

Looking Glass

by Madeleine Dougherty

The club pounded around her. The heavy bass shook the frozen apple and blue raspberry margarita in her glass. She took a sip. The man next to her asked to buy her another drink. She ignored him. Her brother, Oliver, sat with his buddies in their booth. They could see the whole club from their balcony. She got up and maneuvered through the dancers flailing about. The bouncer nodded to her as she went up the stairs. Oliver welcomed her over. He hugged her and asked how her day was. She said that Billy was no longer a feature of her bed. Oliver cheered and said that was good. He never liked Billy. Dominic smiled and patted the seat beside him. She curled into Dominic's warmth. Jenna scowled. Oliver warned her that her face would stay that way. Jenna scowled harder. Jake laughed his hyena laugh. He had finally perfected it. No more nights of being kept up by his practicing. Dominic asked her to dance. She shivered and said yes. She would never say no, but he always asked. They writhed in front of the others like two snakes coiling and uncoiling. Her hair glinted and flickered like fire in the strobe lights. His rings, one on each finger, of skulls, dragons, and big, expensive gems, sparkled. The intimidating steel heels of her pumps shined. The thump of music made their movements more tribal than their usual Latin. He pulled her close. She kissed him. He said her lips tasted like raspberries, tart and enticing. She mentioned her drink. He said that he was drunk on her. She laughed and threw back her head. He lowered his lips to her neck. She gasped. To everyone else her wide-open eyes seemed to fog over in a metallic gray, making them look like shark's eyes.

Pain. Shocking, startling pain shot through her eyes back to the nape of her neck. *The man comes towards her. He is bald and angry. Blue eyed and dangerous. He reaches for her. She*

is pushed against the wall. He strangles her. She smells his breath. Citrusy. She claws at his hands, his face. The gold ring in his ear she rips from the lobe. He doesn't stop. Her hands are not her hands. The nails are short and rough. The polish is sparkly pink. Nicole steps to the side. The man strangles a sweet, gentle-looking brunette. There is a crack. He drops the girl. The music still pounds as he walks down the stairs, but no one is dancing. Bodies litter the floor, most in party dresses, a few holding guns. Nicole follows him down and flits about him. He has a tattoo of a cross on his neck. It continues down his back under his shirt. A jagged scar on his throat is inches from distorting it. He strides to the back door. Blood covers the handlebar. He pauses and turns around. He looks at Nicole. She stumbles back. There is nothing behind her. Everyone is dead. How is he seeing her? The people in her visions never see her. He walks toward her. He reaches for her. Nicole screams.

“Nicky, Nicole, talk to me,” Oliver yelled as she struggled against Dominic’s chest.

“Nicky, Nicky, just breathe,” Dominic murmured.

Her struggles subsided, but not her fear. “He looked at me. He looked me dead in the eye,” she said. They led her back to the couch. Jenna handed Nicole her margarita. She drained it, handed off the empty glass, and leaned back into the comfy pillows. She shivered. Oliver felt her forehead. It must have felt damp because Oliver looked concerned.

“What did you see, Nicky?” Oliver asked.

“Here.” Jenna handed her another drink. This one was cherry red with a twist of lime. It tasted like a cherry Jollyrancher. Dominic pulled Nicole into his side, but she didn’t wrap her arms around him.

“I saw the club. There were bodies everywhere. I was--”

“Wait. Every detail, remember?” said Oliver. He was right to remind her. Nicole prided herself on noticing every detail. Who knew what would be important later?

“I didn’t see any of us, but the bodies littered the dance floor. Blood pooled underneath them. I had to be careful not to slip. I started out in the body of a girl.”

“Anything important there?” Oliver knew what questions to ask.

“No. She’s strangled by a bald, white man. He was the only one living. I followed him as he walked out. He was over six foot, muscled, but not heavily. Blue eyes, big hands, scars everywhere. A big scar across his neck. It looked like both a burn and a cut.” She ran her fingers along the entire front of her throat. Dominic squeezed her to him. “There was a tattoo on the right side of his neck that continued down his back. It was a Medieval cross. He wore a black shirt, cargo pants, and boots. There were other men dressed the same among the dead with guns strapped across their torsos.”

“Were there any people we know?”

“Bouncer on the stairs with half his head blown out. Bartender cut in half by gunfire draped over the bar. Waitress sitting against the wall by the back door choking on her own blood.”

“Okay.” Oliver nodded and looked down. Jenna fretted beside Jake who just leaned against the arm of the couch. “What about the clocks?”

“The one behind the bar was splattered with blood. I could only see the hour hand pointed toward two o’clock. I couldn’t go into the office, so I couldn’t see the other clock or the calendar. The newspapers weren’t on or around the bar either. That’s another thing. There were slight differences. Regular things like the newspapers and coat rack weren’t there. The floor had

a different tile pattern to it. It was a checkerboard underneath the blood, not the flat black we have now. Confetti was on every surface. There must have been a party before everyone died. But,” Nicole shook her head and pushed herself up, “that’s not the point. The man, the killer, he looked at me. He saw me.” Nicole began to get frantic again.

“He must have been looking behind you. At something behind you. Just relax.” Oliver held Nicole’s hands. “You worry too much.”

“I see the future, Olie.” Nicole’s voice hardened. “I see the future. The future doesn’t see me. Those are the rules,” Nicole shouted. Oliver and Dominic tried to calm her down. Jenna still looked worried. Jake turned away, a bored expression on his face.

