

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black leather crop top and matching pants, is sitting on a vibrant green field. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft-focus landscape with green hills and a bright sky.

An Arcane
Society
Novel

New York Times Bestselling Author

JAYNE ANN KRENTZ

writing as

Jayne
Castle

First Time in Print

CANYONS of NIGHT

Book Three of the Looking Glass Trilogy

CANYONS of NIGHT

Book III of the Looking Glass Trilogy

AN ARCANESOCIETY NOVEL

JAYNE CASTLE



JOVE BOOKS, NEW YORK

CANYONS^{of} NIGHT

Book III of the Looking Glass Trilogy

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Praise for

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“Castle delivers another captivating futuristic romance that has all the sexy chemistry, sharply addictive wit, and fast-paced intrigue her readers expect.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

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—Book

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. . . and Jayne Ann Krentz

“Good fun.”

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~~“Along with Nora Roberts, Krentz is one of the most reliably satisfying romance writers in publishing.”~~

~~—Sunday (CA) Times~~

“Jayne Ann Krentz is one of the hottest writers around.”

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OBSIDIAN PREY
DARK LIGHT
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GHOST HUNTER
AFTER GLOW
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NO GOING BACK

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*This one is for Rex.
Your sense of style is classic.*

A Note from Jayne

Welcome to Rainshadow Island. You are about to discover a whole new aspect of the world of Harmony and learn some of the future secrets of the Arcane Society.

In the Rainshadow novels you will meet the passionate men and women who are drawn to this remote island in the Amber Sea. You will also get to know their friends and neighbors in the community of Shadow Bay. You are invited to be a part of their lives; lives which are deeply entwined with the island's dark and mysterious history.

I hope you will enjoy the Rainshadow novels.

Sincerely,
Jayne

Prologue



Rainshadow Island

THE SMALL VEHICLE WAS TRAVELING TOO FAST ON THE narrow, twisted road that snaked along the top of the cliffs. Charlotte Enright heard the insectlike whine of the tiny flash-rock engine behind her and hastily stepped off the pavement onto the relative safety of the shoulder. A moment later one of the familiar low-powered Vibes that visitors rented to get around on the island careened out of the turn.

The driver hit the brakes, bringing the open-sided buggy to a halt beside her.

“Hey, look what we have here,” the man behind the wheel said to his two passengers. “It’s that weird girl with the glasses who works for that crazy old lady in the antiques store. What are you doing out here all by yourself, Weird Girl?”

There was enough light left in the late summer sky to illuminate the three young men in the car. Charlotte recognized them immediately. They had wandered into Looking Glass Antiques earlier in the day, drawn into the shop not because of an interest in antiques but by the rumors that swirled around her aunt.

“Didn’t anyone ever tell you it’s dangerous to hang out on empty roads like this late at night?” the man in the passenger seat asked.

His voice echoed along the lonely stretch of road that led to the Preserve. The laughter of his two companions sent icy chills through Charlotte. She started walking. She did not look back. Maybe she ignored the three they would leave her alone. She quickened her pace, walking faster into the rapidly deepening twilight.

That weird girl with the glasses who works for that crazy old lady in the antiques store. The words might just as well have been emblazoned on her T-shirt, she thought. She was pretty sure that just about everyone on the island, with the exception of her friend Rachel, thought of her in exactly those words.

The driver took his foot off the brake and let the Vibe coast slowly alongside Charlotte.

“Don’t run off, Weird Girl,” the one in the passenger seat called out. “We’ve heard that it gets a little strange out here after dark. Guy back at the bar guaranteed us that if we could get into the Preserve on a moonlit night like this we would see ghosts. You’re from around here. Why don’t you show us the sights?”

“Yeah, come on now, be friendly, Weird Girl,” the driver wheedled. “You’re supposed to be nice to tourists.”

Charlotte clutched the flashlight very tightly and kept her gaze fixed on the dark woods at the end of Merton Road.

