

HOLLY
AND
OAK

◆ SEASON ONE ◆

ASH TOUGH

‘I think I had a normal childhood. Well, maybe it is better to say that I had a relatively normal childhood. I mean I was adopted by parents, who at their best were emotionally distant. So, I guess I’m grading on a curve.

‘Anyway, as I grew up, my parents would read bedtime stories to me about beautiful fairy queens, mischievous leprechauns and merrily scampering water babies. I would pretend that I was invited to tea parties and balls with the fairies. As I grew older, I then started to read stories about the legendary deeds of Achilles, Odysseus, Beowulf, and Arthur. I came across tale after tale filled with magic and wonder. I came across story after story where good always triumphed over evil.

‘I filled my life with stories that made me believe that the world was a magical, wonderful, and ultimately good place. I believed that the forces of good would always be honest, stalwart, true and ultimately victorious over evil. I believed that the forces of evil would be despicable, repulsive and, well for want of a better word, evil. I believed that as long as you were good, you would persevere, find your white knight and have your own happy ending. These tales made me believe that life would be simple, or at least, straightforward.

‘But then I grew up and whilst the world might not have lost its wonder, it lost its magic. Or at least, I thought it did because not only did the lines between good and evil become blurry but so did what it

meant to be good. It wasn't a world of black and white but one filled only with various shades of grey. When I met my white knight, her armour was dirty and battered. For a while, though, that was okay. She wasn't perfect, and neither was I, but then she died. Before we ever really had our happily ever after; everything we had been building was shattered in an instant.

'If my life was like the stories I grew up reading, I would have stayed, to pick up the pieces of my broken life and piece them back together. But I am not one of those great heroes or any kind of hero. So, instead, I ran. I ran across the entire country. I ran to escape my demons before they swallowed me whole. But the problem with running away from something is that you don't always see what you are running towards. And I ran headfirst into a world of problems, I didn't even know I had. I ran into a family and a sister, that I never knew that I had.

'And, as it turns out, I might not know as much about the world as I thought I did. Maybe, just maybe, magic and Faeries really exist. But, relatively speaking, that's a good thing, because every mythical or magical creature you can think of, and a lot of those you can't, are being drawn to Seattle to kill me. So, if I am going to survive what is coming, I will need all the help that I can get.'

– *Kate Matthews*

◆ EPISODE ONE ◆

HOLLY

Twins: two unique souls united by birth.

– Unknown Author

PROLOGUE

A dark Ford Explorer SUV pulled to a stop outside of a two-storey, Greek Revival Colonial-style house. The house had been converted into four condominiums several years earlier. It was perfectly situated in Capitol Hill in Seattle on a quiet tree-lined street lined between several other beautiful homes.

A slimly built woman, with long, luxurious dark brown hair, captivating emerald green eyes, a strong jawline, alabaster skin and a charming smile, stepped out of the car and onto the curbside. The 28-year-old was named Rowan Ashley. She was wearing dark blue jeans, a dark grey shirt under a leather jacket with knee-high, black boots.

Rowan knew that she had, at various times in her life, been described as the human equivalent of a golden retriever. While she had initially been offended by such a description, she had grown to appreciate that the sentiment was a testament to her loyalty, good-hearted, irresistibly nice, personable, friendly and positive nature, which was often accompanied by a tendency to be a little goofy and overly eager at times.

Just as Rowan shut the door, her mobile phone rang. She stopped to lean against the side as she fished her mobile phone out of the pocket of her form-fitting jeans. The name on her phone's display read 'Captain Tomas Montoya'. Captain Montoya, like Rowan, was a member of Seattle's Police Department.

Rowan enjoyed working under Captain Montoya as, on most days,

she appreciated his no-nonsense and by-the-book approach. Today was not one of those days, though, as she needed more than platitudes about how she followed procedure. For Rowan, following procedure meant nothing when it resulted in her partner in the hospital fighting for her life. Rowan needed someone to tell her the truth, or at least what she wanted to believe was the truth; she needed someone to tell her that there was something more that she could have done.