“Rules are made to be broken,” said Oliver. “This was just a vision, an ordinary vision.”

Nicole pulled her hands free of Oliver’s. “Bastard. Don’t treat me as if I don’t know my own visions. This wasn’t normal.”

“Alright, alright, then what do you propose to do about it?” said Oliver.

Nicole took a deep, shaky breath. “Sell the club.”

“What?!” Jake said. He was fiercely angry. Jenna and Dominic looked confused while Oliver raised an eyebrow, probably already contemplating the logistics of selling.

“And never come back.” Nicole caught the eyes of each of her friends. “Promise me none of you will return to the club after you leave tonight. Even if the club is reopened by a new owner. Promise me, please.”

Dominic nodded immediately. “Of course, Nicky,” he said.

“Yeah, Nicky, we promise,” said Jenna. She looked calmer now that she had promised as if doing so had already made her safe.

“I don’t,” Jake looked at them all as if they were crazy.

“Look,” said Nicole, “it was a massacre, but I didn’t see your bodies. That means we all have a chance to survive this mess. If you don’t show up, you won’t be killed. If you do, you’re going to die.”

“Bullshit. Enough of your Twilight Zone bullshit. You’re just scaring us over nothing. You think you’re so superior, and you know everything. Well, you don’t. You have some serious mental problems, Nicky. You should get that checked out.”

“Jake, this was a vision of the future. Just listen to her,” said Oliver.

“No, you and your psycho sister can go to hell.” Jake backed away from the group.

“Jake, if you’re there that night, you will be among the dead.” Nicole reached out to Jake, but he slapped her hands away.

“You don’t even know what night it will be. You have no proof. Just two o’clock, that’s it. And you said we weren’t among the bodies. We could be the survivors.” The rise in Jake’s voice made him sound hopeful.

“Jake--” Nicole tried.

“No, get the hell away from me,” he shouted.

“Fine, fine.” Nicole raised her hands in surrender. “Just please don’t come back to the club.”

Jake sneered and shook his head. “I won’t come as long as you’re here. See, no, you don’t know the future. You don’t know anything.” He screamed the last word. Jake turned and ran, pushing dancers out of his path to the door.

“I better go after him,” said Jenna in a soft voice. She left, hugging herself.

“So, home?” Dominic suggested.

“Yeah.” Nicole nodded faintly. “Olie, you’ll--”

“Yes, I’ll get the paperwork done tomorrow, Nicky.”

“I’m sorry.” Nicole tuned to her brother. They were losing another home because of her. Oliver reassured her with a kind smile and a hug. He was too forgiving. Nicole loved him for it. They made their way out of the club, the two boys on either side of Nicole. They left behind several half full drinks on the low table, but Jake’s beer was empty.

Nicole, Oliver, and Dominic were sitting on the couch, cups of coffee in hand. The TV was on, but just as background noise.

“I’m going to ask Maria to marry me, just as soon as she comes back from her trip,” Oliver said.

“You sure you’re ready for this? Marriage is a big step,” Dominic said. He cuddled up to Nicole. They had gotten back together as soon as Billy moved out. Dominic’s nails scratched at her nylons where his hand gripped her thigh.

“Yeah, this is what I want,” said Oliver.

“Good for you, Olie. You deserve to be happy,” said Nicole. Oliver smiled wide at her. He really did deserve to have something away from Nicole. She had driven them for most of their lives with her visions. He needed something for himself.

The phone rang. Oliver answered it and passed it to Nicole.

“It’s Jenna,” said Oliver.

“Hey, Jenna. What’s up? How was yoga?”

“Nicky, turn on channel 5.” Jenna’s voice was somber.

“Dom, turn on 5.” The news was on. A pretty brunette stood in front of police cars and paramedics. Officers scattered around a familiar entrance to a club helped to keep a caravan of body bags moving.

“...assailants carrying a variety of automatic weapons entered the club at what police suspect was around two in the morning. The assailants barricaded the doors, then opened fire on the party goers...”

“Oh, god,” Dominic gasped. He let go of Nicole and turned up the volume. Oliver leaned forward and pressed his hands to his mouth.

“...the police were able to breach the front door to the club, they only found twenty survivors out of the believed 500 people in attendance. They learned from the survivors’ that the assailants had all committed suicide at the same time...”

“Jenna?” said Nicole.

“Jake was there. He’s in Central Hospital. Get here now.” They both hung up. Nicole jumped up and grabbed her keys from the coffee table.

“Jake’s in the hospital. We need to go,” Nicole called as she went to grab her bag.

“This is Juliet Raker with KR--” The boys sprang up.

The ride to the hospital was uneventful except for Dominic saying repeatedly, “Go, go, Oliver. Drive faster.”

In room 118, Jake lay hooked up to too many tubes. Nurses hovered around him, waiting for him to crash. Doctors flitted from room to room, bed to bed, spending enough time to learn what the problem was, but never enough to fix it. Jenna was by Jake’s side, a step or two away. It

looked like she was giving the nurses enough room should the need arise for them to do something drastic and lifesaving. Nicole knew she was just scared. She was probably saying an incantation to the Goddess in her head or begging the moon for help.

