

Chapter 1

“I’m too old for this crap,” Ruby announced, as she wheeled herself down the hallway of the Mount Rose rest home.

“You’re younger than anyone in here,” Daylen replied, jogging a couple steps to catch up. “And you’ve only been here for an afternoon. I’ll have you out by tomorrow.”

“I could OD on oatmeal by then,” Ruby huffed, as the corner of her wheelchair rammed the doorframe of her room. “Christ! I don’t know how anyone controls these damn things.” Ruby glanced right then left. Not seeing anyone in the immediate area, she stood, wrestled the chair through the doorway then kicked it, sending it crashing into the dresser halfway across the room. “And I swear, if I have to hear Martha play *O Come All Ye Faithful* one more time on that freaking out of tune piano, I’m seriously going to go insane.”

Daylen swallowed a laugh as she closed the door to her aunt’s temporary holding cell.

“She’ll be playing a new tune when I shove that piano—”

“Aunt Ruby, don’t you think you’re going a little overboard? I mean, this place doesn’t seem all that bad. You have a nice room, a television, three meals a day, aqua aerobics classes—”

Ruby cut Daylen's amenity list short with a glare. "Aqua aerobics classes? Aqua aerobics classes? Let me tell you about the aqua aerobics classes. Some genius scheduled them on Fiesta Friday. Thirty old men in a pool after bean burritos is like doing leg lifts in a dirty Tijuana hotel Jacuzzi." Ruby whirled on her niece. "I know I agreed to let you practice controlling your powers, but I swear if you don't hurry the heck up and find this article, something bad is going to happen. Very bad."

"Okay, okay. You go down to the polka lessons and I'll see if I can get any more vibes. If I don't find the article before visitation hours are over, then I'll be back first thing in the morning." Ruby narrowed suspicious eyes. "I promise. Geez."

Ruby pointed a finger at Daylen. "You're up to something."

"No, I'm not. You're just putting way too much pressure on me and messing with my ability to sense things."

"Whatever."

Daylen swallowed another smile. "Don't you think it's odd that this is the second case in a retirement home?"

"It's freaking eBay! These crazy birds are online 24/7." Ruby growled. "But I put an end to that. I *accidentally*," she finger-quoted, "poured applesauce on

the computer keyboard in the Rec room. Theo is working on blocking the site completely.”

Ruby spun her wheelchair, dropped back into it, and wheeled herself toward her niece. “Maybe that’s why you aren’t homing in on the article?”

Daylen took a step back, fortifying her shields. “Maybe what? Why?”

“Maybe you’re thinking about the other rest home caper and a certain tall, sexy, blacked-haired actress that—”

“Moving on. Polka class. Now.” Daylen swung open the door, holding it with her foot, and pointed. “If you want me to free you, you better get to do-si-doing.”

“I’m totally over her,” Ruby mocked as she intentionally rolled over Daylen’s foot.

“Ouch, Jesus!”

“I better be out of here by tomorrow morning, Miss ... Miss Denial Much.”

“Denial much? Kind of lame, don’t ya think?”

Ruby spun her chair to face her niece. “It’s this place! The smell of joint cream and adult diapers is affecting my, my—” She threw up frustrated hands. “Great, now I have Alzheimer’s.”

Daylen took a tentative step, test-driving her recently run over toes. “You know, acting paranoid and cantankerous are the first signs of old age. Maybe we should just fast-track the inevitable and leave you—”

Ruby pushed forward quickly, running over Daylen's other foot.

Daylen grabbed for the wall railing to keep upright. "Christ, Aunt Ruby! I can hardly sneak around with broken toes."

Ruby spun away. "Figure it out," she yelled over her shoulder as she rolled down the hall.

Daylen waited until Ruby made the corner at the end of the hall before heading to the front door. She was limping, but she was limping with a smile of satisfaction as she pulled out the article, a small cat figurine, that she'd located a half hour ago.

The next morning, Daylen followed her aunt into her house, which doubled as their office. "God, it's so good to be home," Ruby announced as she took a long, slow inhale. "Home, where there is absolutely no smell of Mentholatum." She dropped her bag in a chair at the table and walked over to the kitchen cabinets, where she started removing items and placing them on the counter.

"I was going to spring you this morning. You didn't have to Poligrip the piano lady's fingers together."

"Desperate times. Desperate measures," Ruby answered, pulling more canned goods out of the cabinets. "And isn't it amazing how you suddenly came up with the article just before the cops got there? I guess

we can check ‘perform under pressure’ off the training checklist.”

“Yep.” Daylen watched as Ruby took a can of peas out of the cabinet. “What are you doing?”

“Throwing away all the Jell-O, tapioca pudding, oatmeal, and peas.”

“Alllllrighty, then.” Daylen sat and watched. “Do we have anything new on the radar?”

“Yes.”

When her aunt didn’t elaborate, “And?”

“And I don’t have all the details yet,” Ruby offered. More accurately, she hadn’t figured out all the details yet.

“Okay. Well, I guess I’ll take Theo and do a few hours of surveillance on that worker’s comp case.”

Ruby closed the cabinet, scooped up the items she’d cleared out, and dropped them in the trash. “Fine. Do that. I’ll let you know when I have more info.”

