

Chapter 1

“Look, Seth, I am not going to give you the lottery numbers.” Megan pulled her jacket’s hood up over her head, and turned her back against the blast of the north wind that cut through 32th street.

Her best friend moved to block the wind and smiled his most charming smile.

“Ahh, come on. I’m not asking for the whole six, just the first three. That’s only \$500. No one is going to miss a paltry five. Doesn’t change the world, or wipe out civilization as we know it.”

“No Seth,” Megan glared at him. She pulled her coat closer in a vain attempt to stop the wind from stealing the last of her body heat. She knew he was only asking because he was worried about providing for the baby. “You don’t need to win the lottery. You and Barbara are going to be just fine.”

Seth’s eyebrow went up in question as the late tram slid to a stop. “Promise?”

Megan patted his arm as she squeezed pass him through the tram doors. “Yeah, unless you decide to rob a ticket booth at gun point, or something else equally stupid.” She stepped back careful to avoid touching either of the two men who stood holding on to the poles near the doors.

“Ticket booth?” Seth’s face reflected his amusement. “Can’t see me doing that. Can you?”

Megan smiled back at the inside joke, and adjusted her hood now that they were out of the wind. She pushed the brim back a bit, but did not remove it. She glanced around to see if anyone had recognized her, but the few scattered members in this car seemed exhausted, and not at all interested in the two of them.

“Two numbers?” Seth whittled.

“Seth,” Megan’s tone demanded that he stop.

“Well,” he said quietly, leaning closer so that only she could hear, “What good is having an oracle for a friend, if you can’t take advantage of it once in a while?”

“Being an oracle is”

Seth smiled and finished the well worn phrase. “A great responsibility... to be used for the good and not the evil.”

Megan nodded curtly, her hood sliding to cover her face completely. Seth mentally shifted gears. She looked exhausted. Her shoulders slumped under her big bulky coat.

“What have you had to eat today?”

He watched as the coat shrugged.

“What are you going to eat for dinner tonight?”

Again the coat shrugged.

“Come on, you see the future. Surely, you can see an hour from now?” Seth teased gently.

Megan pushed the hood back until her eyes met his. They both knew that she could not see her future, only those of others. “You are having meatloaf from her grandmother’s recipe. Which by the way, you eat it cold and slightly burnt.”

Seth frowned. “Why?”

Megan tilted her head forward and the hood covered her eyes again. The tram slowed rapidly for the next stop. Seth picked up his case and turned to the door. “Call me the second you get to your loft.”

Megan smiled and shoved him through the opening tram doors. “It’s only one more stop and two blocks. Stop worrying.”

Seth’s grumbling reply was lost to the dinging of the door closing and the disembodied tram voice announcement.

Megan braced herself against the pole and rocked to the vehicles' acceleration. She was so tired. Sometimes she felt she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders. All the strands of time wound around and past her. She heaved a sigh and tried to strengthen herself as the tram slowed again, this time at her stop.

Megan pulled her coat tighter, as she stepped from the shelter of the car into the open air station. The wind whipped right through her clothes and unraveled the bright blue scarf from her shoulders, throwing it with disregard along the train platform. Megan watched it tumble and roll as though it were alive, a comical puppet's bid for freedom. Megan watched it go, too tired to give chase. It as it rolled to a stop against a young girl's pant leg. The girl looked down in surprise, then bent to retrieve the escaped knit. Pulling the scarf up for a closer look the girl frowned and then looked around until her eyes landed on Megan. She held the blue scarf out.

Megan hesitated for several seconds before moving the twenty feet to accept the offering. Megan stopped short in front of the girl, her back blocking the worst of the wind. The girl appeared to be about seventeen or so. Her short cropped hair was dyed jet black, and the heavy eyeliner and black clothes marked her as one of the emo crowd. The girl again held the scarf for Megan to take. Megan hesitated, and then reached slowly to close her fingers around the knit. The world narrowed and then expanded as the girl's threads pulled like a giant trampoline in all directions. Time stood still as Megan read the markers, the milestones, the beginning and the end. The girl released the other end of the scarf, and Megan sucked in a breath as time centered on the now. The girl said something, but Megan missed it. The girl smiled slightly. Megan raised her eyes to meet those of the bodyguard that stood beside the girl. She had not noticed him before. The man regarded her with indifference. The next tram whooshed to a stop and the girl and the man moved to board. Within a short minute, the tram roared away, leaving Megan alone, the only soul on the station platform.