“We’ll give you a ride,” the driver said, mockingly lecherous. “Come on, get in the car.”

“All we want you to do is show us this place they call the Preserve,” the one in the backseat urged. “From what we’ve seen today, there sure as hell isn’t anything else of interest on this rock.”

Charlotte wondered how the three in the car had found their way all the way out to Merton Road. Only the locals and the summer regulars were aware that the old strip of pavement dead-ended at the border of the private nature conservancy known as the Rainshadow Preserve.

The trio in the Vibe was a familiar species on Rainshadow during the summer months. The type typically arrived on the private yachts and sailboats that crowded the marina on the weekends. They partied heavily all night long in the dockside taverns and restaurants, and when the bars closed down they moved the parties to their boats.

“Come back here, damn it,” the driver ordered. He wore a pastel polo shirt that probably had a designer label stitched inside. His light brown hair had obviously been cut in an expensive salon. “We won’t hurt you. We just want you to give us a tour of the spooky places the guy in the bar told us about.”

“Forget the ugly little bitch, Derek,” the man in the backseat said. “No boobs on her, anyway. Trying to get into this Preserve is a waste of time. Let’s go back to town. I need a drink and some weed.”

“We came all the way out here to see the Preserve,” Derek insisted, his tone turning surly. “I’m not going back until this bitch shows us where it is.” He raised his voice. “You hear me, weird bitch?”

“Yeah,” the man in the passenger seat said. “I want to see the place, too. Let’s make the bitch show us.”

Charlotte’s pulse pounded. She was walking as swiftly as she could. Any faster and she would be running. She was very frightened but her feminine intuition warned her that if she ran the three men would be out of the Vibe in an instant, pursuing her like a pack of wild animals.

“Is she ignoring us?” the man in the passenger seat asked. “Yeah, I think she’s ignoring us. That’s just flat-out rude. Someone needs to teach her some manners.”

“Damn right, Garrett,” Derek said. “Let’s get her.”

“This is stupid,” the man in the backseat said. But the other two paid no attention to him.

Derek brought the Vibe to a stop and jumped out. Garrett followed, and so did the man in the rear seat, albeit with obvious reluctance. Charlotte knew that she had no choice now but to run. She fled toward the woods at the end of Merton Road.

Derek and Garrett laughed and gave chase. Her only hope was to reach the dark trees up ahead. If she could get even a short distance into the Preserve she might be able to lose the three behind her. It was common knowledge on the island that things got very strange inside the Preserve.

There were risks to the strategy. She might get lost, herself. It could be days before she was found or managed to stumble out on her own, if ever. According to the local residents it was not unheard of for people to disappear for good inside the Preserve.

The pounding footsteps got louder. Derek and Garrett were gaining on her. She could hear their harsh, angry breathing. She knew then that she probably would not be able to outrun them.

She was almost at the end of the pavement, thinking she just might make it after all, when a hand closed around her arm and dragged her to a halt.

She whirled, all of her still-developing para-senses hitting the upper limits of her talent in response to the adrenaline and fear flooding through her. The driver, Derek, was the one who had grabbed her. Garrett hovered nearby. The third man hung back, clearly uneasy about the way the violence was escalating.

With her senses at full sail, she could see the dark paranormal rainbows cast by the auras of the three men. For all the good that did her, she thought bitterly. She did not need to see the flaring bands of ultralight to know that, of the three, Derek was the most unstable and, therefore, the most dangerous. Why couldn’t she have been born with something flashier and more useful in the way of talent? The ability to deliver a psychic hypnotic command or a freezing blast of energy that would

stop Derek cold would have been nice.

~~She had no choice now but to fight. She flailed wildly with the flashlight. A brief flicker of satisfaction swept through her when the metal barrel struck Derek on his upper arm. She hauled back for another blow.~~

“Who do you think you are?” Derek snarled. “I’ll teach you to hit me.”

