

ELIZABETH GUIZZETTI



THE  
GROVE





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## DAYLA

A STRAY QUARTZ PEBBLE GLITTERING in the morning sun caught Dayla's eye. She scooped it up from the gray sidewalk and felt its mysteries within pearly iridescent cracks. Magic seeped into her veins, mingling with her blood, as she glimpsed into the pebble's existence—a history of hot magma, spurts of growth, tumultuous sea, hulls of ships, barnacles, large fish...

"Dayla," her husband, Oliver, called from reality. "What are you doing?"

Shaking her head, she broke the connection with the pebble and peered back at the dimension in which she lived. Surrounding her, businesses in the Sitka's Quay commercial district bore ocean-weathered cedar shingles, cracked paint, stained brick, and rusted hanging baskets fat with spent geraniums and violets. "What am I doing?"

Her husband's short brown and gray hair playfully danced in the wind, but his ruddy face was set in a frown, not at all hiding his concern for what the neighbors and tourists might think of a thirty-seven-year-old woman standing on the sidewalk talking to a rock.

She pushed her long black hair from her face and held the pebble out to him. "Isn't it pretty?"

"Yeah." Claspng his hand over hers, Oliver drew her close. He gave her a scorching kiss on her clammy cheek. "Are you alright? Still planning on tallying summer admissions today?"

She nodded slowly and gazed up Pacific Way to the brick-faced Pacific Coast Oddities Museum. *Our Oddities Museum*. "What time is it?"

"Almost ten."

"Is there a line today?"

Somehow, they were walking again. “No, hon, but it’s still time to get to work. It’s Wednesday.”

“Wednesday...” *What is a Wednesday?* Tallying summer admissions seemed rather insignificant compared to the call of magic within her, but it was important to Oliver, the Oregon Department of Revenue, the IRS... “And I want to do the Gryphons gaff...” she muttered trying to force the burning to subside. “Gryphons will make tourists stop. Tourists mean jobs. I need to stay here. Stay here.”

Oliver turned the key in the deadbolt and glanced over his shoulder before removing the protection ward in one quick movement. Dayla wished he would stop worrying whether anyone saw he used enchantments as a secondary defense against thieves, and ran her fingers up his ribs as he held the door open for her.

Softly closing the door behind them, Oliver said, “Maybe if you finish talking to the stone, you’ll come back completely. I’m going to count the till.”

“Okay.”

She peeled the yellow daisy sweater off her sticky brown arms, threw it on her chair, and opened her hand exposing the rounded milky white quartz set against her palm. She gazed through the veil and reconnected with the pebble’s existence. “Perhaps, after your travels, you would like a safe home in the museum?”

From the other dimension, the pebble whispered, “I mean to rest.”

She gently carried it to the tableau featuring Victorian Era taxidermied black bears and placed it among the other stones. Sorry about the bears’ shortened lives, Dayla stroked the cub’s head, stood on wobbling legs, and crossed the aisles to the front counter allowing the magic to dissipate from her body with each step. She ran her tongue over her top teeth trying to remove the gingery sweetness of spent magic from

her mouth.

“Are you here now?” Oliver set a glass of water on her desk.

“Yep.” Dayla turned on her computer and opened the quarterly sales spreadsheet.

Apparently satisfied, her husband flipped the closed sign to open.

## JONAH

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP.

Jonah spun around to find the source of the noise. His heart racing, he half-expected to see a bomb. *Christ on a Cracker, this isn't Cairo. I'm in Oregon. No one knows me here.* The carwash control box screeched as it clicked down the last sixty seconds. He shoved more quarters into the slot and turned the knob to rinse. No one in the small town would know what he had done...or his plans for the future. He calmed his breathing. *This won't be like Egypt.*

He sprayed the soap off the Aston Martin DB9. Rainbows danced in the high-powered mist. The droplets coalesced into foamy pools in the deep sleek curves before the water fell to the ground. The car turned everyone's head, but he needed more than that. Setting the pressure gun aside, Jonah picked up a frosted glass bottle filled with a clear emulsion. A love potion made logical sense. People fell in love with inanimate objects all the time.

