

1: STOLEN GOODS

“Ew! I think I found the Monkey’s Paw.”

I held up a shrivelled hairy hand. Its gnarled fingers reminded me of the chicken feet my Lao Lao used to boil. Mr. Grimoire peered up from his clipboard, slid his glasses up the bridge of his nose, and squinted at the artefact.

“No. That’s the Hand of Glory.”

“You mean there’s another disgusting hand in the Vault?” I tossed the hideous thing on a nearby oak table.

“Three to be exact.”

On the other side of the oak table, Dylan joked, “One more and we could play the most disgusting version of Patty Cake ever.”

I karate-chopped my forehead to form a fin. “Snark attack!”

“I’m here all Snark Week.”

“Watch out for the Snarknado!”

“What are you two going on about?” Grimoire stuck his head out from behind a pile of boxes, glaring.

“Nothing, sir,” Dylan quipped. “Just giving Kristina a *hand*.”

I groaned.

“Come on, you have to *hand* it to me for trying.”

“Too far, Dylan, too far.”

Grimoire shook his head. “Let’s try to work more and chatter less, shall we? Kristina, place the Hand of Glory with the fingers facing *east*. Thank you.”

We resumed picking up the artefacts littered across the marble floor. I couldn’t believe that right below was my school. Well, not quite. The Vault existed in an inter-dimensional space that doubled as the school’s storage area. If you found the right entrance, you’d enter the Vault. The wrong entrance took you to the dusty fourth floor of my school.

Grimoire protected the collection of artefacts from the prying eyes of the public. Many of the antiques within the Vault were magical and potentially dangerous—a fact I’d learned the hard way. Just a few days ago, I had accidentally set free a djinn named Niram who lived in a lantern, and she nearly burned the building down in an attempt to murder me.

Grimoire tugged his black vest over his ample waistline. He held out his hand. Dylan placed the artefact on his palm. “Try not to play with the artefacts. You never know what you might unleash.”

“Well, it doesn’t look very dangerous.”

“Do not underestimate Blackwell’s Phantasm Ball. Have you ever heard of the Minotaur?”

“Half bull, half man,” Dylan said.

Grimoire shook the globe three times. Suddenly, the Minotaur appeared in the room and roared. Dylan yelped and stumbled backward, grabbing my arm. The horned creature snorted and stamped its foot but did not charge.

The old man laughed. “You’re perfectly safe. Shake this artefact and you can conjure any image you desire.”

Dylan let go of me. “Yeah. Well. It wasn’t *that* scary.”

Grimoire held the globe out. “Care for another demonstration?”

“No. I’m good.” Dylan said quickly, eyeing the Minotaur, which was still huffing at him. “Um, when will this monster go away?”

“When the snow settles in the globe,” Grimoire said. “Ignore him. He won’t bite.”

“Do you know what Rebecca wanted?” I asked.

The Keeper of the Vault shrugged. “Not exactly. We’ll have to see what she has taken before we can understand what she wanted.”

“I still don’t get why your old apprentice broke in. Couldn’t she have just taken the stuff

out while she was still working for you?"

Grimoire shrugged. "She began to behave oddly only in the last few weeks. She talked about wanting the world to see them. Most insistently. That's when I decided to employ security measures around the Vault."

"I guess they didn't work," I said, surveying the damage to the Vault.

"Well, at the beginning, they did. When Rebecca first tried to steal from me, she set off my alarms and confirmed my suspicions. She disappeared before I could question her further, but I hoped that was the end of the matter."

"Except you weren't counting on her to trick us into freeing Niram." I eyed the display case that housed my old smartphone, which now doubled as a prison for the djinn.

Dylan added, "And almost getting us killed in the process."

Grimoire placed a hand on my shoulder. "Still, if not for Rebecca's deceit, I wouldn't have found my new apprentices."

"You mean cleaning staff," I joked.

"Snark attack," Dylan shouted.

The old man flashed a mischievous smile. "A rose by another name still smells as sweet."

"Burn."

"Enough. Back to work," Grimoire ordered.



Several hours later, we had restored most of the collection. Eight of the display cases had been damaged. I found all the items belonging to five of them, but in the end, three artefacts were still missing: Dr. Von Himmel's music box, Aleister Crowley's *Book of Spells*, and the Yellow Emperor's Dragon Teeth.

"What can Rebecca do with those things?" Dylan asked.

Grimoire stroked his chin. "Nothing good. Nothing good at all. Aleister Crowley was an occultist: a warlock with a book of spells."

"You mean the eye-of-newt and flying-broomstick kind of spell book?" I asked.

"A little more advanced than that but, yes, you are basically correct."

Dylan let out a low whistle. "What about the Dragon Teeth? Let me guess—they belonged to a dragon."

Grimoire nodded. "The Yellow Emperor slayed the dragon who plagued the Middle Kingdom, and he took the creature's teeth as his trophy. Legend has it that if you plant the teeth in the earth, terracotta soldiers will spring up and serve you."

I scratched my head. "Wait a minute. A spell book and seeds to grow an army? Sounds like she's preparing for war."

"All she needs is a wicked soundtrack, like from Gears of War. Maybe that's what the music box is for," Dylan said.

"Dr. Von Himmel experimented with sounds in the 1800s. He believed musical notes played in the right order and combination could affect the human brain, and he applied his theory to his music box. They say whoever plays the instrument will control the minds of anyone who hears the enchanted melody."

"I'm starting to see why you don't want this stuff to get out to the public," I said. "Can you imagine what you could do with a box that controlled minds?"

Dylan shrugged. "First thing I'd do is make Mr. Carlton give me a better mark in language arts."

I smacked his arm. "I'm serious. We have to get those artefacts before Rebecca sells them."

"Who would want those things?"

Grimoire answered, "I crossed paths with a few collectors of these rare antiquities. Most want them for the historical value, but a handful of them are interested in their magical properties. Those people are the ones who concern me the most."

“Why?” I asked.

“Let me say, the world of collectors is rather... unsavoury. Those who seek these artefacts may have questionable morals when it comes to how they possess them and how they use them.”

“How do you think she’s going to get a hold of these buyers?” Dylan asked.

“Like everyone else,” I answered. “On the Internet.”