Rowan sighed and rubbed the nape of her neck before she started to walk towards the door of her ground-floor apartment in the house in front of her as she answered her phone and placed it on speaker.

‘Hello, Captain.’

‘Detective,’ said Captain Montoya in lieu of a greeting. ‘Are you still at the hospital?’

‘I just got home.’ The tight fabric of her jeans enveloped her fingers as she fished for her keys. ‘I needed to grab a change of clothes before I head back to the hospital.’

‘Was there any news on Eddie before you left?’

He was referring to Detective Edana Caulfield, or Eddie as she was more commonly known. Eddie had been Rowan’s partner for the Seattle Police Department for the last eighteen months. Rowan had only just, albeit reluctantly, left the hospital where Eddie was fighting for her life after being injured during what had started as a routine canvass of witnesses before it went drastically sideways.

‘Yes.’ She spun her keychain around her index finger. ‘She has three broken ribs, a punctured lung, a lacerated spleen and a severe concussion. They were taking Eddie into surgery when I left.’

Even Rowan, with all her positivity and optimism, knew that Eddie’s prognosis sounded grim. However, as grim as that prognosis was, it was so much better than her initial assessment. There had been several seconds when she first saw Eddie on the ground that Rowan had been sure that it was going to be a lot worse. Rowan was not sure whether

she had ever been as scared as she had been in that moment when she was struggling to find Eddie's pulse. She had even been relieved for a moment when the emergency room doctor had first given her Eddie's prognosis. That relief was short-lived, though, when the gravity of Eddie's situation sunk in.

As Rowan turned the doorknob to open her front door, she felt someone come up behind her. Before she could react, her head was slammed into the jamb of her front door. Rowan, slightly dazed, dropped her phone and keys as she dropped to her knees.

'Detective? Rowan?' asked Captain Montoya in concern as Rowan reached for her service weapon.

Before Rowan can pull her service weapon from her holster, the figure behind her stabbed her twice in the back; one stab between two ribs into her lung and one stab between two other ribs into her liver. Rowan continued to hear Captain Montoya dimly asking whether she was okay as she fell forward against her front door.

The weight of Rowan's body pushed the door open, revealing her living and dining room. It was filled with the assortment of furniture that Rowan had been able to cobble together over the years. As she tried to place a hand against her back to staunch the bleeding, her gaze landed on one of the two things that were more about design than function. It was a large black-and-white photo of New York's Brooklyn Bridge. She had purchased it and another large black-and-white photo of New York's Flatiron building when she first felt something calling her to New York. She only hoped that she had the chance to see them in person one day.

SIX WEEKS LATER

Another 28-year-old-woman with the same slim build, as well as the long, luxurious dark brown hair, captivating emerald green eyes, a strong jawline, alabaster skin and a charming smile, walked across the ground floor of the converted condominium apartment in the Greek Revival Colonial-style house. The apartment was empty of all furniture and belongings.

The woman standing in the apartment was wearing a navy lace-trimmed blouse and black slacks as she walked across the living and dining room to look out of the room's large windows. Her name was Katherine Matthews.

Kate knew that people perceived her, and rightly so, to be a motivated and determined perfectionist with unrealistic expectations of herself. She also knew that people misconstrued her introversion and guardedness for an aloof detachment. She felt that this could not be further from the truth as she had an incredible capacity for kindness, loyalty and compassion. However, she knew that she preferred to display such traits through everyday gestures instead of more ostentatious grand gestures. She also measured these qualities against a responsible and dutiful nature.

'As I was saying,' said the real estate agent from behind Kate, 'this apartment just exudes warmth. It has 931 square feet of living space. It has a classic open floorplan with oak hardwood floors, high ceilings,

large picture windows and pocket doors. The owners would like to have a new tenant as soon as possible. The owners updated the kitchen about two years ago. It is through to your left.’

Kate turned to look at the real estate agent standing behind her. She had introduced herself to Kate as Agatha Trueman. Agatha was only a centimetre shorter than Kate and had wavy blonde hair that came to just past her shoulders, and warm brown eyes. Kate would have guessed that Agatha was of a similar age to her, being in her late twenties or early thirties. Even in the short time that she had been around Agatha, Kate had realised that the other woman was highly motivated and determined bordering on stubbornness. Admittedly, Kate thought, those were traits that well-suited Agatha to her chosen profession.

