

CHAPTER ONE

Fortune Cookie Antics

Libraries are supposed to be quiet, but not like *this*.

This feels oppressive, like a vacuum-sealed tomb. It makes Jerry hesitate in the doorway, somehow uneasy about entering his own private space. As a lawyer, he's used to separating fact from fiction, then forging reality through reason and law. Yet the events of last week somehow haunt him still. It's been impossible to stop the flashbacks: the visage of emerald plumes erupting from the Magnus Building. It clearly rocked the foundations of his world. Hard.

Worse yet is the complication of *her* imminent arrival - Madame Kyo, the so-called "Baba Venga of Little Tokyo." Jerry prefers just to think of her as another LA grifter, peddling nonsense prophecies and rumors. But knowing that she is somehow

involved, and that he'll have to represent her, well... A chill quivers down his spine.

Taking a deep breath, Jerry finally vectors forward into the library, heading for his monstrosity of a desk. There, he drops the stack of case files with a resounding clap, and his eyes are drawn to the precarious pile of open mail that awaits him.

The top-most paper is anything but typical when compared to the rest. With its textured weave and embossed logo, it practically leers at him with the unmistakable branding from the Omishi Group.

The Omishi Group is one of a dozen corporate partners in Jerry's life, yet something about their logo always seems to keep Jerry's gaze hostage. The interweaving of sumptuous purple against dark gray fibers of the paper looks like both a bruise and an arcane seal. Something he can't help but look at.

The only thing that stands out more is the bold red lettering at the bottom of the letterhead, barking its message:

FIND HAN-SO SHIRO! ALL COSTS!!!

No other explanation. Those five words alone, shouting in

harsh all-caps. For several long moments, Jerry can only gawp and ponder the implications. "Han-So Shiro." Who is he? A few vague newspaper articles flicker in his mind, reminding him of that lawless biker gang. What was their name? The "White Wolf Riders"? But what does this have anything to with them?

A rumbling thunderclap jolts him back to the moment and he looks out the bleak, hazy window near his desk. Jerry grew up in LA County, but he can't remember a single storm ever lasting longer than a few days, let alone savaging the city for three weeks straight. Not like this one.

Another clap thrums across the room, but this time it isn't thunder. A harsh rectangle of light floods in, casting long shadows as two figures materialize in the doorway behind him. One stands tall, the other short and substantial. Their featureless silhouettes loom against the blinding backdrop as a pair of living cutouts, more absence than form. Their unsettling intrusion only rattles Jerry further as he tries to make out their countenance. It isn't until the door finally latches shut behind him, that he makes out their faces at last.

First, he spies matching Japanese hats, conical and bamboo, lacquered in an exquisite white that seems too bright for a gloomy day like this one. The plump figure ambles forward with a

stilted gait, her red skirt flowing. When she tilts her head up, the purple blindfold confirms her identity: this is Madam Kyo, in the flesh. Standing in his library.

Keeping closely behind Kyo is a young man dressed in a white sleeveless vest with a high collar. His face remains hidden beneath his bamboo hat. Their movements are fluid and practiced as the youth takes Kyo's shawl from her, then her hat next. All with a well-rehearsed rhythm.

As they approach Jerry's desk, he finds himself holding his breath, curious to see if the infamous Madame Kyo will find her chair unaided like the psychic she's alleged to be. Instead, the assistant gently guides her into place with a swift hand, a mundane action which seems to deflate the mystery of the Kyo at once. It leaves Jerry with conflicting emotions. She's not a blind oracle in the end, nor a mystic sage. She's only but a client, one in a long list of many others too.

With this timely reminder in his head, Jerry seats himself, uncaps a fine pen, and begins his interview.

Kyo's ward retreats to a shadowy corner as soon as Jerry begins.

"Welcome. We appreciate you coming despite the weather. I find these meetings best done in person."

Jerry pauses, but Kyo remains as silent and still as a statue.

"You are Madame Kyo, right?"

When Kyo replies, her blind gaze is askew. "You've been waiting for me, counselor," she says, her voice like sandpaper against silk, carrying a knowing lilt. Something about it reminds Jerry of a mother singing a tragic lullaby to her newborn child.

Jerry raises an eyebrow at them both, for he's still acutely aware of the assistant's watchful stance at a far corner of the room. "Point taken. We need your version of the event, and I'm told you were a direct witness."

"I was'."

"Let's start with your full name and occupation."

"Kyo Lawon. Retired social worker and home health care aide."

Jerry doesn't look up when he beckons her to continue.

"And?"

Kyo meets his question with icy silence, forcing him to push again.

"What else?"

"It is as I told you, counselor."

"I may be mistaken, but I'm under the impression that you're still working. There's talk of palm reading and fortune telling. Then there's the matter of the warehouses that you own, which are only a block down from the tower itself."

Kyo might be arching an eyebrow beneath that blindfold, but Jerry can't be sure. It hides so much more than just Kyo's eyes.

"The warehouses that you speak of, belonged to my late husband, and I know little if anything about them. You'd have to ask the book keepers about all that. As for the rest... Well. What does a lawyer like you think of such things?"

Great question. Wish I knew the answer myself, Jerry thinks, but to her he says, "Well now that you mention it, I don't believe in ancient spirits or old-world demons, or any of the other nonsense the press is trying to apply to this situation."

"And?" Kyo asks, taking her turn to beckon him instead.

"Well. Some people are saying that you are somehow involved, that your warehouses were part of the explosion."

Kyo's silence forces Jerry to continue, "They also say that you might be protecting someone dangerous."

"Ah," Kyo interjects, "That's what this is really about then is it. You and your insurance cronies are seeking someone."

Jerry grows quiet, with sweat sluicing down his neck.

"Well. Out with it, counselor." Kyo demands, her unseeing gaze somehow squaring on Jerry's.

He swallows hard before he lays it out on the table. "Where is Han-So Shiro? And how was he involved?"

Kyo's face darkens, however, as turns away from Jerry. "You and your cronies will leave that boy alone. If it was not for him, and his friends, things would have been far worse."

Jerry scoffs, "So you can confirm he was there then. At the explosion site. Madame Kyo, you should know that Han-So Shiro is a known gangster. A delinquent with a biker gang. So if you're keeping company with-

Kyo shakes her head dismissively, her blind eyes once again gazing off-center.

"You Westerners," Kyo speaks, her voice laden with her many years. "You believe you alone comprehend the worlds truths. Yet when faced with the unknown, you don't seek understanding. No. You instead label the thing as wrong, treating it's very existence as the problem."

Jerry raises both his brows and his palms. "Ma'am?"

A cryptic smile plays across Kyo's face. "And they call me blind... The point, dear counselor, is that great things can

come from unexpected places, and that things are worth far more than what you think you see."

Jerry sighs, frustrated with the response. It's all he needs from this conversation; fortune cookie antics and trite riddles.

"Mrs. Lawson, if I am to be your attorney, I need things to make sense. So to do that, I need to understand everything that happened, start to finish. Can you do that?"

"Very well, counselor," Kyo agrees, as Jerry turns to a fresh page in his legal pad, ready to unravel everything at last.

"It all began with the rains."