Nicole leaned against the doorframe as the boys rushed forward. She was begin unfair. Jenna's worry was real no matter how she expressed it. They were all worried. Dominic carefully maneuvered himself around the machines keeping Jake alive to huddled over his head.

"How you doing, buddy?" Dominic said with a reassuring smile. "You'll be okay."

Oliver stood at the end of the bed. When he held out his hand, Jenna crushed herself to his side.

"I told him not to go." The tidal wave was released. "It's all my fault. I should have stopped him. I should have gone with him," Jenna cried.

"What's wrong with him?" Oliver asked a nurse.

"Multiple gun shots to the abdomen. We got the bullets out, but they've turned septic. There is also internal bleeding. I'm sorry, but you should say your goodbyes now." The nurse went back to bandaging an arm.

"No!" Jenna howled. Oliver led her to a chair.

Jenna was wrong. It wasn't her fault. It was Nicole's. She should have pushed harder to get Jake to believe her. She thought herself so superior she forgot the danger he was in. She should have sought him out when he moved away. Looking into Jake's eyes, though, knowing he would never laugh at her with that cackle again, it was a struggle for Nicole not to say, "I told you so." He had been so arrogant. He still was in these last moments. His eyes blazed behind a mass of bruises and cuts. They dared her to say anything about how it was his own fault he got

hurt. And make no mistake, it was his own fault. He knew of her visions, had seen them come to pass. She told him, told them all what would happen in the club. But he thought she was foolish. He thought he knew better. What could she say to the person who was dying because he did not listen to her?

His eyes were furious. He looked like wanted to shout out at her, "Go away," but didn't want to upset Jenna further. Jake reached out, and Jenna clutched his hand to her chest. Oliver dragged the chair over to the bed. Jake looked bad. There were cuts across his face as if he had been dragged over a rough surface, perhaps covered in glass given the depth of some of the cuts. He didn't have much bandaging on his face. The doctors had already given up on him. They were going to try to keep him comfortable before he died. The blood had dried into brown crusty bits making his face into a virtual plague area. He was lying flat on the bed. It looked like it hurt to move. There were three bandages on his torso. There were soggy with blood. The doctors had been able to stop the blood loss, but his insides were too damaged. He smelled sour and tangy. She couldn't stay here with her mistake. His mistake. She slipped from the room before anyone could get upset. She waited outside, looking in through the window. The hospital was crowded with victims from the club. Most of them were either already in bags or covered in white sheets.

Oliver walked over to Nicole. "You okay?" he said.

"Sure. Just can't be in there."

"Right. I get that. It's never been so close before." He pulled out a water bottle from some mysterious location. Wow, she must have really been out of it to not notice his leaving for a vending machine. He had even drunk half already. Dominic was still in the room. She couldn't blame him for wanting to be close. Jake was Dominic's friend first, and brought into the gang

through him. Nicole never really got along with Jake. This was easier to say now that he would be gone in just a short while. When had she become so harsh? Maybe around the time she realized she really could not save anyone. That happened years ago.

But she could have saved Jake. He had not been one of the bodies in her vision which meant it wasn't a fact that he would be there last night. If she had seen his body, then that would be it. No matter what anyone did he would end up at the club. But she hadn't seen him. Her warning could have saved him. This must be what God feels like.

"Blasphemer," said Oliver. Oops, she had said that out loud.

"No, just the seeing things, knowing what will come to pass, and not being able to change it. I warned him." She gestured at the soon to be corpse through the window. She looked away.

"He had a choice."

"Ah, yes. Free will. What a bitch." The siblings snickered. From inside the room came a long, flat beep. Alarms began sounding off. A crash cart was summoned, and the medical personnel rushed around, but it was all subdued. They had worked for hours on the victims of the massacre. No one really had the strength anymore to keep anyone but the least injured alive. Jenna cried loudly over the shouted orders of the doctors. Oliver offered Nicole his water. There was only a little left. She drained the bottle.

*Vision of Max getting payment for the club massacre.

*Oliver gets married.

*Vision of Max killing while Nicole has sex with Dominic.

*Vision of Max getting scar.

Why was she doing this? “Why am I doing this?” Nicole scolded Jenna, “I can’t believe you talked me into coming here.”

“Oh, come on. It’ll be fun,” Jenna said in a chipper voice as she pulled Nicole up the stairs. “And you just might get some answers.” Jenna rang the doorbell that happened to be an actual bell hanging from the porch overhang. It was brass and shaped to look like a flower.

Nicole looked at it dubiously. “Oh, jeez. Don’t make me do this.”

“Like anyone can make you do anything. Trust me, she’s good. She’s the real thing. She’ll probably know more about your gift that you do.” Jenna’s big smile got a little smug around the corners.

“Don’t quit your day job. Being a salesman is not for you.” It was Nicole’s turn to be smug as Jenna’s smile froze. There might have even been an eye twitch. Jenna clanged the bell again.

The woman who answered the door looked like a rainbow got in a fight with a unicorn. There was colorful glitter everywhere. This time Nicole’s eye twitched. The woman’s blond hair hung to her knees, dyed in horizontal stripes of different colors. Her forearms were covered in sparkly bangles. Her ears had big chandelier earrings hanging from them. She even had toe rings on her bare feet. Her shirt was a deep blue covered in little rhinestone stars. It was paired with a swirling, flowing neon lime green skirt that had stripes of purple glitter down the length. Nicole was beginning to get a headache just looking at her.