His face twisted into a vicious mask. He shook her furiously. The flashlight fell from her hand. Her glasses went flying.

Garrett laughed nervously. “That’s enough, Derek. She’s just a kid.”

“Garrett’s right,” the man from the backseat said. “Come on, Derek, let’s get out of here. We’ve got a lot of drinking left to do tonight. I need my weed, man.”

“We’re not leaving yet,” Derek said. “We’re just starting to have some fun.”

He drew back a clenched fist, preparing to deliver a punch. Charlotte raised both arms in a desperate attempt to ward off the blow. At the same time she kicked Derek in the knee.

Derek howled.

“Are you crazy?” Garrett said.

“Bitch,” Derek screamed. He shook her again.

A shadowy figure materialized out of the woods. Charlotte did not need her glasses to see the obsidian dark hues of a familiar ultralight rainbow. Slade Attridge.

Slade moved toward the driver with the speed and lethal intent of an attacking specter-cat.

“What the hell?” Garrett yelped, startled.

“Shit,” the man from the backseat yelped. “I told you this was a bad idea.”

Derek was oblivious to the danger. In his rage, he was obsessed only with punishing Charlotte. He did not realize what was happening until a powerful hand locked on his shoulder.

“Let her go,” Slade said. He wrenched Derek away from Charlotte.

Derek screamed. He released Charlotte and frantically tried to scramble out of reach. Slade used one booted foot to swipe Derek’s legs out from under him. Derek landed hard on the pavement shrieking with rage and pain.

“You can’t do this to me,” he screeched. “You don’t know who you’re messing with. My dad will have you arrested. He’ll sue your ass.”

“That should be interesting,” Slade said. He looked at the other two. “Get him in the Vibe and get out of here. Come anywhere near her again and you will all wake up in an ICU or maybe just plain dead, depending on my mood at the time. Is that understood?”

“Shit, this guy’s crazy,” the man from the backseat whispered. He ran for the vehicle. “You guys do what you want. I’m out of here.”

He hopped into the driver’s seat, rezzed the little engine, and put the Vibe in gear.

“Wait up, damn it.” Garrett raced toward the Vibe and jumped into the front seat.

Derek staggered to his feet. “Don’t leave me, you bastards. He’ll kill me.”

“It’s a thought,” Slade said, as if the idea held great appeal. “Better run.”

Derek fled toward the Vibe, which was now halfway through a U-turn.

He lunged forward and managed to dive into the back of the buggy.

The Vibe whined away into the night and vanished around a turn.

A hushed silence fell. The eerie quiet was broken only by the sound of labored breathing. Charlotte realized that she was the one trying to catch her breath. She was shivering but not because she was cold. It was all she could do to stand upright. Great. She was having another stupid panic attack. And in front of Slade Attridge of all people. Just her rotten luck.

“You okay?” Slade asked. He picked up the flashlight and put it in her hand.

“Y-yes. Thanks.” She struggled with the deep, square breathing exercise the parapsychologist had

taught her and tried to compose herself. "My glasses." She looked around but everything except Slade's darkly luminous rainbow was indistinct. "They fell off."

"I see them," Slade said. He started across the pavement.

"You m-must have really g-good eyes," she said. Geez. Now she was stuttering because of the panic attack. It was all so humiliating.

"Good night vision," Slade said. "Side effect of my talent."

"You're a h-hunter, aren't you? Not a g-ghost hunter but a true hunter-talent. I thought so. I've got a c-cousin who is a hunter. You move the same way he does. Like a b-big specter-cat. Arcane?"

"My mother was Arcane but she never registered me with the Society," Slade said. "She died when I was twelve."

"What about your father?"

"He was a ghost hunter. Died in the tunnels when I was two."

"Geez." She wrapped her arms around herself and forced herself to breathe in the slow, controlled rhythm she had been taught. "Wh-who raised you?"

"The system."

She went blank for a moment. "What system?"

