

Chapter One

Earth - 2012 A.D.

It was a beautiful spring morning when Sarah Beauregard was called to the reading of a will. Her aunt had left her she knew not what. As a favorite of her Aunt Jo, Sarah was the only one of her generation to receive a personal bequest. She never saw much of her aunt, but somehow she was one of the few people of consequence in Sarah's life. Her grief was both deep and extremely private.

She was dressed in a simple black chiffon dress, her dark hair twisted in a loose knot at the nape of her neck. Rich brown eyes and a smile that lit up her face were her chief attributes. Although her skin, golden even in winter, was flawless, her features were warm, open, and delicate rather than classically beautiful. Her petite frame was lightly muscled demonstrating that she kept in good shape but was no athlete. When she chose she could accentuate the voluptuousness of her body, and, in fact, her ample breasts would have been the trait men might have noticed first if not for the aforementioned smile.

"Good morning, Ms. Beauregard. Please, do go right in," the secretary greeted her as she entered the lobby of Grafton and Howell attorneys-at-law. Sarah walked through the ornate doorway to her left to find John Grafton, Sr., her aunt's attorney, her mother, father, uncle and aunt. After a loving but solemn welcome by her family, Mr. Grafton asked for their attention.

"As you know, we are here today to read the will of Miss Josephine Hanover. So, with your permission, I'll begin. 'I, Josephine Amelia Hanover, being of sound mind and body do hereby bequeath my worldly goods in the following manner: To my sisters, Karen Marie Hanover Langlois and Elaine Rebecca Hanover Beauregard, I leave my estate, including all funds and assets in the amount of \$500, 000 to be divided equally. My personal possessions

should be disposed of as my sisters see fit with one exception: my antique lamp from Arabia I bequeath to Sarah Katherine Beauregard with the condition that she retain ownership of said lamp throughout her life and bequeath it to her own heirs. Sarah, never forget that life is full of love and joy and even something as simple as an old lamp can hold wondrous things.

‘Sarah Katherine Beauregard shall also receive \$50,000 from the trust set up by me in her name. Hadley Jordan Beauregard shall also receive \$50,000 from the trust set up by me in her name. Upon reaching eighteen years of age, Michael Ethan Langlois and Kevin Tyler Langlois shall also receive the same amount from the trusts set up by me for each of them. My family has meant so much to me in my life and I send you all my love. I do certify that this is my last will and testament signed upon this day the 6th of August 2008.’

“I have here copies of the will for each of you, bank statements, lists of assets, as well as various other effects. Ms. Hanover specifically requested that I bring the lamp mentioned here today and turn it over to Sarah myself,” continued Mr. Grafton.

From a locked cabinet behind him, he retrieved the lamp. Tarnished brass, the oil lamp was like something out of an old film, Sarah thought, as she reached for it and studied it closely. Suddenly, as she touched it, a whisper of something indefinable reached her. Whether of power or magic or passion, Sarah was not sure but she knew in that moment, that she would never sell it.

Once home, Sarah placed the lamp on the kitchen counter and gazed at it, lost in thought. Never had she experienced such a reaction to an inanimate object. That flash of an instant when that indefinable something had rushed through her, had been as down to the soul exciting as it had been frightening. Never had the lure and power of the forbidden been so strong. The presence of the lamp made her distinctly uneasy even hours later. Still, Sarah was many things; a

coward was not one of them. So she would retain possession of the lamp, not because she had to but because she wanted to. To have such a firm conviction was, to say the least, disconcerting, but there you had it. Decision made. She would keep the lamp and perhaps one day uncover its secrets.

Sarah got a cold Dr. Pepper from the refrigerator then fetched polish and cloth to clean the lamp. As she began to rub it, a smile played on her lips. Thoughts of Aladdin, magic lamps, and genie's flitted through her mind.

A hum of the energy she had felt before coursed through her with an electrifying jolt. As she continued to rub the lamp, unable to stop, a bright white light blinded her and a tremendous rush of wind filled her ears. Without any further warning, the full power of the lamp knocked her to the ground then all fell silent. Disoriented, she slowly sat up as the light gradually faded. Before her stood the most beautiful man she had ever encountered. Dressed in simple trousers and a loose white linen shirt open at the collar, he was tall, dark haired and at the peak of physical perfection.