The woman, a young thirty year old, smiled warmly at her. “Don’t worry, darling. We’ll figure out what’s wrong. You’ll at least be free of confusion, if not free of the problem, I

promise.” She reached out for Nicole, looking like she was about to hug her. Jenna was smiling confidently again. Nicole’s incredulity knew no bounds. She once again questioned her own sanity and Jenna’s, and especially that of the woman.

“That’s nice to know. Might I know the name of my benefactor of truth?” Nicole said sarcastically. Jenna rolled her eyes and huffed.

“Now, Nicky, shouldn’t I be calling you that?” The woman let her hands fall back to her sides. “My name is Glinda. Jenna, it is now time for you to go, and for Nicky and I to commune with the timber of our own voices.”

Nicole hoped the expression on her face did not make Glinda feel insulted and take offense, though it was the embodiment of “What the fuck?” She turned to Jenna who nodded in a way that she probably thought was reassuring. It wasn’t. Nicole berated herself for going along with this latest idiotic idea as she followed the Good Witch of the North into her house. She immediately wished she hadn’t. She tried to act casual as she held her eyelid still. The house was filled with plants: ficus, ferns, orchids, and narcissus. She could hear multiple wind chimes coming from the open windows. Inside there were ribbons and banners hanging from the ceiling. There were Chinese characters, Arabic sayings, pictures of the Zodiac, mystical squiggles, even hieroglyphics. There were pillows with the Mayan calendar embroidered on them, and afghans with tarot symbols. And if it were possible, there were even more colors in her house than there were on Glinda’s body. Glinda led Nicole past the hallucination made real into a normal room. Nicole kept herself from looking behind her just to be sure that room was a reality. The chairs were upholstered in brown fabric and comfortable Nicole noticed as she sunk into one across

from Glinda. The psychic had a tea set ready on the table between them. Glinda poured out two cups, and put two sugar cubes and some cream in the one she handed to Nicole.

Glinda watched Nicole. "You're not really surprised, are you?" she said.

"No. I'm guessing you have a bit of premonition in you as well," said Nicole as she sipped the properly prepared cup of tea.

"Not premonition. Simply intuition. Sometimes I get the sense of a person's thoughts or emotions. Sometimes I know to go left and not right. I usually know when people are lying. It is all just feelings. I feel enough to give people only the most immediate advice to the present problems, but as I understand it, your gift has a much further reach."

"I wouldn't call it a gift." Nicole studied the pattern on the tea cup. The strange blotches looked like stags crashing their antlers together over the affection of a doe.

"What would you call it, then?" Glinda looked legitimately interested. Her expression showed no doubt or disappointment. Nicole had no problem talking about her visions. It was just sometimes...most times, people weren't exactly sympathetic.

"I would call it useless."

"So, the things you see do not come to pass?"

"Oh, they do," Nicole reassured Glinda. She had not come there on a foolish errand.

"They are not hallucinations. There is just nothing I can do about them. What I see will come to pass. I cannot change anything."

"Perhaps you should explain how they work. Do you have control? Are they tied to touch? Do they come in dreams?"

Nicole looked away from Glinda's too blue eyes, and out the window. The tropical decoration of the interior of the house was replicated outside. This woman loved nature. "My ability works with time. Time isn't a straight line. It's a garden." Nicole turned back to Glinda and scoffed at her own words. "I'm standing on a dandelion, surrounded by those fly away seeds. At any moment, they will be gone and grow into new plants elsewhere. The seeds are decisions, choices, tiny fragments that must happen for a future to come to pass. I don't see the seeds. Each new flower is a possible future. I don't see where the flower will grow or when it will sprout from the ground. I just see the flower before it turns into a puffy white ball and the cycle starts again." She laughed. "I see a moment in time. The moment. The one flower that will survive, completely enclosed. If I'm smart and quick, I can check the clocks and calendars, newspapers, street signs, to pin down the when and where. I have no control. The visions come at any time. Now isn't that ridiculously useless."

Glinda frowned. "How so?"

"Because there is no way to change anything. If I see you die, you will die in exactly the way I see it happen. See, to stop a future, you have to stop the seed. You have to stop one tiny, insignificant detail that starts the whole process. The one thing I can't see, that I can't even guess. Trust me, I've tried."

"You can't go to the police?"

"Nope. Cause most of the time I don't even know when or where. How can I stop the rape of Carolyn King in Ann Arbor, Texas on June fifth, 2007 when the only detail I know is that her last name is King because her wallet falls open when her purse is dropped?" Nicole took a sip of her cold tea.

“So, you can’t touch anything?” Glinda sounded hopeful and upset at the same time.

“No. I can move around, but that’s limited at best.”

“What if you know when and where?”

“Then I can warn people to stay away, but if I see you in the vision, you will be there. If I don’t see you, then you might have a chance, if you don’t fuck up.” Nicole let herself fall further into the chair. She put her hand over her mouth.

“There’s nothing, even if you have all the clues?”

“Like I said, I can’t see the seed. I don’t know what small action will lead to the next and to the next and to the next and to you being there. It is a chain of events that I can’t see and cannot stop. There is only the lock at the end.”

“You’ve tried?”

“I’ve tried.”

“You’re right. That is useless.” The two women laughed. Glinda poured more tea. The full cup warmed Nicole’s hands. “So why do you need my help?”