"Foster care."

"Geez."

She could not think of anything else to say. She had never actually met anyone who had been raised in the foster-care system. The stern legal measures set down by the First Generation colonists had been designed to secure the institutions of marriage and the family in stone and they had been very successful. During the two hundred years since the closing of the Curtain, the laws had eased somewhat but not much. The result was that it was rare for a child to be completely orphaned. There was almost always *someone* who had to take you in.

Slade seemed amused. "It wasn't that bad. I wasn't in the system long. I bailed four years ago when I turned fifteen. Figured I'd do better on the streets."

"Geez." No wonder he seemed so much older, she thought. She was fifteen and she could not imagine what it would be like trying to survive on her own.

At least her pulse was starting to slow down a little. The breathing exercises were finally kicking in.

"You're Arcane, aren't you?" Slade asked.

"Yeah, the whole family has been Arcane for generations." She made a face. "Mostly high-end talents. I'm the underachiever in the clan. I'm just a rainbow-reader."

"What's that?"

"I see aura rainbows. Totally useless, trust me." She tried to focus on Slade as he reached down to pick up her glasses. "They're probably smashed, huh?"

"The frames are a little bent and the lenses are scratched up."

"Figures." She took the glasses from him and put them on.

The twisted frames sat askew on her nose. The scratched lenses made it difficult to see Slade's face clearly. She knew exactly what he looked like, though, because she had seen him often in town and down at the marina where he worked. He was nineteen but there was something about his sharp etched features and unreadable gray-blue eyes that made him seem so much older and infinitely more experienced. Other boys his age were still boys. Slade was a man.

She and Rachel had speculated endlessly about where he had come from and, more importantly, whether he had a girlfriend. If he was dating anyone they were very sure that she was not a local girl. In a town as small as Shadow Bay everyone would know if the stranger who worked at the marina was seeing an island girl.

He had shown up in the Bay at the start of the tourist season that summer, looking for work. Be

Murphy at the marina had given him a job. Slade rented a room above a dockside shop by the water. He was polite and hardworking but he kept to himself. Occasionally he caught the Friday afternoon ferry and disappeared for the weekend. It was assumed that he went to a larger town on one of the other nearby islands—Thursday Harbor, maybe, or maybe he went all the way to Frequency City. No one knew for sure. But he was always back at work at the marina on Monday morning.

“Luckily I’ve got a backup pair of glasses at my aunt’s house,” Charlotte said.

She was immediately mortified. She felt like an idiot talking about her glasses to the man who was currently featured so vividly in her fantasies. Not that Slade knew about his role in her dreams. Slade was pretty sure that to him she was just the weird girl who worked for her crazy old aunt in the antique shop.

“What are you doing out here at this time of night?” Slade asked.

“What do you think I’m doing out here? I wanted to see the Preserve. My aunt talks about it sometimes but she won’t take me inside.”

“For good reason. It’s beautiful in places but it’s dangerous in some parts. Easy to get lost inside. The Foundation that controls the Preserve put up those nottrespassing signs and the fence for a reason.”

“You were inside just a few minutes ago. I saw you come out through the trees.”

“I’m a hunter, remember? I can see where I’m going.”

“Oh, yeah, the night-vision thing.”

“Are you sure you’re okay? Your breathing sounds funny.”

“Actually, I’m getting over a panic attack. I’m doing a breathing exercise. This is so embarrassing.”

“Panic attack, huh? Well, you had good reason to have one tonight. Getting assaulted by three jerks on a lonely road would be enough to scare the daylights out of anyone.”

“The attacks are linked to my stupid talent. I started getting them when I came into my para-senses two years ago. At first everyone assumed that I was just reacting to the stress of high school. But finally my mom sent me to a para-shrink who said it appeared to be a side effect of my new senses.”

Great. Now she was babbling about her personal problems.

“That’s gotta be tough,” Slade said.