Kate wandered away from the window to glance in the kitchen as Agatha continued.

‘The master bedroom is back this way. It has double glass French doors, which open to a rounded balcony.’

Slowly, Kate turned back towards Agatha. The apartment suddenly darkened. The empty spaces filled with an eclectic array of furniture that suddenly materialised out of thin air. The furniture looked like that odd mix that one would normally see in someone’s first apartment. On the wall between the foyer and the doorway to the master bedroom, there was a large black-and-white photo of New York’s Brooklyn Bridge. On the wall between the doorway to the second bedroom and the kitchen, behind the couch, there was another large black-and-white photo of New York’s Flatiron building.

A woman, wearing a rain jacket, jeans and rubber galoshes, walked through the front door and hallway before she walked into the living room. The woman dropped a bag next to the doorway then walked to the couch and sat down. She picked up a remote from the coffee table and turned on the television. In the low light from the television, Kate finally saw the other woman’s face. It was identical to her own.

The darkened room filled with furniture suddenly dissolved, leaving her standing in the empty and sunny apartment facing Agatha.

‘Ms Matthews?’ asked Agatha as she cocked her head slightly to the left. ‘Is everything all right?’

Kate offered Agatha a tight smile to cover her surprise before she walked past her to look at the master bedroom. ‘What can you tell me about the owners?’

‘An older couple owns the property,’ said Agatha after a brief pause.

Kate assumed that the other woman had been waiting on some explanation as to why she had suddenly spaced out and was slightly disconcerted when she found that an explanation was not forthcoming.

‘They purchased the property about four years ago when it was converted into a condo. From memory, they were downsizing. They lived here until two years ago when they moved to a nearby retirement community. They have been renting it out to their daughter ever since.’

‘Please tell me they didn’t evict their daughter,’ said Kate as she tilted her head slightly in confusion.

‘No, they didn’t,’ said Agatha softly. ‘Their daughter died. She was killed about six weeks ago. The owners aren’t sure whether they want to hold on to the property but they are relying on the rental income until they can decide.’

‘Hence the highly motivated part?’ asked Kate.

‘Exactly.’

‘Should I be concerned about my safety here or in this neighbourhood?’

‘No.’ Agatha’s brows knitted together in a frown. ‘Why would you ask that?’

‘You did just say that the woman that lived here was killed less than two months ago,’ said Kate.

‘Right, no. She was a cop killed in the line of duty. Her death had nothing to do with how safe this building or this neighbourhood are,’ said Agatha before she paused. ‘So, would you like a rental application?’

‘Yes, I’d appreciate that,’ said Kate. ‘I’d also like to be notified if the owners are interested in selling.’

‘Would you be interested in buying the property if they are?’ asked Agatha in surprise.

Kate only smiled, more genuinely, in response.

CHAPTER ONE

Kate looked around the apartment. It had now been two weeks since she signed the rental application and the furniture she had brought with her from New York was now sitting around the room. Compared to the eclectic array of furniture that she had seen fill the apartment in her vision, Kate's furniture was all matching, of much better quality and looked expensive without being ostentatious. Kate had unpacked most of her belongings, but there were still several boxes scattered across the living and dining room waiting for her. As Kate walked across the room to unpack more boxes, she turned on her voicemail to play the messages that had accumulated over the last two weeks while she had been finalising the details of her move from New York.

Kate opened the first box, which contained several books. She started pulling the books out of the box one by one as the first message, from her lawyer, began to play in the background.

'Kate, this is Kelly from Blackburn and Slater Lawyers. I wanted to confirm that we have received all the paperwork to finalise the sale of your townhouse. I will call you again in a couple of days to discuss the final steps of the transaction.'