This apparition looked calmly about him, then, seeing Sarah and no one else, he bowed. "What is your will, mistress?"

For a moment Sarah simply sat sprawled on her own kitchen floor, gaping up at him. Stunned, barely able to get out even a word, she finally managed, "Huh?"

"I asked your will, mistress," he repeated, gazing quizzically at her.

Still a bit dazed, Sarah got up from the ground and finally found her voice. "If you mean me, my name is Sarah. Who are you?"

"I am the genie of the lamp, obviously. A Jinn to be precise," he replied.

"And I suppose you are going to tell me you're going to grant me three wishes, right?"

Just save us both the trouble and tell me who you really are and how you got in here before I call the police.”

“Hmm, a demonstration of my powers seems to be in order. Very well. Do not be frightened.” With that, in the blink of an eye, Ian somehow came to be standing directly in front of her.

“Whoa,” breathed Sarah, unable to believe what she had just seen with her own eyes.

“Indeed,” affirmed Ian with a grin.

Sarah stepped slowly toward Ian, one shaking hand outstretched. With the very tips of her fingers she brushed Ian’s well muscled chest then jerked back her hand with a sharp intake of breath, as if burned. “Okay, so if you aren’t some sort of hallucination, and I’m not completely convinced you aren’t, then shouldn’t you tell me the rules?”

“Of course, forgive me, Mistress Sarah. The rules are really quite simple. One: three wishes and only three wishes. Two: all wishes have consequences, good and bad. Be prepared for them. Three: once a wish is made, there is no changing it, so be warned.”

“You are serious, aren’t you? Okay. I think I should sit down now,” she said weakly. Keeping her eyes on Ian every step of the way, Sarah headed straight to her sofa and put her head between her knees.

“Are you quite all right?” Ian asked.

The sincere concern in her tone forced her to make the effort to speak. “Well, that depends on what you mean by all right. I must be crazy or dreaming. That’s it. I’m dreaming and in just a moment I will wake up and be just fine,” came Sarah’s slightly muffled voice.

“Don’t be absurd. You are not dreaming but you do look a bit pale. Where are your smelling salts?”

“Smelling salts? People don’t carry smelling salts anymore. Besides, I am not going to swoon, for Christ’s sake,” replied Sarah sharply, as she sat up.

Ian promptly agreed, “As you say, Mistress, but perhaps a cup of tea might be just the thing.”

“My name is Sarah Beauregard, I hate tea and we will get along much better if you do not call me mistress. Do you have a name or should I just call you the genie of the lamp?”

Something indefinable crossed the genie’s face at the question. It might have been surprise or pleasure, or perhaps more that flashed through his deep blue eyes that she would care to know his name. As she glanced up to find him searching her face, their eyes met. The world seemed to turn upside down and when, after a heartbeat it righted itself, it was forever changed for them both. Shaken to her very foundation, Sarah lowered her eyes. Never had she felt such a connection to another being and it scared her more than a little. Clearly just as affected as she, Ian broke eye contact.

After a time, in a far less reserved tone he informed her, “My name is Ian McLinnin and you, Sarah Beauregard, are very beautiful.” After taking in his new surroundings for a moment, Ian continued, “Might I inquire as to the time and place?”

“It’s 2012 and this is Baton Rouge, Louisiana in the United States.”

“The United States,” asked Ian, “Do you mean the Colonies? So the Revolutionaries won, did they? Excellent.”

“That’s right. I cannot even believe I am asking this but, how long has it been since you were last...released?”

“That would be 1776, just after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Quiet an exciting time,” Ian assured her.

Rising abruptly, Sarah walked back toward the kitchen and took a wine glass from a cabinet. “I hope you don’t mind, Ian, but I could really use a drink. Would you like one?”

A quarter of an hour later, relaxed by more than one glass of wine and exceptional left over Chinese food, Sarah inquired, “Ian, how did you become a genie? Or have you always been one?”

“Actually, it’s Jinn and we are born not made but I wasn’t always the genie of the lamp. I was confined and forced to do the bidding of others.”

“Forced? By whom? And more to the point, why?” asked Sarah sharply.

“Simplest answer? By a very evil and very powerful sorcerer named Alaster because he could. But I would really rather not talk about me. What I would like to know is, are you ready to make your wishes now?”