“Tell me about it. If I run hot for any length of time, I start shaking and it gets hard to breathe. I was really jacked a few minutes ago so I’m paying for it now. I’ll be okay in a couple of minutes, honest.”

“You should go home now,” Slade said. “I’ll walk with you and make sure those guys don’t come back.”

“They won’t return,” she said, very certain. She finally managed to take a deep breath. Her jangled senses and her nerves were finally calming. “I don’t want to go home yet. I came all the way out here to see the Preserve.”

“Does your aunt know where you are?”

“No. Aunt Beatrix took the ferry to Frequency City today to check out some antiques at an estate sale. She won’t return until tomorrow.”

Slade looked toward the dark woods. He seemed to hesitate and then he shrugged. “I’ll take you inside but just for a few minutes.”

Delight snapped through her.

“Will you? That would be wonderful. Thanks.”

He started walking back along the road toward the woods. She switched on the flashlight and hurried to catch up with him.

“I heard someone at the grocery store say that you’re going to leave Rainshadow for good tomorrow,” she said tentatively. “Is it true?”

“That’s the plan. I’ve been accepted at the academy of the FBPI.”

“You’re joining the Federal Bureau of Psi Investigation? Wow. That is so high-re-

Congratulations.”

“Thanks. I’m packed. I’ll catch the morning ferry.”

She tried to think of what to say next. Nothing brilliant came to mind.

“Do you think those three guys will try to have you arrested?” she asked.

“No.”

“How can you be sure? They might remember you from the marina.”

“Even if they do, those three aren’t going to go to the local cops. If they did they’d have to explain why they stopped you on the road.”

“Oh, right.” Her spirits lightened at that realization. “And I’d tell everyone how they attacked me. Chief Halstead knows me and he’s known Aunt Beatrix forever. He would believe me long before he took the word of a bunch of off-islanders.”

“Yes,” Slade said. “He would.”

She was surprised to hear the respect in Slade’s voice. She glanced at his profile.

“I saw the two of you talking together a lot this summer,” she ventured.

“Halstead is the one who suggested I apply to the academy. He even wrote a recommendation.”

THAT EVENING SLADE GAVE HER A BRIEF GLIMPSE OF THE paranormal wonderland that was the Preserve by night. And then he walked her home, saw her inside the cottage on the bluff, and waited until she locked the door. She listened to his footsteps going down the front porch steps and listened until he was gone and the only sound was that of the wind sighing in the trees.

The following morning she went down to the ferry dock. Slade didn’t see her at first. He lounged against the railing, a duffel bag slung over his shoulder. He was alone. There were a handful of other passengers waiting for the ferry but no one was there to see him off to his new life in the Federal Bureau of Psi Investigation.

She approached him cautiously, not certain how he would react. She knew that as far as he was concerned she was just a kid he had helped out of a jam and then humored with a short trip into the forbidden territory of the Preserve.

“Slade?” She stopped a short distance away.

He had been watching the ferry pull into the dock. At the sound of her voice he turned his head and saw her. He smiled.

“I see you found your backup glasses,” he said.

“Yes.” She felt the heat rise in her cheeks. Her second pair of frames was even nerdier than the new pair that had gotten busted last night. “I came to say good-bye.”

“Yeah?”

“And to tell you to be careful, okay?” she added very earnestly. “The FBPI goes after some very dangerous people. Serial killers and drug traffickers.”

“I’ve heard that.” His eyes glittered with amusement. “I’ll be careful.”

She was feeling more awkward by the second. At this rate she would have a panic attack without even raising her dumb talent.

She held out the small box she had brought with her. “I also wanted to give you this. Sort of a thank-you gift for what you did for me last night.”

He eyed the box as if not sure what to make of it. It dawned on her that a man who didn’t have a family of his own probably didn’t get many gifts. He reached out and took the box.

“Thanks,” he said. “What is it?”

“Nothing important,” she assured him. “Just an old pocketknife.”