Kate's phone beeped to signal the end of Kelly's message, just as Kate finished pulling the books out of the box. Despite Kate legally holding the title to the townhouse, she had felt conflicted about selling it. The townhouse had sentimental value as it had been the first place that she

and her wife had lived after their wedding. However, while it may have been bought by her and her wife, it had never really felt like home, particularly because she had spent so little time there. Kate also did not like holding on to a property in which she and her wife had planned on building their family together.

She started to break down the box while the second message played. This message was from Kate's mother, Lillian. Lillian was a person who appreciated the finer things in life but was incapable of dealing with her emotions and refused to show any vulnerability publicly. Kate often struggled with the lack of affection and compassion displayed by her mother. She could not help but sigh as she heard her mother's message play.

'Katherine, it's your mother. I received your message. Please tell me that selling your townhouse and moving to Seattle is some kind of joke. I don't believe you would have done something so foolish. It is bad enough that people at the club are talking about you turning down both Princeton's and Columbia's job offers. I will not become a laughing stock because of your poor decision-making.'

'Yes, Mother,' said Kate as she rolled her eyes after her mother's message ended. 'By all means, make my personal tragedies about you.'

She sighed again in frustration as she ripped off the sticky tape sealing another box. This box contained a collection of small photo frames showing Kate with her friends at various times throughout her adult life. Kate started placing these on a side table in her living and dining room as the next message on her phone began to play.

This message was from Kate's father, Edward. Kate viewed her father as a product of his time and societal upbringing. To her, he was a stern, hard-working man who had spent more time at work than at home when she was growing up. It meant he knew very little about his daughter and had never shown much motivation in changing this. He was also an imposing man, who rigorously adhered to the traditional life

of the upper-class life into which he was born.

‘Katherine, it’s your father. I think you should call your mother,’ said Edward’s message.

That had been exactly what she was expecting from her father. She mentally corrected herself. She had *actually* expected for him to have his secretary call but his message was a close second. Their conversations had long since become entirely predictable.

Kate’s phone beeped again to signal the end of her father’s message just as she finished placing the last photo frame from the box onto the table. The next message began to play as she broke down the now empty box.

This message was from her younger brother Robert, or Robbie, as he was more affectionately known. It had only been about twelve months after Edward and Lillian had adopted Kate that Lillian found out she had finally fallen pregnant with Robbie. As Robbie was the son her parents had always wanted, they had always doted on him. Kate had struggled not to let the jealousy of their parents’ overt favouritism of Robbie colour her relationship with her brother as Kate had always loved him deeply and relied on his support through their lives. However, that was not to say that his very devil-may-care, privileged and entitled approach to life was not a frequent annoyance to her. Kate firmly believed that if Robbie ever found himself in hot water, he had the charm and the guile to talk his way out of it.

‘Katie, it’s Robbie,’ said her brother in his message. ‘Can you please call Mum and Dad? They are really freaking out. Or at least, Mum is freaking out and she has convinced Dad to freak out too. While I know you are hurting, Mum believes that you are doing this for attention. Realistically, I know you probably won’t be able to convince her that she is wrong but I think you should try. And yes, I know trying the same thing over and over again is the definition of insanity but under all the hairspray and neuroses she is still our mother.’

Kate could not help the slight chuckle that escaped her at hearing her brother's description of their mother as her phone beeped again to signal the end of the message. The next message started to play as Kate opened another box. This box was larger than the previous two boxes that she had opened and contained several throw pillows that Kate started to pull out and arrange on her couch.

This message was from her former supervisor, Greg Spinda, from the Niehaus Center for Globalisation and Governance at Princeton University, where Kate had been a postdoctoral research associate. Kate had always found Greg to be a considerate colleague and a supportive mentor. He was just one of the many reasons that Kate had enjoyed her time at Princeton University as much as she did, despite the problems it caused Kate in her relationship with her wife.

Kate's wife had not taken it well when Kate agreed to work at Princeton University as she had wanted Kate to take a role in New York. It had not mattered that Princeton University offered a better opportunity for Kate at that time in her career.

'Kate, it's Greg. I know that I said that I thought you should take some time and get out of the city to write your book. This isn't exactly what I had in mind, though. I kind of assumed you would rent a house in the Hamptons for a couple of weeks.' He paused. 'I can't even imagine what you are going through, but I want you to remember that there are people who love you and want to support you through this.'

