

## CHAPTER ONE

### Fortune Cookie Antics

The library's supposed to be quiet. But not like *this*.

*This* feels more like the terrible hush of a vacuum-seal behind bulletproof glass. Of a tomb not opened for centuries. All of it is enough that Jerry hesitates in the doorway, unable to enter the wooden vault of what's supposed to be his own inner sanctum. Something about the disturbed quiet of the oak shelves feels like a bad dream. A nightmare.

Jerry's supposed to be a lawyer though. Ever the one for quarantining facts from fiction (or visa-versa depending on his customer base). Jurisprudence is his machine-code from which he forges reality against the pillars of reasoning and law.

So what has him so scared now? Had the fractal chaos of last week truly affected him this much? week really affected him

that much?

Deep down, he's still trying to dismiss the flashbacks though - the sight of viral emerald plumes venting from the Magnus Building, just before the flawless super-chroma form of LA's most high-tech skyscraper ripped apart at the seams - it clearly rocked the foundations of his world. Hard.

Nothing about the situation is helped by the fact that *she* will be here any moment now. The infamous Madame Kyo; veritable Baba Venga of Little Tokyo. Or as Jerry prefers to think of her, yet another grifter from the LA darkscape. A charlatan plying their craft by way of rumors that might have the world believe she's some blind oracle. What nonsense. All of it.

Pulling in a deep suck of air, Jerry finally vectors into the inner sanctum of his library, towards the mighty monstrosity of a large desk that awaist him at the back. A T-Rex desk is what some of his clients call it. A bulky form that seems to exert a weird, singularity pull as Jerry approaches. Once there, he lazily plops the stack of case files atop the shining surface with an echoing clap. Loud enough to send his secretary bolting upright from her chair.

"Um... Sorry." He mumbles with a half-whisper. Their eyes meet for a mere second before Jerry feels the urge to cast them

down again, back to the floor where he can watch his two feet trudge themselves to the seat that awaits him.

Once there, his eyes inevitably land on a precarious stack of mail that awaits him. Their usual spot. But the top-most paper is anything but typical, what with it's textured weave and embossed logo. It practically leers at him with the unmistakable branding from the Omishi Group.

They're but one of a dozen corporate partners in Jerry's life, yet something about their strange logo always keeps his eyes hostage. Even if only for a second.

The logo is an interweaving of sumptuous purple against dark gray fibers of the paper. At once it looks like both a bruise and yet also an arcane seal that forces Jerry to study it's interior lettering rather seriously every time he lays a glance upon it.

The only thing that stands out more than the logo has to be the bold red lettering at the bottom of the letterhead, barking it's message:

FIND HAN-SO SHIRO! ALL COSTS!!!

No other explanation. Just those five words shouting in

harsh all-caps, an absolute non-negotiable order.

For several long moments, Jerry can only gape at the lurid directive, struggling to process the implications. "Han-So Shiro." Vague memories start flickering through his mind of newspaper articles and reports featuring the infamous biker gang, the lawless White Wolf Riders... but why is he being told to find one of their members?

The rumbling thunder booming overhead jolts Jerry back to the present. He blinks, the sour smog haze seeming to overtake his eyes. All manners of freak storms have been attering LA for nearly three weeks straight now, unrelenting tempests scouring the city.

Jerry grew up here in LA County, and he doesn't remember the weather being so hostile, nor any storm lasting this long. So strange.

As Jerry contemplates the Omishi Group's bizarre demand, a sliver of light blasts loose from the doors adjacent to the library. Suddenly, a harsh rectangle of illumination blinds him, casting long shadows across the wooden floor. Framed within the doorway are two figures rendered as perfect silhouettes against the blazing backdrop. One seems tall and lithe, the other shorter and more substantial. Blinking his eyes rapidly, Jerry

attempts to adjust to the damnable light. Had the bulbs in that room always been that bright?

The duo linger motionlessly, adding to the surreal quality of the moment. A pair of alien grays ready to abscond with him, for all Jerry knows. Until at last the door clicks close, and the light fades finally.

Now he can seem them in detail. Both don matching hats of a traditional Japanese variety. Giant cones that all but cover their faces, save for their chins. Undoubtedly for protection against the relentless rain. Even from afar, Jerry can tell the hats are lacquered with an exquisite shade of glossy white paint, lending an heir of otherworldly luxury.

Jerry's attention falls to the closest figure first, the shorter, plump one. She hovers along with a stilted gait of a senior. Her flowing red skirt flails unevenly as she moves forward. It's the purple blindfold covering her eyes that truly arrests Jerry's gaze. Seeing it now, and the shimmering golden dragon emblazoned upon it's edges, well it all but seals the truth from here. This is, indeed, Madame Kyo in the flesh.

Behind her, keeping in near lock step, is the taller figure. A younger man from what Jerry can gather, though he can hardly see more than the man's chin. His outfit vaguely

resembles a uniform of some sort. An all white sleeveless vest with a high collar, adorned with oriental patterns and designs that are also woven with golden thread that sparkles with even each glancing movement.

Watching their movements, Jerry finds himself silently taken with how fluid and practiced every thing seems. Kyo removes her red shawl and the white hat and hoists it backwards. With a rhythm, the young man takes them in hand, as if he's assisted her this way a thousand times before. Clearly an assistant of sorts. He finds himself oddly fascinated by the synchronized movements as they march towards their end of the desk at last.