“Because I thought I had a handle on things, and they changed.”

“You had an unusual vision.”

“Several.” Nicole smiled sadly. She was an oddity even to the odd. Glinda picked up a tarot deck and began shuffling. “In the first one, a man looked at me. Like really looked at me. He saw me standing there.”

“What was the vision about?”

“Massacre at the club I owned. He was one of the killers.”

“Could it have been because it was attached to you? It was your club.” Glinda had a legitimate idea, but one that had been thought of before.

“No. I’ve had visions that are connected to me in bizarre, indirect ways. It wasn’t the cause of this.”

“So it was the man who caused this disturbance?”

“Yes. The second weird thing is that I have had multiple visions of the man. I only ever see a person in a vision once. Even side characters. I’ve had four visions of this man so far.”

Nicole put down her empty cup.

“What else?”

“And finally,” Nicole sighed, “I saw a vision of his past.”

“You see the future.”

“Not this time. First three times he had a big scar across his throat. Horrible, twisted thing. It affected his voice. Fourth vision I saw him getting the wound that would heal into the scar. This is getting weird, and I don’t like it.” Nicole started fidgeting.

“There’s no need to be worried. I have an idea. Close your eyes.” Glinda put away the tea set and closed the drapes. The room was dim, but the curtains were not thick enough to block out the afternoon sun. It was peaceful. Nicole did as asked. She guessed that Glinda was going to try hypnosis, or something else to that effect. It never worked on her, but Glinda’s friendliness pushed Nicole to try.

Glinda began humming a low, soft note. Then there was a sharp bong of a bell that made Nicole jump. The tone of the bell continued in what sounded like a cyclical wave. Nicole recognized it as a “singing bowl,” a metal bowl that could be vibrated around the rim with a

leather covered stick for meditation purposes. She had first heard one at an Indian market Jenna dragged her to. This one had a beautiful tone that floated within Nicole. She felt it in her chest. She felt calm.

She didn't know how long this went on. The bell faded slowly, but Nicole could hear the echo in her mind.

"How do you feel?" Glinda said softly.

"Good," said Nicole, "but if you were trying to induce a vision, they don't work that way."

"That's okay." Glinda's eyes sparkled. She looked happy that Nicole felt better. "For now, all you need is to be calm and forget your worries. I want you to come again in two weeks." She walked to the kitchen. "I'm going to give you some tea. Drink it once a day when you feel at peace. When you are reading a book or about to go to sleep. Write down every vision you have, every little detail." Glinda handed her a tin. The lid was painted with a large sunflower. They walked back through the rainforest/rainbow room. "This man does not seem to be a threat to you. I want you to get some distance from him these next two weeks. Try to focus on regular life. Keep yourself in the present as much as you can."

"Thank you," Nicole said. She hesitated, then hugged Glinda. "Really."

"You'll be okay. You're strong." Glinda put her hands together in prayer and bowed her head. "Namaste."

"And to you," Nicole said walking through the door. Outside it was darkening. She checked her watch. It said that she had been in the house for four hours. Nicole looked back at the closed door with squinty eyes and a raised eyebrow.

*Vision of Max sleeping.

*Nicole searches for Max. Gets a name: Maximilian Jahr. Jenna moves to Tibet.

*Goes to see psychic a second time & Vision of Max getting tattoo.

She stands on a beach. The sun rises quickly. The colors of dawn flash behind buildings. When it is high enough that she has to tip her head back to see it, the sun stops moving. There is a boardwalk with little boutiques and tourist traps selling their wares. In front of her is a cafe. Nicole smells eggs, bacon, and coffee. It must be brunch. At the table closest to her are a couple sitting across from each other. The man is bald, white, and wears a white tank top and jeans. The woman is white, has red hair, and wears a blue top and a purple skirt. The two smile at each other, and their hands gently touch. The man stands and turns to the woman. The woman stands, pays for the meal, and they walk away cheerily holding hands. Nicole walks up to the table at the same time as a waiter. The woman left what had to be at least three hundred dollars on a twenty dollar bill. The waiter calls out to the couple. They ignore him. He pockets the money with a shrug. The man and woman both had bowls of fresh fruit and large glasses of orange juice. The woman's glass is empty while the man's is full. The woman left behind a newspaper folded open to the crossword puzzle. Before Nicole can get a look at the date or any of the headlines, the waiter clears the table. High above the sun moves again.

It falls back down to the opposite horizon. The water glitters at the sun's darkening touch. Suddenly, Nicole is on another part of the beach. The couple lay on the sand a few feet below Nicole, in between where she stands and the ocean. The woman starts to get up, but the man

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moves over her. In the low light, Nicole can make out a tattoo on the man's bare back, but only enough to see the shape of a figure sitting. He pulls a scalpel from his pocket, but the woman's eyes are on the man's. She does not see the danger, or perhaps she does not care. He precisely cuts her throat over the major artery. The woman's neck begins to bleed. He kisses her neck, then her lips. In the shadow, his lips look black. In the moonlight, hers are red. The dying woman, looks over her shoulder in Nicole's direction. It is herself. The woman is Nicole. The man is Max. The dying Nicole looks at Nicole, but her gaze was slightly to the left. She blinks once. Twice. And stares. Max stands and takes off his pants. The blood has smeared down his chest. He gazes surprisingly mournfully at the body, then turns around and walks to the water. He washes the blood from his arms. He flings the blade out into the sea. Hopefully it is far enough away to be taken out into deeper waters, and some kid will not step on it. He comes back to the sand, and gently picks up the body. He seems to be hugging it as he walks back into the ocean.