Kate was pulling a throw out of the same box as her phone beeped again. She started draping the throw over her couch as the next message played. This message was from Kate's brother-in-law, Erin Quinn.

Kate had always found Erin to be warm, supportive and giving. He was the friend that everyone wished they had by their sides when the going got tough. Despite his own grief, Erin had been Kate's port in a storm since the death of her wife, Alex, five months earlier in a car accident. He also had a unique ability to always make her laugh

particularly when she needed it or if the chips were down.

‘Katie, it’s Erin. I won’t ask how you are because I’m guessing you are handling things about as well as I am. Dad and I were surprised to hear that you decided to move out here but I would love to catch up for coffee or dinner or whatever. I just want you to know that you don’t have to go through this alone.’

Kate started to break down the final box as the next message on her phone began to play. However, Kate paused in interest, her head tilted to one side as she listened to the message.

‘Hi, Kate, my name is Ainsley Cooper,’ began the voicemail message. ‘I am an Associate Professor at the University of Washington. Greg Spinda mentioned that you had just relocated to Seattle. I am interested in discussing a potential role for you at the university. You have my number so I would appreciate it if you could call me back when you get a chance.’

Well, thought Kate, that could be interesting. Unexpected but interesting all the same, she thought, as she resumed breaking down the last box. Her phone beeped one last time to indicate that the message from Ainsley was her final voicemail message. Kate picked up all the empty boxes and carried them out of the room.



Detective Eddie Caulfield was a woman in her early thirties, who was very tall and strikingly attractive with a finely curved athletic figure. She had dark red hair, which was currently cut to just below her ears and warm, chestnut-coloured eyes. Her friends in college had always categorised her as a cinnamon roll due to her good, gentle and kind nature. She had always laughed off these attempts and had spent most of her working life endeavouring to demonstrate her bravery, sense of

justice and honour, and her hardworking nature. It was those traits that she felt had driven her to pursue a career within Seattle's Police Department. Most days, she loved strapping on her gun and badge and catching bad guys. But today was not one of those days.

Instead, Eddie was currently pacing from one side to the other and back again. The room itself was about what one would expect from a therapist's office, complete with the almost mandatory counselling couch. Eddie assumed that therapists used couches to help their patients feel comfortable. All things considered, Eddie was not sure the couch was helping her current comfort levels. As it was, Eddie was sure that her therapist was having a field day interpreting her flushed face and pressed lips but she could not help it. She was grappling with a unique combination of anger, annoyance and impatience. She hoped, though, that her therapist thought it was a usual combination of emotions to be feeling after everything she had been through.

'It's not fair,' said Eddie almost petulantly as she continued to pace backwards and forwards across the room. 'My partner has only been dead for eight weeks. I haven't even been cleared for active duty yet.'

'As the one who hasn't signed off on your return to duty, I'm aware,' said Dr Daryl Wong.

Dr Wong was the psychiatrist that the Seattle Police Department had ordered Eddie to see following not only her physical injuries but also the death of her partner. In the time that Eddie had been attending appointments with him, Dr Wong had presented himself as very calm, softly spoken and even-tempered. Eddie thought Dr Wong even looked the part with his glasses and sweaters.

Eddie stopped and turned towards where Dr Wong was sitting with his ankle squared over one knee. He had a slight smile on his face.

'Funny,' said Eddie as she dropped into the seat across from Dr Wong with a huff.

'The reason I haven't yet agreed to you returning to duty is that I

don't believe that you have fully dealt with the trauma of losing your partner,' said Dr Wong. 'Start dealing with that and I can get you back to work.'

'Trust me when I say that I have dealt with my trauma,' said Eddie earnestly.

'Really?' asked Dr Wong. 'Then explain to me why you don't want a new partner'.

'It's just too soon,' said Eddie as she picked up one of the couch's small pillows and turned it over in her hands.

'You are a cop. You have had partners before Rowan. If you are to continue being a cop, then you will need a new partner.' Dr Wong leaned back in his chair. 'Do you want to hear why I think you don't want a new partner?'