He got the lid off the oblong box and took out the narrow black crystal object inside. He studied

with interest. "How does it work? I don't see the blade."

She smiled. "Well, that's the unusual thing about that knife. It was made by a master craftsman named Vegas Takashima. He died about forty years ago. He was Arcane and he made each knife by hand so his pieces are infused with a lot of his creative psi. Whatever he did made the blades almost indestructible. You'll eventually figure out how it works and when you do, you'll see it's still good. It will last for decades, maybe another century or two."

"Thank you."

She hesitated. "I tuned it for you."

Slade raised his brows. "You can tune objects that are hot?"

She shrugged. "Provided there's enough energy in them. It's a rainbow-reader thing."

"What does tuning a para-antique do?"

"Nothing very useful," she admitted. "But people seem to like it when I find the right object and manipulate the frequencies to resonate harmoniously with their auras. Just a trick."

He hefted the Takashima knife on his palm and smiled slowly. "It does feel good." He closed his fingers around the black crystal knife. "Like it belongs to me."

"That's how the tuning thing works," she said earnestly. "It's not a real spectacular talent but my family feels I may have a career selling art and antiques."

"Is that what you want to do?"

"No." She brightened. "I want to get a degree in para-archaeology and work for one of the Arcane museums. Or maybe go underground with some of the academic and research people who explore the alien ruins."

"Sounds exciting."

"Not as exciting as the FBPI but I'd really like to do it."

"Good luck."

"Thanks."

He slipped the knife into the pocket of his jacket. The ferry was docked now. The three other people who had been waiting for it started down the ramp. Slade hitched the duffel bag higher on his shoulder.

"Time to go," he said.

"Good-bye. Thanks for last night. And remember to be careful, okay?"

"Sure."

He leaned forward slightly and kissed her lightly on the forehead. Before she could decide how to handle the situation, he was walking away from her, boarding the ferry.

She stood on the dock until the ferry sailed out of the harbor and out of sight. Just before it disappeared she waved. She thought she saw Slade lift a hand in farewell but she couldn't be sure. Her backup glasses were fitted with an old prescription and her distance vision was blurry. Or maybe the problem was the tears in her eyes.

She made a promise to herself that morning. When she went home to Frequency City at the end of the month she was going to get a trendy new haircut and a pair of contact lenses. Common sense told her that she was highly unlikely to ever meet Slade Attridge again. But just in case she did get lucky she was going to do her best to make certain that, whatever else happened, he didn't kiss her as if she were his kid sister.

Chapter 1



Rainshadow Island, fifteen years later . . .

CHARLOTTE FOLDED HER ARMS ON THE GLASS-TOPPED sales counter and watched the two feral beasts come through the door of Looking Glass Antiques. One was definitely human, definitely male, and definitely dangerous. The second was a scruffy-looking ball of gray fluff with two bright blue eyes, six small paws, and an attitude. The dust bunny rode on Slade Attridge's shoulder and Charlotte was quite sure that in his own miniature way he could be just as dangerous as his human companion. They were both born to hunt, she thought.

"Welcome to Looking Glass Antiques, Chief Attridge," Charlotte said. "You might want to keep an eye on Rex. I have a strict you-break-it-you-buy-it policy."

Slade stopped just inside the doorway. He quartered the shop's cluttered front room with a swift assessing glance, cold, mag-steel eyes faintly narrowed. Rex sleeked out a little, revealing a ragged ear that appeared to have been badly mangled in a fight at some point in the past. His second set of eyes, the ones he used for night hunts, popped open. At least he wasn't showing any teeth, Charlotte thought. They said that with dust bunnies, by the time you saw the teeth it was too late. The bunnies were cute when they were fluffed up but under all that fur lay the ruthless heart of a small predator.

"This shop is even hotter than it was fifteen years ago when your aunt ran it," Slade said.

Charlotte was amused. "You remember, hmm?"