“No, I don’t have any idea what to wish for. I’m not even sure if I believe you,” admitted Sarah, smiling over the rim of her glass as she sipped.

“I think you do believe and I think that scares you,” Ian said softly. Setting down his glass of wine on the table, Ian reached over to gently take her hand in his. “Is there nothing you want?” For a moment he let down his shields and let her see his rapidly burgeoning desire for her, just an infinitesimal portion of it, just for an instant. She could feel, she could practically see how much he longed to be close to someone, anyone, but suddenly, unexpectedly, especially to her.

Sarah found herself lost in his eyes all over again, utterly mesmerized. Blinking, doing her best to break the spell, she took a deep breathe and replied, “Oh, there are so many things I want but even I only have three wishes. When I decide, you’ll be the first to know.”

Rising from her chair and setting her wine glass on the kitchen counter nearest the sink, Sarah turned back to Ian, hesitated, then ventured, “Ian, I am not sure what to do about tomorrow. I have to go to work and I absolutely cannot take you with me. On the other hand, I’m not entirely comfortable just leaving you here on your own to fend for yourself when you’ve never encountered the 21st century before.”

“You work? As a young woman alone, I suppose you would have to work. What sort of work do you do?” Ian wondered, intrigued.

“I’m a librarian,” she replied.

“Somehow, this does not surprise me. I do not believe I have ever seen so many books outside of one.” Ian indicated her book shelf and walked over to peruse the titles. “You must be well educated to be in such a position and your father must have been a very sensible man,” continued Ian as he turned back to Sarah.

“I am fairly well educated but things are quite different now for women. A lot has changed in 200 plus years, Ian,” she explained, smiling. “A woman can be anything she wants to be provided she has the will and the ability.”

“Just as it ought to be,” agreed Ian.

“So, if I left you here, do you think you could manage?”

“I have commanded an army, ruled a kingdom, done everything I could to save my people and endured near to a thousand years in captivity. I think I can handle one day alone.” His voice carried all the confidence of a man who has done all of these things and more over the years. “Besides, I pick things up very quickly. Give me an hour with your books and I’ll know much of what I need to know.”

Sarah nodded then back tracked. “You ruled a kingdom? That is a story I will have to

hear,” she said in fascinated tones.

It never even crossed Sarah’s mind that allowing a strange man the run of her gorgeous, well-furnished loft apartment for an entire day might not be a wise idea. Or that allowing him to spend the night in her guest room, come to that. Yet, somehow, she was not at all worried. Instinctively, with an intuition she had long since learned to trust, she knew that no matter what might happen between them, he would never seek to intentionally harm her.

“Ahem, well, that’s settled then. I suppose I ought to say goodnight,” said Sarah some moments later. “The guest room is the first door on the left. If there is anything you need, just give a shout.”

“Yes, of course. “

Sarah started toward her room but hearing Ian call her name softly, she circled back.

“Yes?”

“Thank you.” Ian told her.

Earth 2012 A.D.

Impressive was the first word that came to Francesca Whitney’s mind as she entered Alaster Tunney’s office. Although, on reflection, impressive was really an understatement. She estimated the room was half the size of her apartment as she made herself comfortable in the visitors chair facing the desk. While she waited for him to appear, she took in the finer points. An antique table of solid oak serving as a desk held a state of the art computer but little else. The very old, very expensive Persian rug on the floor tempted her to take off her shoes and wiggle her toes in it. Everything was chosen to flawlessly accent the Monet on the wall. She would bet her brand new \$600 Italian pumps that the painting was no reproduction. Clearly this was a man who had a taste for and could afford the finer things.

Her musings were stopped short by the sound of the door opening. Hastily she rose, holding out her hand in automatic greeting. “Mr. Tunney, thank you for agreeing to see me on such short notice.” Her voice died in her throat as he approached and the sun lit his face. A stunningly handsome and extremely well preserved fifty, his body was toned but his eyes were as cold as an arctic wind. She blinked and pulled herself together enough to realize he was speaking.

“Not at all, Ms. Whitney. I am always happy to speak to interested journalists about my company.” He smiled and it transformed his face. It made him handsome to a distracting degree but it still did not reach his eyes.

Francesca shook his hand and was surprised to find it warm. Somehow she had expected his palms to reflect his eyes.