She woke up and pushed herself out of bed. Her chest heaved as she took in shaking gulps of air. There was a rustling sound behind her. She spun. Dominic turned over on his side of the bed, twisting the blankets around him. Nicole covered her face with her hands as she squatted down. Her skin tingled as the sweat on it chilled in the night air. Her hands shook from the overload of adrenalin. The thick Persian carpet was comfortingly soft as her toes sunk into the fibers. She was glad she had convinced Oliver into giving it to her when he moved into his new apartment with Maria. Maria agreed with her that it just did not go with their chosen color palate. Nicole sunk her fingers into the deep red and blue fibers, focusing herself on the here and now. Once her heart stopped trying to imitate Secretariat, she went to the bathroom to splash water on her face, neck, and arms. She sweat became slick as she washed it away. Patting the still warm

skin with a towel Jenna had left behind, Nicole looked up into the mirror. Her face reflected all her worries and fears in the tenseness around her eyes and hardness in her lips. She tried to take a deep breath to smooth out the fear in her face, but her breath hitched. She did not want to die. She saw tears creep down her cheeks and the rim around her eyes grow red. She touched her reflection.

It reminded her of the physics lesson of a reflection from her high school science class. The glow from the nightlight bounces off the mirror at an angle equal to the one it came in on. The light then hits her body, back to the mirror, and finally up into her eyes. An infinitesimal amount of time passes between the reflection being created and her eyes seeing it. Enough time passes for the reflection to be considered the past. In her visions, Nicole is the light bouncing from the past, into the mirror, and into the future. She looks into the future. And just as neither the mirror or the light can change or affect the object in front of the mirror, she cannot change the future. Max had thrown a big, ape-shitty wrench into her world like a monkey throwing poo. Whereas before there were simply objects in front of the mirror for her to see; Max had been the first object to look into the mirror at her. Only once, but it had been enough. Then, again and again, Max walked in front of the mirror, separating himself further from the rest of the rabble in her visions. What made him so special? Now she knew: he would be the one to kill her. She had never experienced anything like him because she had never seen her own death before. Simple explanation for something that had been bugging her for at least a year.

And there was nothing she could do. If her vision showed her dying on the sand of Cruz Beach, then she would die a horrible death in the arms of a hit man who feels something for her.

She could not run or stall. There was no escape. She would always end up on that beach. He was her future, and she, as the light, was his past. All that was left was to meet this Maximilian Jahr.

Her tears stopped, and her face had returned to its normal pale tone. She felt like she knew him already. Max, the mercenary, living in Cruz Beach, California. He killed for money while relishing the violence. He commanded those below him with a charisma that was frightening in massacring an entire club full of people, and then to commit suicide upon his word without any promise of compensation. He looked into a girl's eyes and snapped her neck. He looked into Nicole's eyes, and he would cut her throat. And he will love her as he does it. Nicole watched as the wrinkles around her eyes, the frown between her eyebrows, and steel around her lips smoothed. Her lips tasted of salt. For a brief flicker of a moment, she imagined it was blood.

"Nicole, you okay?" Dominic said as he walked into the bathroom.

"Yeah." She splashed water on her face and dried it again. "But I need to make a call." He followed her into the kitchen, getting himself a glass of water as he always did to wash out the taste of sleep from his mouth. He offered her the glass. She took a sip while getting her cellphone from the counter.

"Oliver?" she asked when the phone picked up.

"Nicole? It's three in the morning." His voice was gravelly. Nicole could hear Maria whispering in the background.

"I know. I'm moving to California. I'd like it if you and Maria came with me." She faced Dominic and flashed a smile at his bewildered expression. "Dominic, too."

"You had a vision," Oliver grumbled.

"Yes. I will be moving. We'll talk again in the morning?"

“Sure. At Diana’s. Your treat.”

“Sounds Perfect.” Nicole hung up and played with the cord to the charger.

“You saw yourself moving to California in the middle of the night?” Dominic said, getting a beer from the fridge.

“Sort of.”

“I knew I would need this.” He gestured to the beer. “It was about him, wasn’t it. Let me guess,” his face screwed up into a nasty sneer, “he lives in California. Your Maximilian.”

“I’m sorry.” She looked away from his hard eyes. The stainless steel fridge that Dominic had picked especially for its homemade soda dispenser on the front because she liked creating interesting flavors like a lavender root beer was covered in photos of the six of them. At one time all of them had lived in the giant apartment together. Then Jake died. Oliver got married and moved in with his wife. Jenna felt meditating would help to get rid of her guilt. It was only her and Dominic left in the giant apartment. Her favorite picture was off to the right. It was of her and Dominic after they had broken up. They were sitting in Diana’s cafe on opposite sides of the table. Things were tense between them until Jake told a joke about rabbits. Everyone laughed, but it especially tickled Dominic and Nicole. They giggled hard. Jenna took a picture of them just as they looked at each other. There was a shared joy in that moment. They knew then that they still knew each other. Nothing had really changed except they were now sleeping with different people. They had been friends first, and now could be friends again. They never felt an overwhelming, desperate love for each other like in the fairy tales, and never would. Their relationship was surprisingly easy. A perfect friends-with-benefits situation. It only got

complicated when they stated calling themselves a couple which they had sadly once again become.