Slade looked straight at her. "Oh, yeah."

Small thrills flashed across Charlotte's senses. *I had it bad for him fifteen years ago and this time around it's going to be a million times worse.*

Her fantasies about Slade had been dormant for so long that she had been convinced that she had outgrown them. But when he had walked off the morning ferry five days ago to take over the position of police chief on Rainshadow Island, she'd had a shocking revelation. The Arcane matchmakers had given up on her, labeled her unmatchable and blamed it on the nature of her talent. But one look at Slade and she knew why she had never been content with any of the other men she had met. Some part of her had always insisted on comparing her dates to the man of her dreams. It was not fair, it was not wise, but that was how it had been. And now Dream Man was here, standing right in front of her.

She was saved from having to come up with a snappy response by Rex. The dust bunny chortled and bounded down from Slade's shoulder. Charlotte watched uneasily as he fluttered through the cluttered space and vanished behind a pile of vintage purses and handbags.

Slade surveyed the room. "Coming in here was always a bit like walking into a mild lightning storm, but the sensation has gotten stronger. There's more energy now."

"Most people aren't aware of all the psi in this shop," she said. "At least not on a conscious level. But strong sensitives usually pick up on it. The reason it feels hotter now is because my aunt acquired a lot more stock during the last fifteen years before she died. In addition, I brought most of the objects from my store in Frequency City with me a few weeks ago when I closed my business there and

moved to the island.”

“Hard to believe fifteen years have gone by.”

“Yes,” she said.

Trying not to be obvious, she raised her talent a little and studied Slade’s aura rainbow. He was not running hot so the bands of dark ultralight were faint, but that was enough to tell her Slade hadn’t changed much in those fifteen years. He had simply become a purer, more intense version of what he had been at nineteen: hard, tough, self-contained, and self-controlled. His eyes were colder now, cold and bleak as the mag-steel they resembled.

Slade hadn’t smiled a lot fifteen years ago and she was pretty sure he’d never been prone to frequent displays of lightheartedness. But from what she had seen of him during the past five days he had evidently lost what little he had once possessed in the way of a sense of humor or cheerful spirits.

“Out of curiosity,” Slade said, “didn’t your aunt ever sell anything? This place looks like someone’s attic, a two-hundred-year-old attic, at that.”

She laughed and pushed her glasses higher on her nose. “All Aunt Beatrix cared about was collecting hot antiques. But I did a lot of business back in Frequency and I expect to make money with Looking Glass, as well. Trust me, I won’t starve. I’m good at this.”

To her shock his mouth kicked up a bit at the corner in the barest hint of a smile. “So it turned out you did have a career in art and antiques sales, just like your family thought?”

“Yes. Aunt Beatrix left her shop and the entire collection to me when she died a while back. I decided to operate from here instead of Frequency. It took a while to process my aunt’s will so the place has been locked up for some time. I just got the doors open again a couple of weeks ago. I’m still taking inventory and trying to get the paperwork straightened out. Aunt Beatrix was not much for organization.”

“I can see that.”

“Weird that we both wound up back here on Rainshadow, isn’t it? I mean, what are the odds?”

“Damned if I know,” he said. “Returning to Rainshadow wasn’t in my plans until recently.”

“Oh?”

“I’m making a career change. Turns out I need a short-term job to pay the bills while I get things going in a new direction. A friend told me that the chief’s job here on the island was open so I took it.”

“I see.” It was as if all the energy in the room had gone suddenly flat. So much for the little frisson of excitement and anticipation that had been flickering through her over the course of the past five days. Slade had no intention of hanging around Shadow Bay for long. She cleared her throat. “This isn’t a permanent move for you, then?”

“Not if I can help it,” he said. “I figure I’ll be here six months at most. I’ll need that much time to get my new project up and running. You?”

“After Aunt Beatrix died, I had planned to close Looking Glass and ship the stock to my Frequency City store but I changed my mind. I sold that store and moved here, instead.”

