

CHAPTER ONE

THE IMPOSSIBLE IS JUST SOMETHING THAT HASN'T HAPPENED YET

The sound of glass breaking woke Meghan from a sound sleep. She got out of bed and tip-toed to the bedroom door. The deep rumble of male voices stopped her: there were men in the house. Their voices carried throughout the house, but she couldn't make out the words. Why hadn't the alarm gone off? She remembered setting it when she checked all the doors and windows. Had the homeowners, for whom she was house-sitting, given her the wrong code? She crept back to the bed and lifted the receiver to call 911. No dial tone. Oh God!

Her cell phone was in her purse, and her purse was downstairs.

Now what?

She needed to find a place to hide. The closet was too obvious, and so was the space under the bed.

She crossed the hallway to the bathroom and found the perfect spot: the wicker laundry basket. She was almost small enough to fit inside. She took a hand towel off the rack and, after stuffing herself inside, put the towel on her head to make it seem that the basket was overflowing with laundry. She put the lid on top for extra camouflage.

Just in time. The intruders clamoring up the stairs: they weren't trying to be quiet. Not good. She could barely make out their words over the thundering of her heart.

"I'll look in the bedroom for the jewelry. You look in the bathroom."

"The bathroom?"

"That's where people keep their drugs. In the medicine cabinet. Duh, what's wrong with you? We went over this. And hurry up."

"Okay, okay. Be cool. The owners be out of town. We got all night."

Meghan heard the sounds of rummaging in the master bedroom: closet doors opening and slamming shut; drawers being pulled out and dumped.

"Nothing," one of the men called out. "You find anything yet?"

"No, man. This was a stupid idea." There was the sound of footsteps coming down the hall.

"Where you going?"

"The other bathroom. They got more than one. Plus, I gotta take a leak," was the surly answer.

The burglar was a big man, and he blocked out the light coming from the hallway as he fumbled for the switch. Meghan squeezed her eyes at the glaring light, but only for a moment. She needed to keep track of the intruder, but the laundry basket was behind the opened door. She tried to keep her breathing as quiet as possible, but she couldn't be sure. All she could hear was her heart beating, fast and loud. Through the spaces in the wicker, a black shadow moved past her line of sight. Meghan fistfisted her

trembling hands: if she could see him, he could see her. All he had to do was look in the right direction.

Fortunately, his back was to her as he searched the drawers and medicine cabinets.

"Nothin," the thief mumbled in frustration. He moved over to the toilet, did what he needed to do, and then washed his hands.

Great! A sanitary burglar.

"Where the hell's the towel?" she heard him mutter. Oh no! It was on her head. She tried to keep the tremors of fear from giving away her position. The shadow came closer and then stopped. He was using the bath towels. Meghan didn't breathe until he turned off the light on his way out the door.

Some of her tension eased when she heard the police sirens growing in the distance. Meghan sighed quietly: the house must have a silent alarm. She'd assumed that the burglars had disabled it before breaking in.

Apparently not, she thought as the sound increased in volume. The two would-be thieves heard it as well. It was hard to miss. Wichita's finest had arrived.

"Shit. We gotta go." The guy sounded panicked.

"We can get out the back."

Meghan judged the voice to be coming from the master bathroom.

Then there was the sound of feet running down the hall and down the back stairs. She heard the screen door to the backyard slam shut. She took a deep breath and let it out in relief. They were out of the house. She could get out of the basket. She lifted her

arms to move the hamper lid, but she felt faint. Probably the tension, she thought. She took another deep breath, but this time, everything went ... white.

Shouldn't it go black when you faint? was her last thought. And then she was gone.

Something was tickling her nose. Meghan wiggled her nose and opened her eyes. She focused and saw deep green spikes. Grass.

She was lying on grass. As she pushed herself to a sitting position, the small white towel fell off her head. What on earth? I'm hallucinating, she thought, looking around in confusion. She was in a dead-end gorge with a waterfall feeding a small pond. The sky was a deep blue, the walls of the canyon were broken rock, striated pink and tan, and the vegetation was a healthy green. How did I get here?

She ran her hands through her hair, inhaling deeply, and then let it out in a whoosh. It felt like the outdoors, fresh yet earthy, not like the antiseptic smell of a bathroom. Oh, goody, full sensory hallucination!