Alaster studied the young woman before him. Pretty, though in a harsh sort of way, he judged. A blunt haircut and too much make up were largely responsible for this impression, that and the sharp intelligence which shown out of her brown eyes. He gestured to a seating area on the left rather than the desk and they both sat.

After settling herself in the plush armchair, Francesca took out her mini-recorder and placed it on the coffee table in front of them. “I’d like to begin this interview by confessing that I am here under false pretenses. I am not writing a financial piece on your company. I am actually here to speak to you about the missing girls.”

Alaster did not miss a beat. “The Springfield five? Five girls missing without a trace, the kidnapper/killer at large, same m.o. and cause of death each time all found in Springfield, Illinois? What could those girls have to do with me?”

Francesca took out a snapshot of each girl and placed them on the table before answering. “On the face of it, nothing. But when I looked further, I discovered the only connection these

girls had was to you. All five of them were employed by Turnstyle Industries or one of its subsidiaries. Would you care to comment?"

An indulgent smile played upon his lips as he took a moment to answer. "Ms. Whitney, do you have any idea how many people this company employs? Not to mention its subsidiaries? I believe the number falls somewhere in the hundreds of thousands."

"So you are saying this is just a coincidence? I find that hard to believe."

"Call it what you want. I have no further comment and this conversation is over." He rose to his full height and strode toward the door.

Francesca did not budge but remained firmly in her chair. "You might want to reconsider that," she ventured.

With a whoosh, Alaster closed the door and turned back to face her. "Really? Why?"

"Well, right now, I'm just following a lead. Refuse to talk to me and I might start to wonder. Then I might start asking questions." She shrugged and gave him her most charming smile. "I am a journalist after all."

He would rip her to shreds, slowly, painfully and at the first opportunity, he promised himself. He took a deep, cleansing breath and imagined the scene for a moment. Thus fortified, he was able to reply with some measure of calm. "I see. I hate to disappoint you but I don't know anything more about these women than what I just told you."

She considered him for a brief moment, then rose. "Fair enough. I'm sorry to take up your time."

He shook her hand, then escorted her to the door. "No problem. A few minutes with a beautiful woman is never a waste."

As she turned to go, however, he stopped her with a word. "All the same, if I see

anything of your accusations in print, I will see to it you won't even be allowed to write your own grocery list once I am through with you." He gifted her with that smile again, only this time it was full of satisfaction. The blunt shock which must have shown on her face had to be the cause, Francesca assumed. "Just so we understand each other," he finished.

With a stiff nod, Francesca walked out. When the door shut behind her she breathed a sigh of relief, even if she was ashamed of it. In spite of, or perhaps because of, that moment of bone deep fear she called her editor that very night.

"Jake, have you got that list of properties?" Fran inquired of her intern.

He crossed the crowded, chaotic newsroom. "As a matter of fact, I do. You may now fall at my feet to express your praise and awe."

"I bow to you, oh god of interns. Your speed, accuracy and unmitigated brilliance all astound me," she assured him.

"So they should. I hold in my hand a list of all current and, if unoccupied, previous residences, corporate apartments and commercial property. In short, I have here any real estate personally owned by or connected to Alaster Tunney or his company. Are you sure you want to do this?"

Rather than waste time with a reply, she stretched to grasp the paper but he held the document just out of her reach.

Francesca met his gaze with a level one of her own. "He's dirty, Jake, I've always known that. Now, I think he might be a murderer. Correction, he is a murderer. I definitely want to do this." Without further ceremony, she snatched the list from his hand.

"All right but if you are really going to take this guy on, then I am coming with you."

With a resigned grimace, she agreed.

They stopped at the end of a long lane to gaze at the plantation situated at the far edge of a clearing. “Frannie, I am just going to come out and say it. I don’t like this.” Jake eyed the building and its environs with deep suspicion. “This place is very isolated. If we’re caught we won’t have a prayer. There’s no possible way help would reach us in time.”

Fran quelled a responsive shudder and replaced it with determination. “Oh come on, Jake. There’s a story here, you know it and I know it.” When she got no response, she gave him a light tap on the shoulder to get his attention. “So lets get what we need and get the hell out, yeah?”

“Yeah,” he agreed with a distinct lack of enthusiasm.

The two exited the vehicle and walked beyond the perimeter so as to approach the building in, to quote Fran, ‘a stealthy manner’.