Daylen moved to the bottom of the stairs and yelled, “Theo. You’re with me this morning.” She grimaced when she heard a crash, a tumble over what she suspected was the trashcan, then a whimper of pain.

A second later, Theo smiled down over the railing with wide-eyed enthusiasm. “Seriously?”

Daylen couldn’t help but grin back. “Seriously. Grab the binoculars and the camera.”

“Copy that!”

Daylen went back to the kitchen to find her aunt in route to the trashcan with the blender. “What are you doing now?”

“I never want anything blended, pureed, mashed, whipped, or—”

“Margaritas,” Daylen offered, knowing the one word that would stop the destruction of the innocent appliance.

Ruby pondered a second, then reluctantly lifted her foot and let the lid close. “Fine.” She turned to her niece, holding out the blender. “This is now declared to be a liquid-only blender. Correction, an alcohol-only blender.”

Daylen nodded. “Duly noted.”

Theo slid into the kitchen a second later with a camera case under one arm, a binocular case slung across his chest, a Lord of the Rings baseball cap, Risky Business dark sunglasses, and a Magnum P.I. mustache.

“What’s on your face?” Daylen asked.

“It’s my disguise. Kanyon wore disguises on some of your cases, so now that I’m filling in—”

“You’re not filling in for Kanyon,” Daylen retorted.

“Yep, totally over her,” Ruby mumbled from the other side of the kitchen.

Daylen shot her aunt a look before turning back to Theo. “I’m sorry. I mean, you’re helping me, yes, absolutely helping me. But, Kanyon was ...” *What was*

she going to say? My Guardian? She looked at her aunt for assistance, who oh-so-helpfully, crossed her arms and lifted a “*How ya going to finish that one, genius*” eyebrow at her. Ruby had been telling her for weeks that she thought Theo could handle their little Seeker Guardian secret. This would be a good opportunity, but it would require her to speak about Kanyon and she wasn’t sure she could do it without tears. Yes, it had been eight months and twenty-three days but ... “It’s not important,” Daylen said, cutting off her own thoughts. “You can do whatever you want.” She looked back at him, wagging a finger at his face. “Except for the Uncle Badtouch mustache. That’s gotta go.”

“Okay. I can totally lose it.” Theo grabbed the corner of the fake hair prosthetic.

“I wouldn’t–” Daylen started. Theo’s eyes went wide as he let out a whimper. “–rip that off,” Daylen finished.

They walked out the back door five minutes later, Theo with a second ice cube held to his red upper lip.

“Call me when you’re headed back and we’ll do dinner or something,” Ruby offered with a dismissive wave, waiting until she heard Daylen’s vehicle start down the drive before she headed upstairs. “Isadora.” She looked at the ceiling. “I need a moment of your time, please.”

Isadora was gazing out the window when Ruby entered. “I see you survived your latest adventure.”

“No thanks to you. Or,” she whirled a finger at the ceiling, “them. My time in the field is over. I almost died this time.”

Knowing better, Isadora gave Ruby a pointed head-to-toe once over.

“I did!” Ruby continued. “And I might still. I got so many pinches on my butt from the pervy, old men, that they probably gave me blood clots.”

Isadora let out a soft chuckle. “I think you will live. Actually, I know you will.” She gave Ruby a wink.

“Whatever. How long are we going to let this go on?” Ruby made her way to sit behind her desk. “She’s able to control herself. Control her powers.”

“Yes, it would appear she has a good amount of control for the power she possesses. But, no one knows how she or Kanyon, for that matter, will handle their powers when they—”

“Pull their heads out of their asses and hook up?” Ruby finished for her. “I get it. But time is getting short.”

Isadora sat in a chair in front of Ruby’s desk. “That it is, I am afraid.”

“Which means we need them to get on with it so they can start ... you know, figuring the rest of it out.”

“I can tell you already have a plan.”

“As a matter of fact, I do. I just need to borrow an item from the archives. A little one. The one I

retrieved from Woody Allen back in the sixties,” Ruby clarified.

Isadora lost her smile. “You cannot be serious?”

“Completely.”

“Ruby, I have to caution you, though you should already be well aware of the risk.”

Ruby waved her off. “I know, I know. I’ll deal with it when the time comes. I refuse to let my niece spend her life as I have, living without her ...” she wouldn’t say it, “you know, the one she’s supposed to be with. More so, I won’t let her get hurt trying to fight the upcoming battle by herself. Which we both know, she *will* try doing. And we also both know, that won’t work.” She pointed at herself. “Been there. Lost that.”

“I do not think this is the way,” Isadora tried again.

Ruby lifted a hand, cutting off Isadora’s protests. “It’s the way I got.” She picked up the cat figurine Daylen retrieved earlier. “I’ll handle it while I’m there. I just need you to open the door.” Isadora made no efforts to do so. “Isadora, Daylen needs her Guardian! She needs Kanyon!”

Isadora sighed heavily then nodded. She waved a hand toward the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves that lined the office wall. A small swirling light appeared. “Please reconsider your actions,” Isadora pleaded, as the light grew larger.

“I’ll take my punishment. Whatever it may be. Because there’s nothing they can do to me that would be worse than seeing Daylen get hurt while trying to fight this battle alone.”

Isadora gestured toward the light. “Then I will honor your choice and I will not interfere.”