'Enlighten me.' Eddie punched the pillow in her hands softly.

'You are blaming yourself for Rowan's death,' said Dr Wong. 'I have spent the last eight weeks trying to get you to tell me why that is. Maybe that is because you don't know or at least you don't want to admit why that is. Regardless, until you are willing to acknowledge that for yourself, you won't be able to move past this.'

'And why shouldn't I blame myself for what happened? Why shouldn't I blame myself for not protecting her?' asked Eddie as she crossed her arms in front of her chest.

'You think your partner died because you couldn't protect her?' asked Dr Wong. 'Let's set aside all the troubling and condescending connotations from that statement, which suggests your partner was somehow less capable of protecting herself than you were for a moment. Instead, just answer me. How were you supposed to protect her when you were lying in a hospital bed with three broken ribs, a collapsed lung and a ruptured spleen? You are only human. What more could you have done? Were you supposed to be with her at all times of day and night? Because if that's the case, your partner was either incompetent or you

have some control issues that we should be addressing.’

Eddie looked away from Dr Wong without answering. It was not like she could tell him she was not human but a Faerie. She could not tell him that she had lost her parents and spent most of her life exiled from her home due to a civil war, which had engulfed their royal family. She could not tell him that she should have protected her partner as she was one of two the two rightful heirs to the throne, currently held by Rowan’s usurping, great-uncle, Cornelius, who had seized the throne that was rightfully Rowan’s after the death of her mother.



The Broadway Coffee House was a bright, airy, well-lit store in Capitol Hill’s Pike/Pine corridor. It was a bustling but casual bookshop cafe. On one side of the front half of the store ran a counter, while a collection of wooden tables filled the other side of the front half of the store. There was also a long wooden bench that ran along the glass window storefront. Several bookshelves offering books for sale filled the back of the store. There were even more bookshelves in the loft area above the cafe.

Kate was seated at a table partially hidden towards the back of the cafe, just in front of the bookshelves. She had a half-empty cup of tea and a half-eaten sandwich in front of her while she worked on her laptop. Kate found that the cafe provided her with the right amount of white noise to prevent her from going stir-crazy but was not too loud as to distract her from the work that she was doing. Kate also found the proximity to so many books to be very comforting but also a bit tempting. She had been coming here every day for almost a week now and there had yet to be a day that she had not bought a new book for her collection. Kate was definitely of the view that one could never have

too many books. That was part of the reason why she was using the spare room in her new apartment as her own personal library.

Suddenly Kate's table was bumped as another customer accidentally backed into the table as they stepped out of the way of one of the cafe's employees.

'Sorry about that,' said the woman without turning around to look at the table she had just walked into.

Kate looked up and noticed that she was very tall with short red hair.

'Totally fine,' said Kate before she looked back towards her laptop. However, Kate's attention was quickly drawn back towards the other customer as she dropped her cup of coffee in surprise and turned towards Kate.

'Rowan?' asked the woman, her brown eyes wide and eyebrows raised in shock.

'Ah, no,' said Kate. 'I think you have the wrong person.'

'Seriously?' asked the woman as her hands settled on her hips. 'Rowan, this isn't funny.'

'Look, no offence but I have no idea who you think I am,' said Kate as she narrowed her eyes. 'I don't know who this Rowan is but I'm not her.'

'Show me your ID,' said the other woman assertively.

'Not a chance in hell,' said Kate.

'My name is Detective Eddie Caulfield,' said Detective Caulfield as she flashed Kate her police credentials. 'So show me your ID.'

'Fine,' said Kate as she pulled out her licence and handed it to Detective Caulfield. 'Here. See. My name is Kate Matthews. Now, I don't know what your problem is but I would prefer it if you left me alone.'

Kate snapped her laptop closed in frustration. She picked up her bag and slid her laptop inside. She reached out and took her licence back from Detective Caulfield before walking out of the cafe. Kate did not notice that as she left, Detective Caulfield's eyes slammed shut, she sagged forward and braced herself against the table.