“I don’t love him,” Nicole said.

“Yet,” Dominic quickly added.

“I don’t know if I can. I’m scared, Dom.”

Dominic scoffed and drank his beer. During the long pause that followed, Dominic glanced at Nicole and frowned. He studied her face. Nicole knew her fear from before must have crept back into her expression because Dominic no longer looked angry.

“I want you to come with me,” she said, letting him see her fear and yearning. Dominic’s expression turned inward. He nodded slowly. He emptied the half full glass of water in the sink. He reached for her hand which she gave, and guided her back to bed. He held her as they fell back asleep. She was grateful he didn’t say anything when she gripped his arms hard enough to bruise, and just held her closer. Yep, they were like puzzle pieces. They just fit in the simplest of terms.

It didn’t take Nicole long to convince Oliver to come with her to California. Maria was all for the idea. She was originally from the west coast and missed the sun. The married couple had started thinking about children. Maria wanted to raise her children in what she still considered home. Nicole and Oliver were nomadic and very social in their capacity as orphans. It wasn’t strange for them to move as a result of one of Nicole’s visions, but they were getting older and in Oliver’s case, more settled. All it took was the assurance that her vision had shown Nicole

in California. Two weeks later they owned two beach houses a few blocks away from each other in sunny Cruz Beach.

Dominic had asked Nicole to marry him. This was not the first time he had done so in the many years they had known each other, but each time was emotionally difficult. She always said no. It wasn't that she didn't love him. They were good friends, and the sex was exciting. She did love him, and he her, but as much as he understood how her ability worked, he didn't understand how much her ability was a part of her. It was deep in her heart and present in each particle of her skin. He knew she didn't have control, so he didn't expect her to just turn it off. But...but.

The car in front of her began to slow. The light was red. Nicole stopped and checked her phone. Dom left her six messages in the last hour. She told him she needed time alone, but he was worried. He thought of the visions like commercials, informational and brief. Clinical, clean, and separate. He didn't get that she remembered every face, remembered being in their skin, feeling how they experienced their bodies, and loved each one. He was jealous of her feelings for Max, and as much as she tried to dissuade him, he had every right to be. Max was a part of her same as Dom. She knew Dom suspected this, and was trying to keep her with him through marriage. He didn't know that Max already owned her.

Nicole is in the dark. Thank god she was stopped at the light. She had been in accidents caused by her having a vision while driving. It was another reason Oliver usually lived with her, for protection. A bedside lamp flicks on in front of her. She is in Max's room again. The room is clean of dirty clothes and gun parts. Max pushes a tiny blonde onto the bed. She is light enough to bounce on the tightly tucked in sheets. Max pulls off her clunky, black heels. She wriggles out

of her hot pink skirt, leaving her in a sparkly blue thong and white tube top. Who even wears tube tops anymore? The people who went to The Looking Glass were far more fashionable.

Max reveals his smooth buttocks and powerful legs, but leaves on his gray tank top. There is the edge of a bandage on his hip. He stiffly bends over the girl, getting a condom from the side table. The girl giggles and squirms against his chest. Max holds her hands still, grimacing when she rubbed his right side. She squeaks in pain from his tight grip. He lets go and reaches under his pillow. He pulls out a scalpel. The girl struggles to get away, but he pushes her stomach against the bed.

“Careful. This is very sharp. I could easily nick you,” Max growls. The girl freezes. Her wide eyes follow the blade down. She whimpers when she feels it against her thigh. “Don’t move,” Max warns. With a quick twist, the blade slides through the thong. He tosses the blade away onto the side table. He enters her, turning her sigh of relief into a moan. He moves slowly over her with snap of his hips at the end of each plunge.

“Oh, god. You’re a scary mother-fucker, but you sure can fuck,” the girl says. She moans on each thrust. Max continues to hold her down with a hand on her stomach and one on her throat.

Nicole turns away and leans on the dresser with her head in her hands. Why show her this? She doesn’t need to know this. The dresser is covered in spare change, receipts, and a daily planner. It’s open to May fifth. So this is next week. What is the point of showing Nicole her killer having sex next week? Really?! The planner has an appointment written in for 12:30. At that time, everyone is out to lunch. Nicole grinds the heels of her hands into her eyes. The location

for the meeting is "Staple Street," nothing more. He had a new job. Why is she so wrapped up in Max's life?

Suddenly Nicole is looking up at Max. This is not the first time she has been forced into a body having sex. She doesn't hear the people's thoughts She does experience their bodies the way the people experience them. She feels Max moving within her; but the girl's tongue piercing is a distracting annoyance. The rings through her nipples are beginning to chafe against his shirt. Max's penis fills her fully to the point of pain, but the girl is a foot or two shorter than Nicole. If she had been in her own body, Max would have fit just fine. Nicole did not feel much pleasure from the experience. It is rather hard to get in the mood when in a strange body. Max looks down at her still pumping away. His brows and lips are pinched together. He breathes heavily through his nose. It is unnerving how intent his stare is.