Megan shivered against the cold and the story of the future she had just seen. She wanted to call Seth. Just to hear a familiar voice, a sound of the now. But she

knew that Barbara had met her husband at the door with a hello kiss that had sidetracked them from dinner. They wouldn't come up for air for another hour.

Megan tried to shake the lingering tentacles of the story away. She tried to remind herself of Seth's words as she trotted down the stairs to the street.

She repeated them into the wind. "I am not responsible for the fate of the world. I am allowed to save the world only if I want to." But the words flew away, empty.

If Megan chose to do nothing, Lisa Marie Montgomery would be laying in a tangled heap at the bottom of the Phillips Building in two weeks. "Crap," that was not the way she wanted to start this week.

Chapter 2

Megan stood in the front entrance of the Phillips Building and looked with misgivings at the security checkpoint between her and the elevators. She pulled the short skirt of the little black dress she was wearing down again and smoothed her hands down across her hips. She was feeling decidedly uncomfortable with the lack of covering. Not only did she feel awkward with the attention she was attracting, but this outfit was cold. She glanced down at the knee high boots and the short tight black skirt and shook her head. The things she was willing to do to just talk to someone. This should be simple she reminded herself. All she had to do was get through the security check, up the elevator, passed the first secretary, passed the personal secretary, and into his office. Megan straightened and tried to relax. She noticed several men watching her. Just as long as they only looked and did not decide to approach her she would be fine. She watched as one of the men moved in her direction. Megan abruptly walked across the lobby and stopped at the information desk. She was glad to see the man hesitate and then continue walking.

She needed Mr. Murray to get here, but he had not arrived yet. Megan glanced around the foyer. She didn't think she could wait much longer for the accountant to show up. Where was he?

Another of the men started her way. His slow stroll, not quite a swagger, was definitely designed to draw the eye; a walk that said, successful, confident, powerful. Megan ducked her head and pretended not to see. The man changed course and came to a stop at the information counter beside her. Megan frowned as his threads pulled in all directions.

"Hello," his voice was a low pleasant baritone.

Megan sighed and shot him a go-away glance.

"Hi," he tried again, "my name is Brad."

Megan perked up as a tall thin man entered the foyer through the front doors. Finally!

She pushed away from the counter and gave Brad the once over. "Your name is Hal Samson. Your kids names are Milly and Joe. Tell your wife, Rita, I said Hi." She smirked as the man reacted in surprise and immediately started checking the surrounding to see if his office buddies had set him up. Megan strolled across the foyer, as Hal prepared for Candid Camera to jump out of the woodwork.

She hurried to catch up with the accountant before he crossed the security check point.

Arriving at the security desk at the same time as the tall thin man, Megan smiled and waved. She wobbled on her heeled boots before catching herself against the edge of the metal detector.

"Gracious, Mr. Murray, I thought there for a second you were going to go up without me."

The accountant blinked at her in confusion, but Megan was glad to see that the security guard that too busy checking out her legs to notice the other man's reaction.

"Do I know you?" The accountant adjusted his glasses and peered over them at her.

"Well, no," Megan said truthfully, and then added the lie, "I was supposed to meet Lisa here, so that we could go over her math homework on the way back to Gillford in the car, but I was late, and Mrs. Hayes said I should come up with you." Megan tried to make her confused frown convincing. "She did tell you, right? You are Mr. Murray, the accountant that goes over Lisa's budget with her on the first Wednesday of the month at ten o'clock. You are the one that suggested to her brother that she get a math tutor, right?" Megan smiled. "Well, I'm the math tutor."

The security guard smiled, but the accountant continued to frown. Megan's smile wavered and then widened when the tall man waved for her to follow him

through the checkpoint. At the elevator bank he frowned at her again before stepping into the executive lift and pushing the top floor. Megan sighed and relaxed against the back, mirrored panel as the car rose rapidly to the offices of Ameriglobal International; one hurdle down, three more to go.