Erin Quinn was 32 years old, tall with short brown hair, blue eyes and a slight but deliberate stubble along his jaw and upper lip. He was slim with a muscular build. He knew that people, like his sister-in-law, tended to gravitate to his warmth, positivity and optimism. He made sure to show each person who found themselves within his circle that he was a loyal, trustworthy and dependable friend. He also knew that his slightly flamboyant nature made it easy for casual observers to overlook the intelligence and determination that had shaped his professional career.

It was that intelligence and determination that ensured that he was always in his bioengineering research lab at the University of Washington bright and early each morning. Erin knew that the laboratory was on the smaller side but it was well-funded to perform the experiments, take the measurements and gather the data that he needed to. To Erin, it only mattered that the laboratory was equipped with everything that he needed for his research. Admittedly, most days he still felt like a kid who had been given the key to a candy store.

He had not always wanted to go into bioengineering research, though. He had spent most of his life wanting to go into medicine and help people as a doctor. But when his mother was diagnosed with a terminal and rare lung disease when he was in college, his aspirations changed. Instead, watching his mother suffer, had compelled him to find a cure for the disease that ended her life. He knew there was nothing he could do to change what had happened to his mother but maybe one day, another family would not have to lose their mother like he had lost his.

Erin was looking through the lens of a microscope when his phone

rang. The display showed the name 'Katie Matthews'. He smiled widely for a moment before he answered the phone.

'Hey, honey. How are you?' asked Erin.

'Hi, chicken,' said Kate warmly. 'I'm as good as can be expected in the circumstances. What about you and your dad?'

'Honestly? About the same.' He smiled sadly. 'It is surprising how often I pick up the phone to tell her about my day and I just have to stop myself.'

'You know that you can always call me instead, right?' said Kate quickly to fill the silence left by Erin.

'You're going through enough,' said Erin softly. 'I don't want to add to that.'

'But you want to always be there when I need it?' asked Kate. 'We both lost Alex. We both lost someone we loved. We are both grieving her loss. I don't want to grieve her alone anymore. I think that is part of the reason that I wanted to move here. I don't want to be alone in this anymore.'

'You were never alone, honey,' said Erin softly.

'I know,' said Kate, 'but if we are going to find a way through this, it should be together.'

'I like the sound of that.' He paused as a petite Asian woman walked into the lab.

Her name was Akiko Shimizu. Erin had never asked Akiko her age as a gentleman never asks those kinds of questions but he had always assumed that she was in her mid-twenties. Erin had always found Akiko to be bright, bubbly, lively and almost annoyingly perky.

This morning, she was wearing a tank top, which briefly revealed a tattoo on her shoulder before she pulled on her lab coat. Erin had always found Akiko's tattoo, which was a triskelion within a nonagon, unique and fascinating. Despite asking the question several times, Akiko had never told him the inspiration behind it.

‘Sorry, sweetheart, but I have to go. How about we do drinks?’

‘Tonight? You can see my new place?’ asked Kate.

‘That sounds great. I will see you later.’ He hung up the phone and turned towards Akiko. ‘Hi, Akiko.’

‘Morning, Erin,’ said Akiko cheerily. ‘Is that a new boyfriend? Have you been holding out on me? You know I live vicariously through you.’

‘No, there is no new boyfriend. I would have told you if there was.’ He rubbed his forehead. ‘It was my sister.’

‘Sister?’ She frowned. ‘I thought Alex was your only sister.’

‘Alex’s wife, Kate. She just moved to Seattle.’

‘Moving from New York to Seattle five months after burying her wife?’ asked Akiko. ‘Talk about impulsive decisions in the wake of grief.’

‘Actually, it’s surprisingly in character,’ said Erin.

Akiko raised her eyebrows in surprise before Erin offered a small smile in return and turned back to the microscope.



The office of the Chief of Staff to the Mayor of Seattle looked exactly like what Eddie would have expected of a senior-level bureaucrat with a lot of polished wooden furniture including a large and ostentatious solid mahogany leather top executive desk. The huge room occupied the corner of the building with floor-to-ceiling windows that provide spectacular views of downtown Seattle. One of the remaining walls had several floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookshelves while the other wall had a large oil painting of some landscape in an expensive frame.

