

Ginkgo leaves drifted down like butterfly wings outside the gem show. They made a yellow carpet on the walkway to the boarding school's gymnasium. Within the swirling leaves, Andi heard a voice. Hollow metallic vowels rustled like leaves in gutters. Consonants scratched and thumped like animals trapped in heating ducts. When the frantic skittering of syllables merged into words, a ghostly plea slipped into her consciousness. *Trapped . . . help.*

"You'll find your way to the Other Side," Andi whispered.

Some days, the spirits refused to leave her in peace. Turning off spirits' voices was like trying to keep a snake in a bird cage. The Shadows had been with her since she was four. Her mother had sent those spirits to watch over her. But the voice she heard today was not the Shadows. They rarely spoke.

*Please . . . help.*

Andi opened the door. "I'm not the one to help you," she told the young voice. "I attract bad men."

The ticket ladies took her money and stamped her hand. She scanned from one end of the gymnasium to the other. So many vendors. Where to start. Left past the fossils to a station called P&S Lapidary. They always had unique pieces.

*Please . . . ma'am.* The whisper had a faint Southern lilt.

"Aw come on. Hijack someone else's head. Go see my ex-husband. Convince him to give me all his money." Andi looked left and right to make sure no one had heard. No need to worry. Odds were good that at least one other person in the crowd talked to herself.

Andi made her way through thirty stations. Through bargain-bound women rummaging in bins of clearance beads, through vendors taking orders to set stones, through miles of bead

strands, she searched for the perfect happy, shiny piece. Twice around the gym, and that whispering voice drilled its way into her conscience again.

*Please . . . buy . . . me.*

Cripes! The urgency of that sweet young voice. She heaved a sigh. "Hope you're not expensive. Where are you?" Her feet ached and the place was stifling hot. "Where?"

*Over here!*

She couldn't see a damn thing through the shoppers lined up two people deep at the stations. Up on her toes, down, from foot to foot, sideways. A tiring, annoying dance. Andi shivered despite the stuffy gymnasium.

*Here!*

Easing her way through the shoppers, she peered into a glass display case. Malachite beads, a red coral branch necklace, two strands of ringed freshwater pearls, and one pendant with a cameo-style face etched in bone.

The vendor with a bolo tie looked like her ninth grade geography teacher. "Let me open that for you. The face pendants are going fast. Only two left." He lifted the hinged glass cover.

*Me!* A loud whisper from the carved pendant with a girl's face.

Andi looked intently at it. Like most cameos, the face was a side profile. Tendrils of the girl's curly hair escaped an upswept hairdo, framing her face. At first, she appeared to be asleep. Then the girl's face turned and studied her too, eyes blinking as if she'd just awakened. Andi shivered. In the spirit world she'd inherited from her mother, voices whispered. Images in jewelry didn't move.

*What now?* She spoke silently. Subconscious to subconscious.

*Hurry, ma'am! Buy . . .*

A woman who reeked of Chanel No. 5 snatched the face pendant from the case.

"Excuse me," Andi said. "I came here to buy that piece. It called to me." There now, she'd admitted she was crazy. She gave a lopsided grin and a shrug. "Please could I have it?"

"Sorry, hon. I got here first." A condescending glance at Andi, and the lady wrapped her bratwurst fingers around the pendant.

"Not to worry, ladies," the seller told them. "I have another like this." He pushed the tablecloth aside, reached under the table, and pulled out a second pendant. "It's stunning with Namibian Pietersite accents. I could let you have it for the same price."

*No . . . me.* An adamant voice.

"I don't want the other pendant," Andi said. "I came here for the one in her hand." At the next booth, a woman holding a jade jar stopped talking and stared at her. Andi blushed, knowing she sounded like a petulant child.

Suddenly, Chanel Lady gasped. "Ouch! Awful thing cut me. It has sharp edges." A thin line of blood welled on her finger, and she dropped the pendant as if it had bitten her.

Andi caught it before it hit the floor. The silver bezel felt ice-cold. A young girl's eyes gazed up at her and blinked. *Thanks, ma'am.*

She stared at the pendant. Her mother had warned about spirits attaching to people. If spirits attached, she'd said, terrible things could happen.

Chanel Lady cradled the darker pendant. Not a word was uttered from it. Maybe the tea-stained piece believed in being seen and not heard. Its bone face was younger. Pietersite in the top bezel had chatoyancy, a luminous quality. Thin wavy splotches of browns, blacks, reds, and yellows swirled through the dark stone like tiny ice crystals in frozen latte.

"Yes. I like this one better. Excellent quality Pietersite," Chanel Lady said.

"If you don't mind, I'll take her payment first." The seller probably wanted to send the woman to another station before she started a fight with his customers.

"No problem. Is this ivory?" Andi asked. Whether vendors called it mammoth bone or not, elephants didn't deserve to be slaughtered for jewelry.

"Absolutely not. Wouldn't sell it if it was. Cow bone," he assured her.

A triumphant smirk aimed at Andi, and Chanel Lady made her way through the crowd. Subduing an impulse to give her the middle finger, Andi turned back to the pendant. She studied the heart-shaped face, turned it over and winced at the tiny price sticker. Was she insane? Andi couldn't afford that; she'd lost her teaching job.

"I'll need your address and email." The seller handed her a clipboard.

She'd fought over it and won, no changing her mind now. While he charged her credit card, Andi filled out the information for his mailing list. Then she weaved through the shoppers to find a quiet corner by the concessions stand.

What the hell. The pendant was a dose of credit card therapy. Unzipping the plastic sleeve, she lifted the piece by the bail. Two bezels set in silver. One disk held labradorite, a luminous blue stone with black veins, and in the second bezel, a face carved in bone. She shifted it in her palm, studying the details. Had light played with the image, making it look like the girl moved? It would warm at the touch of her skin.

Once more around the gym, and she left the show, slogging through the field toward her car, wondering how a whispering girl had convinced her to buy a pricey pendant. Yet, she had a sense that something other than her credit card bill had changed.