Meghan massaged the back of her neck and looked around again. The waterfall drew her attention. She got to her feet and starting walking towards the pond. She was halfway there when she felt rather than heard a deep rumbling. She looked over and examined the rocks, thinking it might be a rockfall. No, nothing was moving there. The ground started to shake. Earthquake? There was an odd sound, and the rumbling got closer. She turned and saw the dust cloud.

STAMPEDE!

Meghan was in a dead-end canyon and, with animals coming quickly towards her, there was no place to go but up. She ran to the rock face and started climbing. She could do this.

Climbing was one of her favorite sports at the gym, except that she was usually harnessed and wearing shoes. Right now, she was barefoot and in her pajamas, without safety gear. Fear will give you wings. Meghan had heard that adage before, and she now knew that this was true. Her hands and feet found purchase on protruding rocks, in small cracks. She never noticed the cuts and abrasions she collected on her journey upwards. She climbed about thirty-five feet before she could see a small ledge. She moved towards it and hauled herself up. She turned around to see what she had escaped and nearly fell off her perch.

Hundreds of animals were being herded into the gorge. The creatures had six legs, and the sound they made was definitely not 'moo'. That wasn't what had her doubting her sanity.

It was the creatures driving the herds. They were huge flying lions, and they were working together.

A whole flock or would that be a pride, she wondered hysterically.

Being invisible was not an option, but she tried anyway. Meghan scuttled back as far as she could until her back was nestled in a slight indent. She could see but hopefully not be seen. Meghan watched the cats fly in formation and break off when necessary to round up stray 'cattle'? They were trying to get the herd to move towards the pond at the other end of the gorge. They were focused on their task and didn't notice her. Or so

she thought. What she hadn't counted on was that she was wearing her favorite silk pajamas, her favorite bright red pajamas. Not a color that blends in well with the scenery.

Keitar spotted her first. He wondered about the spot of bright red in the rocks and flew over to investigate. What he saw almost caused him to fall out of the sky, something that hadn't happened to him since he was a fledgling. There was a woman in the rocks beside the waterfall. She was trying to hide, but the red clothing was impossible to miss.

A woman. There is a woman in the rocks, he broadcast to the others.

The grigor turned from their tasks to come over and look for themselves. The ledge was too small for any of them to land, and the woman was trying to push further back into the rocks. Why was she doing that? Was she afraid of them? That couldn't be right. Everyone knew that grigor were guardians. Did she need help? Why was she there?

The woman cringed visibly when she realized they could see her. "Shoo kitty," Keitar heard her murmur. All twelve grigor saw that she was afraid, and that made no sense.

Everyone knew that grigor protected the innocent. Keitar tried to contact her, but her mind was shut tight. He couldn't reach her to ease her fear. Impossible. Only a woman of Light could block him. What was a woman of Light doing in the rocks?

Keitar figured out that the best way to reach the woman was to climb up. He landed and changed to warrior form. Climbing was not something he regularly did, and his clothing was torn in a few places by the time he reached the ledge. He spoke softly to try and calm the obviously terrified woman.

He tried to reassure her; she was white with terror. "It's all right. No one will hurt you."

There was no response.

"You know grigor will not harm you."

Again there was no response. "May come up and sit with you? he asked. When she nodded, he moved slowly and sat beside her. She was visibly trembling.

"My name is Keitar. Don't be frightened. I won't hurt you," Keitar said, still speaking softly.

"I'm not worried about you," the woman whispered back, "it's those lions. They can't land, but we can't go down. They have us pinned."

"Grigor would never harm an innocent. Never!" Keitar said heatedly.

How could she believe that grigor were a threat? It was as though she'd never seen one. Keitar was curious as to why she thought that the grigor would harm her. He needed more information. First things first, he needed a name to try and connect with her.

"What is your name?" he asked softly.

"Meghan," the stranger answered absently.

"How did you get here?" he inquired next.

"Same way you did, I climbed," Meghan answered, never taking her eyes off the lions.

"No, I mean, how did you come to be in the canyon?" Keitar asked patiently. "It's a long way from any village. Where are you from?"

"I don't know how I got here. I was in the bathroom... I think I fainted, and then I was here. I thought I was hallucinating," Meghan looked down into her bloodied palms, "but you don't bleed in a hallucination." She looked at him, bewilderment in her expressive green eyes. "Do you?"

"Where are you from?" Keitar asked again.