The second obstacle, the office secretary was only a bump in the road as Megan followed the accountant through the main office and into the executive wing.

At the sight of Mrs. Hayes, Megan faltered. Some people's lives were chaos, unpredictable, turbulent. Their futures were hard to read and never with any accuracy. Some lives like Mr. Murray's were steady, predictable, rational, plodding along like a stick in a marsh. But other lives were large, solid, bold, like the Grand Canyon. They were permanent, consistent. They were so big that even though they are constantly changing and growing, it is hard for the naked eye to see. Megan liked to compare them to the movement of tectonic plates. These were the people that made the world go round. Megan stopped in her tracks and swallowed hard. Mrs. Hayes was the Rock of Gibraltar. Lisa's playboy brother's gatekeeper was not someone Megan wanted to mess with.

"Miss Lisa called and cannot make it this morning," the intimidating Mrs. Hayes was saying.

Mr. Murray groaned in vexation and waved at Megan. "Well, you may as well have a seat, until I straighten this out."

Megan sat quickly without being told twice. Mr. Murray moved toward the conference room with his cell phone to his ear, and Mrs. Hayes returned her attention to her computer screen. Megan sat without moving. The world seemed to have forgotten she was there. She shifted her feet slowly without drawing the secretary's notice.

Megan tilted her head and watched the play of shadowy figures move around the room, the shadows of future possibilities. They were always there, faint waifs in the air. For the most part they were never reliable. The future was liquid and the vapors of the possible never told the true story of now.

Megan shook her head and blinked the future possibilities away. She stared at Mrs. Hayes working away on her keyboard. The secretary's story wound and Megan could see that Mr. Montgomery arrived at exactly eight fifteen, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. He rode his private elevator to his office, and started taking appointments at nine o'clock. Evidence of the past proved that no one got into see him without an appointment. Frowning, Megan realized that she would not get an audience with the owner of Ameriglobal from her seat in his waiting room. She either needed to be in his office or Her eyes slid to the elevator at the end of the room.



Luke Montgomery leaned his head against the side window of the limo, his phone on the other ear. In frustration, he leaned back against the seat as the annoying Mr. Murray informed him that his sister had missed yet another meeting and wanted to know what to do with the tutor. Luke frowned. What tutor? The message ended and the next one filled his ear and focused half his attention. He didn't know what to do about Lisa. She was acting so distant, and distrusting. Everyone said that she was just going through her rebellious teenage years. Luke shook his head, he hoped that was all there was to it.

He felt the car slow and turn into the underground parking lot.

He rolled his shoulders to relieve the stress he was already feeling, and it wasn't even eight thirty yet. He knew he needed to slow down. His trainer at the gym had been harping at him to take a vacation. Who had time for vacations? What? - The world thought that major shipping empires ran themselves? Luke snorted. He did need a little time off. He should call Ron and see about hooking up with him at the club. A little loud music, a couple of drinks, and a couple of girls that would take him mind off the LongCorp merger.

"Hi, ho, hi, ho, it's off to work we go." Luke sighed at his own sad humor, and shoved his papers back in his briefcase.

The car circled to park in front of his private office elevator. He heard Todd, his body guard knock on the roof of the car, a signal that all was clear. The door opened and Luke climbed out. He moved toward the elevator just as the doors slid open.

Luke had only seconds to register the movement inside the elevator before Todd's massive body slammed into his.

Within a minute, the all clear was called, and Todd drug Luke's bruised and battered body back to his feet and away from the side of the car.

Luke blinked at the sight that greeted him. There in the center of his private elevator stood an angel in a short tight dress and knee high gogo boots. She stood relaxed even with two guns pointed at her. Her hands held up in surrender, her auburn hair spilling down her back in waves. Her wide grey eyes contemplated him. She turned in a slow circle to show she was not hiding anything. Luke noticed that the dress was too tight to conceal anything including her very nice curves.

"We should search her," Walter waved his gun in her direction.

The angel tisked at his driver and then turned her eyes back to his. "Luke, I need to talk to you about your sister, Lisa."