Uncapping the bottle, the scent of roses, vanilla, and cinnamon overwhelmed him. “Should I do a patch test?” Garnering courage, he shook his head. “The clear coat will protect the paint.”

Standing motionless, Jonah closed his eyes, took in a deep breath, and exhaled. His hands fluttered from the

tingling heat growing in his palms. Magical fervor spread through his spine as he visualized the Keeper of the Sacred Nexus and the Ancients sleeping within it. He opened his eyes, dabbed the potion on a clean sponge, and wiped it across the sparkling blue body of the DB9. “Dayla love me,” he repeated softly three times, careful the carwash attendant didn’t hear him.

His arteries screamed as he pictured the Keeper drawn first to the car and then to him, her dark eyes opening wider and full lips parting, sharing her natural power with him. Ignoring the mounting agony, he intoned to the car, “Tempt the Keeper. Fascinate her with wealth.”

The seduction should be easy. From their website, county records, and a Facebook marketing survey he sent out, he discovered Dayla Fischer was at best lower-middle class. She and her husband owned a quaint craftsman bungalow and ran the Pacific Coast Oddities Museum, the main tourist attraction in their insignificant town. She was born at the PeaceHealth Medical Center in Florence, but otherwise lived in Sitka’s Quay her entire life. A quarter Siletz from her maternal side, Dayla had few connections to the reservation and even fewer ties to her paternal Jewish heritage. Facebook posts showed she was innocently anachronistic in the way the other Keepers he had met often were.

Her husband, Oliver Hayes, was not.

Born in Vancouver BC, Oliver’s family moved to Seattle when he was ten. He attended the University of Washington and worked in Seattle for five years before he and Dayla married and purchased the house where they lived. His parents still lived in Seattle. He served on Sitka Quay’s town council three terms in a row. They had a cat, but no children. That wasn’t surprising. Powerful sorcerers almost never had kids. Still, the husband might pose a problem. Was he gifted

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too? Did the Keeper love him? Jonah's data mining didn't tell him and he wouldn't know until he saw them together.

Jonah's disguise was simple. He would play the part of a visiting sorcerer who wished to walk in the Grove and feel the restorative essence of the Gods' dreams. One could only get so much from myths and legends older than written language, but if he played it right, Dayla wouldn't figure out her role in saving the world until her knowledge was already his.

Repeating his mantras, Jonah circled the car. As he moved toward the back, he listened for sounds in the trunk. He didn't hear anything. He (it?) was probably still napping among the camping gear.

The magical energy began to burn, but Jonah continued his intonation. His mind flooded with images from Egypt's antediluvian God lying motionless as the day He went to sleep. *No, not now. Not again.* Jonah closed his eyes trying to push the memory away, but his mind replayed the vision of Egypt's Keeper bloodied on the loose sand, sucking him backward until he couldn't breathe. Overwhelmed with the God's need for blood, Jonah bit his arm, stepped backward and tripped over the pressure gun's hose. As he hit the concrete, feverish heat and a flash of golden light escaped from its dimension into his. *How could I be so careless?*

He glanced around and wiped his palms on his jeans. Portland wasn't known for being overtly religious, but if the carwash attendant or some nosy drone hobbyist saw him casting spells, they might call the cops. Cops would check the trunk. "This won't be Egypt. Only the Gods' sacrifice need die this time. Not another Keeper," he whispered, adding it to his incantation.

Dripping the rest of the potion onto a new sponge, he wiped the leather interior. Vanilla and roses tickled his nostrils. He would have to drive with the top down. Stepping

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back from his car, he hoped he hadn't wasted the potion. He only had one more left which he planned to bathe in once he found lodging in Sitka's Quay. "It doesn't matter, once I have the Keeper, she will know how to make potions—or know someone who does."

Jonah observed fluffy cumulous clouds in the sky. It didn't look like rain, but this close to the Pacific, one could never be sure. He added quarters to the control box, and rotated the knob to wax. He would make the Keeper understand their higher purpose, but first he must wax the car. Otherwise, a downpour would wash off the potion. That would truly be a waste, and he had sacrificed so much already.

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