

## Fortune

Margaret Mystic sat sprawled on the couch in the back room, trying to blow a string of golden beads out from her face. She just wanted to take the ridiculous headdress off already, its flashes of light from the gold plastic giving her a headache. She pushed it back off her face so she could look around at her behind-the-scenes break room. There was a dirty microwave beside a coffee machine on an old box for her “ancient table” in the séance room, and beside that were backup pulley machines that would help her lift the crystal ball off the table to float around. Her eyes drifted over the jars of musty incense and over her mother’s old costume that rested on a dressing mannequin.

Her mother had hoped she would wear that gaudy robe when she succeeded her. Margaret had hoped she would have abandoned the thought and let her go to college like her sister. Margaret kicked her feet up on the couch and tossed her head back onto the small TV tray that served as a side table for drinks and snacks. She pouted. Weren’t most family businesses typically something wholesome, like raising the farm that a fantastically great grandfather moved to America to build? Why was she sitting here in a dusty tourist trap waiting for the next sucker to come so she could swindle their money away?

With a huff, Margaret kicked herself up off the couch and made her way to the wardrobe beside the pulleys, opening the doors to reveal the hangers full of various psychic costumes and robes, with her normal clothes separated front and center. She should just leave right now, no one was going to come in tonight unless they were drunk and wanting to mock a psychic’s whole line of work. She wouldn’t blame them. If she had gone to college, no doubt she would have

done the same. As she reached for her jeans, though, a little picture frame winked light at her from the top shelf above the clothes.

Margaret paused, her bottom lip pressing out slightly more. “Oh, don’t give me that, Mia.” She reached her hand up and gently took down the picture frame. It was the one object that wasn’t dusty within the cabinet. She rubbed her finger over the young woman’s face. Her eyes narrowed at the man who had his arm around her waist, but the expression softened at the little boy on the woman’s hip. “You’re the lucky one. Mom let you go.” She muttered to the photo, “You got to find the man, get the dream. You were the older one, mom was going to make you stay here. You shouldn’t be the one telling *me* to stay now.”

The photograph didn’t answer back, but Margaret’s brown eyes searched those of the shapely woman with the wide smile. Margaret’s own mouth tightened into a line, “I know, you would have done the same if I met Mister Right, but it’s just—” she choked off, sighing as she put the photo back. “Well, what’s ten minutes anyway? Only because you told me to, though.” She huffed, straightening her headdress as she checked the clock.

Margaret moaned, “It’s only 10:30? I could’ve sworn it was 10:50!” She leered back at the cabinet, then closed it, “You owe me one, Mia. Big time.”

It may have been late, but in a big city like this, people wandered down side streets looking for all sorts of trouble or mystic adventure all the time. Just last week, Margaret had a party of ten come in right at 10:20 on the dot, right when she had been about to close early. That was probably why her mother was so adamant that she kept the store open until 11. Her mother did also warn her to be careful, though. The weirdos started prowling around after 10.

She checked herself in the mirror to fix her eyeliner when she heard the jingling of the bell. Margaret jumped, skewing her eyeliner in the process, then swore as she quickly wiped at

the smudge with her finger. "I have been expecting you!" she called from the back, her voice cracking with more panic than that of a typical all-seeing mystic. She sighed when she cleaned up the smudge, then slipped into the next room to quickly sit at her large ornate chair. To a customer, the dark purple velvet upholstery with the well-carved wood would make them think it was antique from a palace. In reality, her mother stuffed the cushions with newspaper and stole the chair from Mia's old job.

Margaret watched as a figure moved through the gift shop that was by the entrance. She frowned to herself, narrowing her eyes to try and see them. She wished that it was widely accepted for psychics to wear their glasses; she couldn't see a thing from here. As the figure moved closer, she frowned. The man was wearing a strange, dark blue tunic that was clasped at the neck with a bronze pin. His hair was short, and it turned upwards like a field of grass blown back slightly by a gentle breeze. He looked to her and she gasped, the intensity of those deep, dark eyes.

Damn, if he wasn't dressed so strangely, she would want to ask him out. However, right now she had a suspicion that he was one of those weirdos her mother warned her about. Just as she suspected this, though, his gaze softened, "I'm glad to have found you, Margaret Mystic." He gave her a smile that melted her heart like a popsicle in the summer. "I'm in dire need of your aide."

Snapping out of her reverie, Margaret sat tall, bowing her head ever so slightly to let the beads swish by her head, "My third eye is at your service, I will part the very heavens to find you an answer." She repeated the script with the same intonation her mother had shown her long ago. What was it her mother said? 'Sound like the weaver of time and space? Speak as though your

words write the client's very future?' Margaret didn't know what that sounded like, so she had always just did it like her mother did.

This man seemed to buy it, and he sighed, a sound that to Margaret was like windchimes on a spring breeze. Margaret's heart fluttered. "I am in your debt, Madame Margaret." He bowed his head to her. When he looked up, she shook away the small, pleased smile from her face, "Please, I need to find out where Na'algur has gone. I must know what he's planning, and what he means to do with the medallion."

