat of the Star Crystal’s light blasted against my cheeks.

“*Hap-wisk,*” Mr. Grimoire said. The light and heat faded away.

“Wow!” Dylan said. “Great party trick.”

“The Star Crystals are not for fun,” Mr. Grimoire scolded. “Use them only if you have to. They only have so much power. Then you have to recharge them in the sunlight. Understood?”

We nodded.

"Mr. Grimoire, we can't be sure that Rebecca has the missing page," I said. "Why don't we search around her grandmother's house and see if it might have fallen out of the book?"

"I know Rebecca has it," Mr. Grimoire said. "By now she's probably summoned the Nightshades."

"For all we know, the page is mixed in with somebody's recycling," Anji suggested.

"I'm with Mr. Grimoire," Dylan said. "We can't trust Rebecca."

"What could it hurt to look for the spell?" argued Anji. "If we're wrong, what do we lose?"

Mr. Grimoire folded his arms over his chest. "It's a waste of time. Rebecca has the page and she's probably delivered it to that collector, Lenore Frobisher. We know that the two of them are in league together to get at the contents of this vault."

"Look, Anji and I can go back to the house to look for the spell page," I said.

"It's been a week since we recovered the artefacts," he pointed out.

"We should still look. Meanwhile, Dylan can stay here and help you secure the entrances to the vault in case I'm wrong. That way we can cover all our bases."

"Fine," Mr. Grimoire said in a huff. "But if you

don't find anything by nightfall, we will have to assume that Rebecca is behind this."

I nodded. Anji and I headed out of the vault. The instant teleportation that magically transitioned us from the hidden room on the fourth floor to our normal school hallway always made me want to puke. But I kept my lunch down.

On the bus ride to Rebecca's grandmother's house, Anji surfed on her smartphone while I stared out the window at the passing houses, chewing my bottom lip. Mr. Grimoire seemed so certain that Rebecca was up to no good, but the Rebecca he knew was not like the one I had met.

She seemed more desperate than greedy. I had used Dr. Von Himmel's music box to take control of her mind. Under the spell, she had to do everything I asked. I demanded she tell me why she stole from Mr. Grimoire. Her answer? She wanted to raise enough money to pay for her sick grandmother's experimental medical treatments.

We walked from the bus stop to the house where we had our last showdown with Rebecca and Lenore. Then we combed the immediate area for any sign of the missing page. It was a quiet street with rows of bungalows edged with hedges and picket fences: lots of great hiding places for stray pieces of paper to get caught up in.



Anji turned to me. "What is it with Mr. Grimoire? He has a full hate-on for Rebecca."

I shrugged. "No idea."

"I guess I'd be ticked too, like if someone hacked into my computer."

"This seems like something more. It's almost like it's personal."

"Reminds me of my uncle when someone broke into his house. After that, he didn't trust anyone. Called the cops on kids walking down the street at night. Stared out his window with a baseball bat in his lap until two in the morning. At one point, my mom had to talk him out of getting guard dogs."

"So what finally got him to calm down?" I asked.

"Nothing. He's still wound up, and it's been two years."

"Wow. Let's hope Mr. Grimoire doesn't go down that road."

Anji nodded. I peered into neighbours' yards. I had hoped the page might have blown against a tree or under a car, but with a week gone by, the chances of finding it were as likely as the chances of my dad mailing my mom a grocery cheque these days.

We moved to the next street. Plenty of trash but no page.

“What’s that?”

I rushed over to where Anji was pointing and picked up a piece of paper. One quick scan of some poor handwriting and bad spelling told me what I had found.

“It’s a kid’s homework assignment.”

“Probably just as well that he lost it. That is some terrible handwriting, and look at the spelling mistakes.”

“You’re a natural-born teacher, Anji.”

She faked a bow with a grand gesture then glanced up. “The sun’s going down. Think we should call off the search?”

“One more street,” I begged.

“My parents will wonder what’s wrong with me if they don’t see me glued to the computer monitor at home. They might even think I have a social life. Shudder.”

I laughed. “My mom’s been out a lot, so she never notices what time I get home these days.”

“Poor you. You need an edgy soundtrack of tragedy,” Anji said.

I chuckled. “I’d better check in with Mr. Grimoire. Tell him we had no luck.”

“I’m sure he’ll love the chance to say, ‘I told you so.’”

As we strolled through the suburbs on the way

back to the bus stop, I studied the quiet houses. One bungalow reminded me of my old home on the south side. I missed my room. I missed my yard. I missed the Sunday mornings I spent with Mom and Dad making pancakes together. I missed being a family.

Anji elbowed my side, poking me out of the daydream.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I think we're being followed."