Megan tried to keep her voice steady. She knew with her head that she was safe after the first few seconds when the doors had opened, but the adrenaline had kicked in. Her hands trembled as she slowly circled. She was glad to see the dress was doing its job. Megan tried to keep her face impassive as she watched Lisa's brother eye her derriere as she turned. Megan swallowed; Lisa clearly only saw that man as her big brother. Sometimes the perceptions of reality that Megan got from others were biased. She should have remembered that Lisa's thoughts had pegged him as a playboy, but whoa, someone should have warned her.

She stepped forward slowly and still holding her hands up in surrender, "Hi, I'm Megan Sugar. I know who the inside leak in your company is."

Megan watched as his expression went from confused to predatory in under a second. He stepped forward and caught her by the hand. The world narrowed and

dimmed and then exploded. Megan recoiled away from him and stepped back into the elevator. He followed her. Megan backed against the mirrored panel and struggled to pull in a breath.

The threads tangled and weaved. Todd followed his employer and the elevator doors slid closed. Megan closed her eyes against the feelings as a tidal wave crashed over her. Luke moved toward her again, but she turned to face the corner and struggled to pull herself together.

“Don’t touch me,” the whispered plea caught the man off guard. He stepped back to the other side of the car.

“What do you know?” he demanded.

The angel shook her head in confusion and blinked at him as though she had forgotten where she was.

She straightened, sliding up the wall, but was still leaning against it heavily.

Luke frowned. What had happened to the confident, sassy lady that had stepped out of the elevator only moments before?

Megan forced her mind to function. “Your sister, Lisa,” she started but the words just seemed to hang in the air.

She felt Luke slide his hand into her hair. His breath raspy against her neck. She moved against him, inviting his kiss.

Megan blinked. No, she was on an elevator, not in his office.

“What about my sister?” the man, across from her, demanded.

He kissed down the side of her neck to her shoulder and then back up. “Luke,” her voice sounded shaky.

Megan shook her head. She was going crazy. She never, ever saw her future.

“Well?” the man in the elevator with her demanded again.

His hands slid down her back and cupped her bottom through the denim of her jeans. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled until their lips finally met.

Megan looked around confused. The kiss felt so real. But the man in question still glared at her in distrust.

The elevator bell sounded to indicate their arrival, and the doors started to open. Megan moved and punched the stop button. The warning bell sounded. She struggled to pull herself from that kiss and focus. The owner of Ameriglobal glared at her, and the bodyguard waved his gun again.

She knew this was her one chance. She wasn't composed enough to present the facts in a calm logical manner like she had planned so she went for plan B. "Your little sister is being blackmailed by her bodyguard. That is how they get the information from your office," she blurted. "In two weeks she is going to discover she is pregnant, because information isn't the only thing he gets. When she finds out, she is going to jump from the roof of this building."

Megan looked from one stunned face to the other and back to Luke. "You are the only one who can change this. You need to bug her room tonight; you need to get her into a mental health facility. They need to get her off the oxycodine she is addicted to."

The elevator alarm sounded loud in the small space.

"I know you don't know me, but I have sewn enough seeds to cause you to look into it." Megan smiled and turned the alarm off.

The doors slid open and Megan stepped out. She turned to face the two men in the elevator. "And you will ride with her to the hospital in the ambulance, and you will stay the first night with her. She needs you."

With only a brief look over her shoulder she strolled away, through the executive office suite and into the front foyer. The elevator door in the front foyer slid open and Megan stepped into the cubicle. She lifted her fingers in a brief wave and then she was gone.

Luke stood there frozen as the doors of his elevator slid closed, blocking his view of his office.

Todd holstered his sidearm, "That dame is crazy."

Luke looked at his friend and longtime employee. "Crazy or not, put some surveillance equipment in my little sister's room."

Todd shrugged, "You're the boss."

The doors slid open and Luke marched across the reception area. At his office door, he turned back to Todd, "And find out who she is. I want to know everything. From what she ate for breakfast and what she wears to sleep in." Luke ignored Todd's smirk and went into his office. Whoever she was and whatever her game, he would know all about it soon enough.

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