Once they're within range of the chair, Jerry waits with bated breath to see if Kyo will find the chair by herself. As if she can divine it's location through whatever psychic spells she may possess. But no. Instead, the assistant gently guides her into place, and only leaves once she's well and settled. Just like that, all that is mysterious and enrapturing of Madame Kyo fades, leaving the mundane reality that she's just a blind old woman with silver, braided hair. That's it'. Nothing more.

Conflicting emotions leave Jerry slightly off-balance as he seats himself, and prepares to address his unusual visitors. He

takes up a fine writing pen, uncaps it, and lays it solemnly against the surface of a yellow legal pad.

It's time to begin.

"Welcome. We appreciate you coming here today, despite the weather. But I find that these things are done best when told in person."

Jerry pauses. Though he doesn't know what he's waiting for. Madam Kyo says nothing. Remains as still as a garden statue, content to wait in silence for the rest of the world to move on by.

"You are Madame Kyo, right?"

When Kyo speaks, her blind gaze is sideways and askew, as if answering to someone standing at Jerry's side rather than Jerry himself. And her voice is a quixotic mixture of sandpaper wrapped in silk that rasps and catches as she speaks. It carries the quality of a lifetime chain smoker or barfly, yet one with a melody underneath. A sort of knowing lilt that reminds of his mother's lullabies. Both comforting yet ethereal.

"You've been waiting for me, counselor." Kyo says, and it's not a question. The words bite with a weight of certainty. Without waiting for his reply, she waves a dismissing signal to her ward, who quietly removes himself from the vicinity. He

carries himself off into the a shadowy corner of the library, where he about-faces them both. Waiting with his hands drawn behind his back.

Jerry lift's an eyebrow and glances at the youth for a short moment before returning his eyes to the legal paper.

"Point taken. So, what we're hoping to do here today, is get your version of what happened. I understand that you were in direct witness of the event?"

"I was." She says simply.

"That's what we need then. Let's start first with your full name, and occupation.

She replies simply, "Madame Kyo Lawson. Retired social worker. Retired home health Care aide."

Jerry doesn't look up from the paper. "And?"

Kyo says nothing at first. Only bids his question with iced-over silence.

"What else?" Jerry beckons.

"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. I know little of them and simply trust the book keepers with 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 to himself, but he refuses to say it out loud. "Well now that you mention it, I suppose I should be forward in my stance. That I don't believe in ancient spirits or old-world demons, or any of the other nonsense the press is saying."

Now it seems to be Kyo's turn to drill further for the truth. "What else?" She asks, almost in perfect mockery of how Jerry voiced the question earlier.

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

Kyo says nothing back for herself, leaving Jerry to stumble and maunder through. "- They also say that you're keeping very dangerous company. That you may be protecting someone..."

"- Ahh. Then no doubt, what this meeting is really about is you're after someone. Aren't you?"

Jerry grows quiet suddenly, and sweat sluices down his

neck.

"I assure you, dear counselor, it's quite impossible to mistake me as someone born yesterday. I know enough about this business to know better. Now out with it. Who are you looking for."

Her sideways gaze suddenly lands on his own. Centers upon Jerry with all the menacing glare of Jerry's own grandmother after catching Jerry with his hand in the cookie jar. Maybe she really can see into the folds of the future? She certainly sees through Jerry.

Swallowing hard, he lays his cards all out on the table.

"Where is Han-So Shiro? How was he involved?"

Madame Kyo's face darkens and her lips press into a thin line. "As I've told the lot of you cronies, you will leave that boy alone," her voice snaps like a belt ready for the lashing. "If it wasn't for that young man and his friends, the damage would have been far worse. Worse than you can possibly understand."

Jerry scoffs. "Well, you've at least confirmed he was there then. Where a massive explosion went off, and LA's most high-tech skyscraper went up in smoke. *Green* smoke at that. Now if you're protecting him, Mrs. Lawson, you should at least be

aware this Han-So Shiro is a known gangster. A thug with the White Wolf Riders, the notorious biker gang. And if you're keeping their company-

Kyo shakes her head dismissively. The blind eyes once again gaze off-center from Jerry.

"You Westerners. You think you and you alone are the ones who understand everything this world has to offer. Yet when any of you are confronted by something you don't understand right away, what do you do? Do you attempt to understand it better? No. You make accusations at it, and accuse *the thing* of being. Not your lack of understanding about it." She shakes her head, a gesture that drips with consternation as much as the aged wisdom of her many years.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I don't know what you mean." Jerry asks with palms up.

A cryptic smile plays across her face now. "The point, dear counselor, is that many things are worth far more than what you can merely see. Including people. And I somehow know this better than you lot, and yet I'm the one they say is blind. The irony," she huffs.

Jerry sighs quietly to himself. That's all he needs right now in the middle of this already chaotic situation. "Fortune

Cookie Antics."

"Look, I apologize if I've offended you, Mrs. Lawson. But if I'm going to be your attorney, things make sense to me. And I still can't tell what went wrong, or how you're involved. So, let's do it this way. Let's start from the beginning, and you tell me everything from your point of view.

Kyo gives a confident, sagely nod. "That I can do, counselor."

Jerry folds over the first page of his legal pad, preferring to start with one that is new.

Before him, the old woman begins.

"It all came with the rains."