“What made you do that? Weren’t things going well for you in Frequency City?”

“Very well,” she said. She wasn’t boasting. It was a fact. “I made a lot of money with that store. But I’ll make money with this one, too. The power of online marketing, you know. In addition, I plan to turn Looking Glass into a destination antiques shop. In my line it’s all about reputation, and when it comes to paranormal antiques, I’m one of the best in the business.”

“I believe you,” he said. “I always knew you’d be successful at whatever you decided to do.”

“Really? No one in my family had a lot of hope. Whatever gave you that impression?”

He moved one hand slightly. “Probably the way you tried to fight off that bastard who manhandled you that night out on Merton Road.”

“Wasn’t like I had a lot of options that night.”

“Most people freeze when they face serious violence. They can’t function. You were fighting.”

“And losing,” she pointed out dryly.

“But you weren’t going down without a fight. That’s what counts. That’s why I agreed to take you into the Preserve that night. Figured you were owed that much after what you’d gone through.”

“Oh,” she said. “I was scared to death that night, you know.”

“It was the logical response to the situation.”

There was a muffled clunk from the far side of the shop. Charlotte heard a faint, ominous buzzing noise. She realized that she could no longer see Rex.

“Your dust bunny,” she yelled. Alarmed, she rushed out from behind the counter. “Where is he? What’s he doing?”

“Rex is not my dust bunny. We’re buddies, that’s all.”

“Yeah, yeah, I understand. That’s not the point. The point is that you are responsible for him while he is in this shop. Now where is he?”

“He may have gone behind that fancy little table with the mirror.”

The buzzing sound continued. Charlotte heard more thumps and thuds.

“That dressing table is a genuine First Century Pre-Era of Discord piece,” she snapped. She hurried across the room to the exquisitely inlaid dressing table. “It was designed by Fenwick LeMasters himself. The inlays are green amber and obsidian. The mirror and frame are original, for goodness sake.”

“Who is Fenwick LeMasters?”

“Just one of the finest furniture craftsmen of his time. Also a very powerful talent who could work green amber. Collectors pay thousands for his pieces. Oh, never mind.”

She peered over the top of the dressing table and saw Rex. The dust bunny had trapped a vintage action figure in the corner between a First Generation cabinet that reeked of the old-Earth parlor antiques it had once contained and a Second Generation floor lamp. Rex was batting the toy unmercifully with his paw as if tormenting a mouse or some other prey. The foot-high plastic figure wore long, flowing plastic robes marked with alchemical signs. The toy was armed with a small, fist-sized crystal.

The unprovoked assault had activated whatever energy was left in the old, run-down amber battery inside the figure. The action doll repeatedly raised and lowered one arm as though to ward off Rex. The buzzing noise came from the odd little crystal weapon. Each time the arm shifted, the toy weapon flashed and sparked with weak, violet-hued light.

“Stop that,” Charlotte said to Rex. “Sylvester is a very valuable collectible. Fewer than five hundred of them were made.”

Rex ignored her. He took another swipe at the figure.

She started to reach down to retrieve the action figure but common sense made her hesitate. Dust bunnies could be dangerous when provoked.

She rounded on Slade, instead. “Do something about Rex. I’m serious. That figure is worth at least a thousand dollars to certain Arcane collectors.”

Slade came to stand beside her. He looked down at Rex and the hapless Sylvester doll.

“That’s enough, Rex,” Slade said quietly. “You don’t want to mess with Sylvester Jones. According to the legends the old bastard could take care of himself.”

To Charlotte’s relief Rex stopped batting the figure. He sat back on his rear legs and fixed Slade with what Charlotte concluded was the dust bunny equivalent of a disgusted eye-roll. He sauntered off to investigate a pile of vintage stuffed animals.

“Whew.” Charlotte scooped up the action figure and examined it closely. “Luckily I don’t think he did any damage.”

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