Then Nicole is looking down at the girl, and Nicole flushes with pleasure. Nicole has found that women's bodies have specifications, but men's don't. As angry as Max looks, he is enjoying himself. Through him, Nicole enjoys herself. It is a strange experience to suddenly have a penis. She feels the girl's small hands on Max's wide shoulders, feels the fragile hips in her palms, feels the moist warmth of the girl's cunt. Cunt? That isn't Nicole's word. Is Max infecting her mind now? The pressure within her builds until with a sharp snap it throws her into ecstasy.

Nicole threw her head back against the headrest. The light was still red. The song on her radio was on the exact same note. She reached down. She shivered at the touch to her wet, tingling flesh. The car behind her honked. The light had turned green. She made her way home. Her mind was made up, but Dominic might not stick around too long after this.

*Visions of Max looking for Nicole. Intersperse moments of reality. Dominic leaves.

The cold sea air was at odds with the sticky heat of the sun. Nicole's orange juice sat half drunk, sharp and sweet. She carefully wrote out "Premonition" in its boxes. Seven down, Sandra Bullock, 2007 film. It matched with "Visual" and "Unseen" as in "optical" and "cannot be." The crossword puzzle's title was "Sight Site." A shadow passed over the paper. The opposite chair scratched the pebble and concrete ground. The waiter fetched another orange juice and a cup of fresh fruit. Nicole looked up into her new dining companion's blue eyes, crinkled in anticipation. Max sat in front of her, taking the peel off his wedge of orange.

"It's been two years," she said.

He stabbed a grape. "Nicky." His voice was rough. Not from smoking, but the scar tissue crisscrossing his throat. "I've been looking for you," Max said. Oliver was happy with Maria. They were expecting their first children, twins. Dominic had left five months ago to Mexico with a trunkful of guns. Jenna was in Tibet, hopefully still alive. And Jake was dead. Everyone from that night she first had a vision of Max and Max looked at her was either dead or moved on. Max was all she had. Even her cat was gone.

"I know," she said. Two years later Nicole was no longer afraid of the violence and power this man had. "What do you see when you look at me?"

He crunched a slice of honeydew. It was not yet fully ripe. "I see myself," he said.

"How?"

“You are my past. I am your future.” Max’s eyes held hers. He was pale. He didn’t blend in with the tanned beach bunnies. The heat was going to get to him eventually. She emptied her glass. He offered her his.

“No, no. It’s good. You should try it,” she said. Her own orange juice still tingled her tongue. She welcomed the pain where she had bitten her cheek earlier that morning. She was still alive. The chair beneath her. The smooth tile and rough grout of the table. The cold fork shaking in her hand. All real.

“Come for a walk with me,” Max said. He stood beside her, offering his hand. The other held a strawberry. His hand was scarred, big, and heavy. The fingers were crooked from too many breaks and dislocations. The air must struggle to flow around that hand. Nicole put all the money in her wallet on the table. His glass was still full.

“This is too much,” the waiter called as they walked away. The waiter sounded like one of the seagulls. Like his brethren high above, he was annoying and ignored, except in the rare cases where he was silly or exceptionally smart. In this case, he was neither. Max offered her the strawberry, holding it as she bit off half. His eyes didn’t move from her face as he ate the rest, greenery, and all. The seeds popped between her teeth. He licked his fingertips.

“Could I see your back?” she said hesitantly.

He smiled. “You really did see me, then.” He turned from her and pulled off his sweat damp shirt. Black lines covered his whole back and sides. Nicole had never seen the entire tattoo. “Yes, I really did,” she said breathily. Across the left side of his muscular back spread skeletal wings with bunches of feathers attached in random places as if the wings were mostly decayed. They were attached to an armored angel that kneeled in the middle of Max’s back. The armor

was black, detailed with “silver” vine-like swirls. The angel’s long hair was tied back with the tail pulled over the angel’s shoulder so that it partially covered its face as it bowed its head to the cross above on Max’s neck. The cross was a bejeweled fixture at the top of the staff the angel held in its left hand. The sword in the angel’s right hand was just as richly jeweled with delicate filigree-like details as the cross. The sharp blade curved around Max’s right hip to rest on the “ground” to the side of his naval. The boney tips of the wings reflected the movement of the sword as they curved around Max’s left hip. From the front, the two sides seemed to embrace him as if the wings were Max’s wings and the sword in Max’s hand. Max gripped her hand hard. Nicole returned the favor.

They lay on the sand for hours. She bathed in the sun. He bathed in her presence. She dug in the sand, scooping out a cradle to gently hold her. Their shirts became her pillow. She tried to relax and embrace what was coming. She tried to be the ocean, full and whole. The seagulls laughed at her. The cooling air and darkening sky worried her. The time had passed too quickly. This was it. She wanted more time. It wasn’t enough. She felt the same cold tears rolling down her cheeks as when she first had her vision of this.

“Will you wash in the ocean after?”

“I will wash you away from me,” he said. She felt a coldness at her neck. He crouched over her. It felt like he had dragged an ice cube across her pulse. He kissed her neck, then her lips. His lips were cold and tasted of salt and metal. She tried to lean forward for another. She shivered, and he held her. He saw himself in her dark eyes. She looked over her shoulder, hoping her other self understood that this was what had to happen, that she wanted this. When she was as cool as the sand around them, he went to the water and washed her blood away from his skin

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and from the blade of his knife. He searched for his reflection. In the moonlight, he was a dark shadow surrounded by silver. The water was not as good a mirror as her eyes.