"I'm from Kansas. But I don't think that I'm in Kansas anymore. Oh God," Meghan whimpered almost hysterically, "did you hear me say that?"

"I'm not in Kansas anymore." Her eyes rolled back in her head, and she fell against him. Keitar grabbed her so that she wouldn't fall off the ledge.

What happened? Allator inquired.

She fainted, Keitar explained. *Something about not being in Kansas anymore was enough to overwhelm her. Have any of you ever heard of Kansas?*

None of the grigor knew of such a place.

With Keitar in warrior form, the grigor were able to get Meghan back to the castle at High Lake before she woke up.

Keitar carried her to one of the upper-level apartments and placed her in the center of the bed.

"No one has heard of Kansas," Keitar mused pensively. "If this is so, that she's from another place, I believe she may be the Summoned One.

Allator, remain here with your flight and guard her. The Shadow Masters will undoubtedly hear of this. I must advise Sular of her arrival."

"Do you really think she may be Summoned?" Allator asked excitedly.

"She may be. Watch her and when she awakens, try to calm her. She was quite worried about not being in Kansas."

"Don't be concerned, Keitar. I understand her value as much as you. She'll be well cared for."

"And no grigor, warriors only. She was more than frightened by their presence," Keitar concluded as he walked out of the bedroom.

He continued out of the suite and carefully closed the door behind him.

He'd thought to place guards, but that would only advertise that something was worth guarding. Allator and his men would be enough.

As he made his way down to the Great Hall, Keitar thought about the woman. Meghan. He'd felt strangely possessive of her. All grigor would be protective, but he felt more.

She was an enigma. It had been a long time since a woman had looked at him with trust instead of greed, although that could change when she discovered he was the heir to Donatar. She was also quick and resourceful. She'd climbed the rock wall to escape the aurenths.

He shook his head ruefully. She intrigued him more than was reasonable. If she was indeed a Summoned One, he couldn't court her to get her to claim him. He'd hoped to find a mate during his grand tour of the various realms if only to escape Cassia's machinations. His primary purpose was to learn new training methods and make

necessary contacts for the future, but that didn't mean he couldn't look for a suitable mate.

He decided to make himself responsible for her and not allow his interest to manifest itself. He might be the heir of Donatar, but he was a guest at High Lake. Meghan had come here. She was needed here. Keitar nodded once to acknowledge to himself what his behavior towards Meghan would be.

He would be friendly but circumspect, no more. But deep inside, where he didn't want to look, he wished it could be otherwise.

Decision made, Keitar walked into the Great Hall to find Sular. The leader of High Lake was enduring the Petitioning. This monthly affair usually lasted several hours and sometimes even went on into the next day.

No one was ever turned away. Sular listened to everyone.

As Keitar entered the Hall, Sular boomed out: "You ask us to do this?!" Be grateful that this is neutral ground. Go! Now! Before I decide to kill you myself!"

Keitar grinned. Yes, Sular listened to every petition, but that didn't mean that he acted on all the requests.

"Everyone out. We'll reconvene in one hour." Sular stood up and stepped down from the dais. He was the only one who had a chair. It kept petitions short. When the day's schedule was made up, people were advised when they should come to the hall. No one HAD to stay for the whole session. Most didn't.

Sular spotted Keitar and walked over to him. He was still furious: "You wouldn't believe what those accursed Limneargians wanted from us. And where have you been? You were supposed to hear petitions with me today, not go out and have fun."

"Sular, take a deep breath and calm yourself. I think that a Summoned One has arrived."

"WHAT? ... When?.. Where is she?"

"She is in one of the upstairs chambers. Allator and his flight are guarding her. "

"What makes you believe that she may be one of the Summoned?" Sular asked.

"She claims to be from Kansas. No one has heard of this place. She said that she fainted and awoke in the west canyon. She was wearing odd red attire."

"Sular, we can't touch her mind," Keitar added in near reverence.

"That seems to be persuasive evidence. The last request did not limit the search to this realm. The Globe extended the search further than we could have imagined possible," Sular exclaimed

"We must decide what to tell her. She fears grigor."

"If she is to help us save the grigor, this could be a problem," Sular said grimly. "We must decide what to tell her. It must be the truth but certainly an abridged version. To inform her that she is needed to save the grigor from extinction might be a bit much."

Keitar agreed. The two men adjourned to Sular's study to discuss how much to reveal to the newcomer whose help was so badly needed