

## *Provenance*

### II

The next day at work, I tried as hard as I could to pretend that nothing out of the ordinary had happened last night.

I worked my way through the dissertations, then on to the new books when I couldn't take the dullness of the dissertations any more. There appeared to have been an outbreak of nuclear engineering graduates, and I could only take so much talk about neutrons and protons and excited particles before I lost my mind. Superficially, the day went on like any other day. I grumbled under my breath when Julia nudged up the volume on her country music. I chatted with the new student worker. My online horoscope told me "Tonight: stay in with a movie and a bowl of popcorn." It sounded like a plan.

I tried as hard as I could to stay away from the memories and thoughts that were percolating at the back of my mind. Becca's green eyes. The windowless room where she had written her note. How had she gotten out to mail the post card? Where had she gotten the stamp? Who was that redheaded guy? But most of all, why the hell had Thom believed in my knack of reading the history of things? It made no sense. *I* wouldn't have believed me. It was too outrageous, too bizarre. It was like something from a science fiction novel with characters who could move things with their minds or something. Much too weird to be true.

Except that it was. I really could find out where things had been just by touching them.

"Hey, what's wrong?" I heard Julia call in her too-loud voice.

I started and looked over the DMZ of carts and the half shelves. "Nothing. Just thinking."

"Well, don't think too hard," she said merrily, and went back to her work.

I pattered around at my desk for a few minutes before I gave up and went for a walk to clear my head. The late November breeze caught my hair, lifting the thick waves and making me shiver. I hurriedly wrapped my fuzzy green scarf around my neck and buttoned up my warm gray coat. Shoving my hands into my pockets, I headed for the twin rows of trees that lined the broad concrete path from the library to the quad. The brisk fall air would calm me down, if it didn't give me pneumonia first. A nice walk under the falling red and yellow leaves should do the trick.

I hoped.

As it turned out, I didn't have a chance to find out. I hadn't made it three steps down the path before I heard another pair of shoes shuffling through the dead leaves.

“Ada? It is Ada, yes?”

I turned to face Dr. Jasper. “Yes, it is.”

“May I talk to you?”

“Sure. I’m just walking down to the quad and back.” I headed back down the path, resisting the urge to kick at the leaves like a sulky teenager.

“You haven’t come to see me,” Jasper began.

“Was I supposed to?”

“No, but I expected you to. Thom found you last night, didn’t he?”

“Did you give him my address?” I asked testily.

“Of course not. I just told the boy to follow his nose.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“Not important.” He hurried on, “I was right, wasn’t I? About you.”

“Right about what?” I muttered. Of course, I knew what he was talking about, but that didn’t mean I wanted it shouted around.

“You know where things have been, just by touching them.”

“Just because I passed out when I touched Thom’s postcard?”

“I’ve seen something like it before.”

That stopped me dead in my tracks. “When? Who?”

“Another librarian. I met him at a conference a long time ago. You know, it’s really odd how many of us have gifts like this,” he mused. “Something for a paper, perhaps.”

“Who would publish something like that?” I scoffed.

“You’d be surprised.” He paused, then added, “Young Mr. Vilkas probably told you about my gift.”

“He said you could find things.”

“Well, he’s half right. I told him that I could find *information*. I can’t find things. Or people.”

“That’s what I said. I told him that that was your job. I mean, you’re a librarian. It’s what we do. We find information. No mystery there.”

“True, but that’s not precisely what I meant. I’ve always been able to put my hands on just the right book, or to pull up just the right article when I search. The students who visit the reference desk love me.”

“I’ll bet. Why are you telling me this?”

“I don’t want you to think I’m crazy.”

Too late, I thought.

Jasper went on, "I also wanted you to know that you're not the only one. You're not crazy and you're not just imagining it. What you can do is real."

"You're not going to tell me that you always knew you were special, are you?" I asked nastily.

"Well, you're not making it easy." He trailed off and was silent for a moment until something occurred to him. "Sometimes I wonder if the whole Age of Reason was worth it."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It means that this would be a lot easier if you were an ignorant peasant girl."

I laughed. I couldn't help it. "Right up until I got burnt at the stake, anyway."

Jasper let out a rusty chuckle. "All right, maybe I was going to tell you that I always knew I was special. It's true, though. I could always find out whatever I needed to know. It's not as amazing as Spider-man's super powers, but it's a useful talent. Got me through school, anyway."

"Maybe you're just lucky," I hazarded.

"I used to think so, but it's happened far too many times. Your little trick is a lot more dramatic than mine."

I sighed. "You could say that. Do you know what happened to the librarian who could do what I do?"

"Oh yes, he retired as early as he could and moved to Alaska. He lives in a little cabin and writes weird little mystery novels. They don't sell. Not all that surprising, really. They're awful."

"Something to look forward to," I mumbled.

Jasper ignored me. "Did you help Thom?"

"Eventually. It took some persuading on his part."

The old librarian turned to face me. "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"No, why would he?" I knew I should have kicked Thom out last night. He *was* a crazy person. Shit, and he knew where I lived. Maybe I should go by the hardware store and buy a burglar chain. Did I need a drill to install a chain? Surely my landlord would understand a few tiny holes.

Jasper's next comments didn't do much to pull me out of my uneasiness. "Thom's a good boy, but very determined when it comes to his family."

"Well, I'm definitely not going to let him in my apartment again."

"Probably wise."

"Not to be rude, but are we done?" I asked.

"Not exactly. I don't think that Thom told you the whole story. He told you that Becca had been

kidnapped, yes?”

I nodded.

“That part is true, but it's not the whole story. Becca died five days ago. I found the story in the paper last night, after Thom went to your place.”

I was so surprised that I couldn't respond.

Jasper continued. “He doesn't want to find her. He wants to find the man responsible. He wants revenge.”

No wonder he didn't want to go to the cops, I thought. “Does he know what you found?”

“I haven't called him yet.”

“Are you going to?”

“I'm going to have to talk to him eventually. I'm not sure what to tell him,” Jasper admitted.

“Call the cops. It's their business.”

“I will not. I know what young Mr. Vilkas would do to me if I brought them into it. I supposed that I'll just hand the article over and wash my hands of the whole thing. At any rate,” he declared, “it's nothing for you to worry about. This is between Vilkas and I.”