

## CHAPTER ONE

### **THE IMPOSSIBLE IS JUST SOMETHING THAT HASN'T HAPPENED YET**

The sharp sound of glass breaking woke Emma up. She sat up and listened for a moment. Nothing. She relaxed and lay back down. She was pulling up the blankets when she heard it again. She rolled out of bed and tip-toed to the bedroom door. The deep rumble of male voices stopped her: there were men in the house. The sound 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 bedside table and lifted the receiver to call 911. No dial tone. Oh God! She couldn't call for help; 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 tip-toed across 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. The intruders were clambering 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 man is out of town. We got all night.”

Emma heard the sounds of rummaging in the primary 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. He blocked out the light coming from the hallway as he fumbled for the light switch. Emma squeezed her eyes at the sudden brightness, 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 all she could hear was her heart beating fast and loud. Through the spaces in the wicker, she saw a black shadow moving past her line of sight. She clenched 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. Emma 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. The house must have a silent alarm. She'd thought that the intruders had disabled it before breaking in, but apparently not, 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."

Emma judged the voice to be coming from the primary bedroom. Then, there was the sound of feet running down the hall and the back stairs. She heard the screen door to the back yard 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 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? And then she was gone.

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Emma woke up. Something was tickling her cheek. She 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 must be hallucinating, she thought as she looked around in confusion. She was in a dead-end canyon with a waterfall feeding a small pond. The sky was a deep blue, the canyon walls 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 smelled like the outdoors, fresh yet earthy. She massaged the back of her neck while looking around again. She got to her feet and started walking towards the pond. She was half-way there when she felt rather than heard a deep rumbling. She examined the canyon walls, 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!**

Emma looked around for a place to hide and, with animals coming quickly towards her, realized 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 favourite sports at the gym, except that she was usually harnessed and wearing shoes. Right now, she was barefoot and in her pyjamas, without safety gear. Fear will give you wings. Emma had heard that adage before and now knew it was true. Her hands and feet found purchase on protruding rocks or 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 to see what she'd escaped and nearly fell off her perch.

She could finally make out individual animals. They had six legs, and the sound they made was definitely not 'moo'. That wasn't what had Emma 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 quipped softly, using humour as she sometimes did when she found herself in untenable situations.

Being invisible was not an option, but she tried anyway. Emma scuttled back as far as she could until her back was nestled in a slight indent. She could see but hopefully not be seen. Emma watched the lions 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 canyon. They were focused entirely on their task and didn't notice her. Or so she thought. What she hadn't counted on was that she was wearing her favourite silk pyjamas, her favourite bright red pyjamas. Not a colour that blends in well with the scenery.

Keitar spotted her first. He thought he saw movement 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 on the rocks beside the waterfall. She was trying to hide, but she was impossible to miss.

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

The Grigor turned from their tasks to come over and look for themselves. The ledge was too small for any of them to land. 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 when she realized that she'd been spotted. "Shoo kitty," Keitar heard her murmur. All eleven Grigor could see that she was afraid, which made no sense.

He 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 on the rocks?

Keitar decided that climbing up was the best way to reach the woman. He landed and changed to warrior form. Climbing was not something he regularly did, and his clothing tore in a few places before he reached the level of the ledge. He spoke softly to try and calm the obviously terrified woman.

"It's all right. No one will hurt you."

There was no response.

"The aunts can't reach you up here. You're safe."

When again there was no response, he asked if he could pull himself up onto the ledge with her. When she nodded, he moved slowly and sat beside her.

"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!" he exclaimed, stunned that anyone would think such a thing. How could she believe that Grigor were a threat? It was as though she'd never seen one.

Keitar wondered what had prompted her belief that the Grigor would harm her. He needed more information. First things first, he needed a name to try to connect with her.

"I'm Keitar. What's your name?" he asked softly.

"Emma," the stranger answered.

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

"Same way you did, I climbed," Emma answered absently, never taking her eyes off the flying creatures.

"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." Emma looked down into her bloodied palms, "but you don't bleed in a hallucination." She looked up 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," Emma 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. It was quite narrow.

*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.

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With Keitar in human form, the Grigor were able to get Emma 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 a Summoned One. Allator, remain here with your flight and guard her: word will spread, and Shadow Masters will certainly hear of this. I must advise Sular of her arrival."

"You also think she may be one of the 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 do. I'll make sure she is 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 considered placing 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. Emma. He felt strangely possessive of her. All Grigor would be protective, but he felt more. She was an enigma. She was also very beautiful. 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 aurent stampede.

He shook his head ruefully. She intrigued him more than was reasonable. If she was indeed a Summoned One, he couldn't court her: a woman of the Light chose and claimed, not the other way around. He'd hoped to find a mate during his grand tour of the various realms, if only to escape Cassia's machinations. That woman had stalked him, but only because he was the heir. His primary purpose was to learn new training methods and to make necessary contacts for the future, but that didn't mean he couldn't look for a suitable mate, but Emma wasn't available.

He decided to make himself responsible for her and not allow his interest to control him. He was a guest at High Lake, and Sular would encourage Allator, his heir, to garner Emma's attention. Keitar nodded once to acknowledge to himself what his behaviour towards Emma would be. He'd be no more than friendly in his dealings with her.

But deep inside, where he didn't want to look, he wished it could be otherwise.

Decision made, he walked into the Great Hall to find Sular. The High Lake leader was enduring the Petitioning. This monthly affair usually lasted several hours and sometimes even went on into the next day. Everyone was given a chance to speak. Sular listened to everyone.

As Keitar entered the Hall, Sular bellowed: "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 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 as to 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, you need to take a deep breath and calm down. I think that a Summoned One has arrived."

"WHAT? When? Where is she?"

"She's in one of the upper chambers. Allator and his flight are guarding her. "

"What makes you believe that she's one of the Summoned?" Sular asked.

"She claims to be from Kansas. No one's heard of this place. She said that she fainted and awoke in the west canyon. Sular, we can't touch her mind," Keitar added. They both knew that only a woman powerful in the Light could shield her mind from Grigor.

"That seems to be persuasive evidence. The last request didn't limit the search to the known realms. The Globe's search extended further than we could've imagined possible," Sular said.

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

"If she knows so little of Grigor as to fear us, this could be a problem," Sular said grimly. "We must explain the situation, but I think an abridged version would be best at this time."

Keitar agreed. Sular led the way to his study to discuss how to present the information to the newcomer whose help was so badly needed.