The man seated at the desk looked to be in his fifties, with wavy but perfectly coiffed dark brown hair that was greying slightly at his temples. He had blue eyes and a charming smile. He exuded confidence and power in his crisp and perfectly tailored suit. He was the very

definition of a man behind the curtain. On the desk was a nameplate that read Nolan Fitzroy.

‘This whole “Master of the Universe” thing really seems to work for you, Nolan,’ said Eddie as she leaned against the door jamb looking at the man seated at the desk. Nolan had rescued Eddie from the conflict that had engulfed their home when Cornelius murdered his brother, King Regulus, and attempted to seize control of the throne from its rightful heir, Queen Titania. Eddie was sure that Regulus’ and Titania’s Chief Advisor had other plans than becoming an adoptive parent to a five-year-old grieving not only the loss of her home but also her parents, who had fallen victim to Cornelius’ ruthless rise to power. But he had more than risen to not only that challenge in Eddie’s eyes but also to the challenge of rallying the fragmented factions that had remained loyal to Queen Titania and her heirs.

‘Thank you,’ said Nolan as he looked up at Eddie. He smiled kindly and gestured for her to come into his office. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘I am going into the station tomorrow to discuss returning to work with Captain Montoya,’ said Eddie as she sat down in front of Nolan’s desk. ‘And before you say anything, all my injuries have healed and my doctors have signed off on me returning to work, at least in an administrative capacity.’

‘That was not what I asked and you know it,’ said Nolan.

‘Well,’ said Eddie, ‘that’s the only answer you are going to get.’

‘If you do not want to talk about that,’ said Nolan, ‘then what brings you downtown at this time of night?’

Eddie straightened her back and squared her shoulders. ‘I ran into someone interesting in a coffee shop today.’

‘Did you come here to talk about your dating life?’ asked Nolan.

‘Seriously?’ Eddie frowned and shook her head. ‘No. Trust me. That is something we will never talk about.’

‘Thank goodness for that,’ said Nolan.

‘Moving on,’ said Eddie. ‘The woman that I ran into, I could have sworn she was Rowan.’

‘Eddie, are you still speaking to that therapist?’ asked Nolan cautiously.

‘Why would you even ask that?’ asked Eddie.

‘I know grief can do strange things to people,’ said Nolan cautiously, ‘and if you are seeing things—’

‘I was not doing a Haley Joel Osment impression,’ interrupted Eddie.

She knew that it was an easy assumption for Nolan to make that her grief had been clouding her judgment. She remembered being so distraught on learning of Rowan’s death that the hospital staff had needed to sedate her to prevent her from injuring herself. She had almost thought she was seeing things when she first saw the woman who was a doppelganger for her late partner and seeing the woman had thrown her for a loop.

But surprisingly for Eddie, her discontent had only been short-lived. Instead, of the grief, loss and guilt that she had carried for the last several weeks, Eddie had quickly found herself filled with hope, hope that their cause was not lost and that one of Titania’s daughters remained alive.

‘A what?’ asked Nolan.

‘You were the one who has spent almost thirty years telling me I need to blend in with humans more,’ said Eddie. ‘You know. “Do as the humans do, Eddie” and “You should only ever be ordinary, Eddie, and never extraordinary”. One would think in all that time, you would have taken your own advice, embraced human past times, and seen a movie or two.’

‘Do you think I am working as the Mayor’s Chief of Staff just for kicks?’ asked Nolan.

‘Well, with a job like this, you can probably buy a lot of really nice shoes,’ said Eddie before she laughed as Nolan rolled his eyes at her. ‘Hayley Joel Osment was in *The Sixth Sense*. You know, “I see dead people”? Which, for the record, I didn’t. But I confronted the woman

and got her to show me her licence. Her name was Katherine Matthews.’

‘Her name was Katherine?’ asked Nolan.

‘Interesting, don’t you think?’ asked Eddie. ‘Particularly considering Rowan had a twin sister named Catriona that we haven’t been able to find since you organised her adoption twenty-eight years ago.’