

THE SOUL PROPHECY

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PUFFIN

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‘Good to see you again, Genna,’ says a smooth, snide voice.

I look up into the coal-black eyes of Damien. His lean chiselled face is even more marble-white than I remember. But he appears to have used his time in prison to weight train and bulk up. His arms are well defined and his hoodie is tight round his chest. He flicks his fringe of raven hair from his eyes and flashes me a smile as charming as a snake’s. ‘So, where are you going in such a hurry?’

‘*Murderer!*’ I roar, launching myself at him in a fit of rage. However, before I can get my hands on his throat, I’m grabbed from behind and my arms are pinned. I glance behind me to see the rest of his gang surrounding me. They all wear hoodies, their faces cast in shadow. But I recognize each of them. The blond-haired boy whose arm I broke in the crypt. The girl with the black widow spider tattoo on her neck. The muscular thug holding me, his nose bent crooked courtesy of Phoenix, who broke it for him twice. And the most lethal of the lot: the tall and powerful girl who wears knuckleduster rings and carries a steel pipe in her back pocket.

‘Genna, you’ve had many parents before and they’ve all died,’ says Damien unsympathetically. ‘I don’t know why you’re so upset. You should be used to it by now.’

Once again the disturbing image of two bodies wrapped in blood-stained togas flashes before my eyes – and this time it makes sense. My mother and father from a past life, murdered by Hunters. My anger now doubles and I writhe in the iron grip of the thug. ‘How come you’re free?’ I spit at Damien.

He grins. ‘DI Shaw vouched for our good behaviour inside . . . got us out early on a *rehabilitation* programme. So kind of her, don’t you think?’

‘I don’t understand. None of you should be Hunters any more,’ I say, my anger giving way to bewilderment. ‘Phoenix killed Tanas. I saw him die right in front of my eyes.’

‘That you did,’ replies Damien. ‘But you underestimated his power. Tanas is back and stronger than ever.’

I stop struggling. ‘He’s returned? In *this* lifetime? That’s not possible.’

‘Oh, but it is!’ Damien can’t hide his glee. ‘You see, Tanas himself incarnated into another body.’

A wave of despair overcomes me at this revelation. Phoenix had thrust an obsidian blade straight through Tanas’s chest and told me how this shard of black volcanic rock was my enemy’s Achilles heel and that the Incarnate’s soul would be too weak to return for at least a lifetime, if not more. That’s the reason my Soul Protector left me unguarded – he’d believed his job was done for this life. *How wrong he was!*

Damien draws a six-inch-long green knife from his belt. I instantly recognize the lethal weapon, although the last

time I saw it the blade was shattered into several pieces, so Mei's parents must have had it restored. Made of pure jade, its hilt carved with an icon of a jaguar crossed with a man, the four-thousand-year-old knife is the one Tanas needs to cut out my heart when performing the ceremony that will extinguish my soul forever.

Seeing the fear in my eyes, Damien advances on me. 'Poor Genna,' he sneers. 'There's no Phoenix around to protect you now.' He smirks, waving the repaired knife in my face. He licks his lips hungrily before barking an order to his gang. 'Hold her spreadeagled against the wall.'

The four other Hunters glance uneasily at one another. 'Shouldn't Tanas perform the ritual?' questions Knuckleduster uneasily. 'You know what our master thought about our attempt in the park.'

Damien shoots the girl an irritable look. 'We can't afford to let this First Ascendant's soul slip through our fingers again,' he growls. 'Besides, I think I deserve a little of his power. Now do as I say!'

Thug goes to pin me against the wall when a sharp voice shouts, 'Oi! Leave that girl alone!'

The policewoman from my house is pelting round the corner towards us, closely followed by another officer. DI Shaw is nowhere in sight. Taking advantage of the distraction, I twist myself free of Thug's grip and elbow him hard in the solar plexus. He gasps in pain and doubles over. I don't wait around for the other Hunters to react.

I run.

Over the pounding of my feet on the tarmac, I can hear the two police officers giving chase. I work my way back to

the main street, hoping to lose them among the crowds of shoppers. But my pursuers are gaining on me fast. As I weave between the startled pedestrians, I barge straight into a woman with her shopping. Her bag rips open and tins of cat food go scattering across the pavement.

‘Sorry!’ I shout, running on. But the collision works in my favour as the policeman on my tail stumbles on a tin and goes sprawling to the ground.

‘Genna, STOP!’ orders the other officer, nimbly leaping over her colleague and continuing to give chase.

I daren’t stop, though. I can’t risk being taken into custody and put under DI Shaw’s charge. My heart thudding hard, I power on up the street. Ahead of me is a busy junction. Just as the traffic lights turn green, I dart across the road. A horn blares as a car pulls out, narrowly missing me, then careers straight into the policewoman close on my heels. She tumbles over the bonnet and lands in a heap in the road.

I glance back, worried she’s seriously hurt. But I see her moving, more bruised than broken, so don’t hang around any longer. Damien and his Hunters are still on my trail. Fleeing down the opposite street, I duck into a building site where a block of flats is under construction and conceal myself behind a cement truck. I peer out cautiously as the two police officers stagger past, one clutching her side, the other limping badly.

A few moments later, Damien and his Hunters rush by.

Catching my breath and slowly counting to calm myself, I wait a full minute until I’m certain I’ve lost both the police and the Soul Hunters, then I emerge from my hiding place.

I've barely taken two steps, however, when the muscled thug appears at the site entrance. His craggy features still bear the faint red fern-like scars from the lightning strike that almost killed him in the stone circle. Wheezing and hunched over, he's nursing his stomach where I elbowed him earlier.

I stand stock-still hoping he won't notice me among the construction workers in their high-vis jackets. Then my mobile rings, loud and jaunty. Fumbling in my pocket, I cut the call and mute my phone.

But I'm too late.

DON'T MISS
GENNA AND PHOENIX'S
NEXT THRILLING
ADVENTURE

**THE SOUL
SURVIVOR**

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