"Medallion?" Margaret frowned, her brow now furrowing. "You mean, you don't want to hear about a girl? Or, talk to your father or something?"

The young man shook his head, "No, my father is not of importance right now, and romance is the last thing on my mind." This comment made Margaret's face fall slightly, "Just the medallion and Na'algur, please. I know that must take more moving of the heavens to accomplish, but you are my only hope."

Margaret gulped, "Moving of the heavens... right." She bit her lip, her eyes flashing about the room as though she had left her heaven-parting plow around there somewhere. Her eyes settled at the bottom of the tablecloth, and she stooped down to reach under the table, "This should do it!" While hidden, she wiped sweat off her brow, then picked up the yellowing ball of glass and its plastic stand that was painted to look like rusted copper to set on the table. She was careful not to let the string attached to the glass ball snag on her sleeve, and her hand reached under her chair and pressed a button so that the pulley machine in the back wound the string taut. To hide the sound of this, she started some musical chanting. "Aaaaah eeehh oooooh ahhhh," she waved her hands as she ascended back into her seat, then froze her hands when they were out, but slightly above her head, "I think I feel the answer to your question." Her heart hammered

away in her chest. This young man wasn't staring at her with the skepticism or awe that she usually faced, but he looked at her as though expecting something. Was he not buying the show?

He smiled. "So you see him?" he grabbed the crystal ball and pushed it towards her, and Margaret flinched as she heard a mechanical snap in the back. "Please, show him to me!"

Her eyes stared hollowly at the crystal, and her blood ran cold. The string had snapped. She wouldn't be able to do the floating trick. She'd be exposed, she'd get a review on Yelp exposing her as a fraud, no one would come again, her mother would be so ashamed. She'd make Mia leave her sweet family to join the business, they'd have to get a new shop, and she'd be the scorn of her family for generations to come! All of this was because of this cute *weirdo* that had to walk in before the shift was over. She should have closed early.

She opened her mouth to speak, but then closed it to gulp. Well, her mother always said the show must go on. She stood, "One moment, I need more equipment." She hiked up her robes and went to the front of the shop that was filled with tarot cards and t-shirts, and filled her arms with candles and grabbed several sticks of incense. She returned and set the incense on the table and the candles all around the edges. She hoped this at least would make it seem more legitimate, and by the bright look in the man's eyes, she could see that it was indeed winning him over. She reached to her bag to get a lighter, but then paused, looking over to the wooden table in the corner of the room where a box of matches sat by incense that burned out weeks ago. Matches were more legit than a plastic cigarette lighter. She went over and took this, then struck a match and lit a candle, which she then used to light the others. She lit the incense then plopped into her chair, breathing heavily from the rush. She checked her client, who seemed patient enough. She sighed. Good, she wasn't done for yet.

She then held her hands out to her sides, palm-up as she usually would do when the machine was working, “Great Heavens above, light the way,” she spoke calmly, “Show us the way to the medallion and—“ she paused, opening an eye to look at the man.

“Na’algur.” He whispered.

“—and show us the way to Na’algur.” She finished with a clear voice. “Let us see—”

There was an explosion of light, and Margaret gasped. Something hit her square-on, but she wasn’t crushed, the wind being sucked right out from her lungs as she suddenly found herself in an alley. She saw a bald man with dark, heavy eyes and a beetled brow as he looked behind him, then drew something on the wall of an old building. Out of his pocket, he procured a golden amulet shaped like an eye, and in its center was a red rock. He put this flush against the stone and drew a pattern around it that pulsed with light. Margaret shook in her slippers, but before she could step, she was thrown towards the mark on the building, falling into it like it was an abyss.

She screamed, her robes fluttering around her as she fell through darkness towards a lake. In that lake, she saw dark markings of stone that matched what the man painted, and in its center was an eye. Only, the center of this eye was—

Her client. She was back in the séance room facing her client. He had stood up to move towards her, his eyes wide with concern, and the candles had extinguished with only the incense smoke left to heat the room. Margaret was cold, and her hands were trembling.

“Wh-what the hell was that?” she breathed, her hands holding her robed arms.

“Madame Margaret, what did you see?” the young man pleaded, his warn hand touching her arm.

She pulled away from him, her dark eyes looking him up and down. “Na’algor,” the strange name floated into her mind, “Is in an alley on 232<sup>nd</sup> street New York. You will learn his plans by searching in the eye of the sea.”

“The eye of the sea?” he asked, frowning deeply, “But what does that mean?”

“The hell if I know!” she pulled away from him more, “Now get out of here and find him!”

The young man’s face became grim. “Yes,” he bowed his head, clapping his hands together as though praying, “Thank you, Madame Margaret. Your gift is truly worthy of the name ‘Mystic’.” He then turned and hurried off.

Mystic. She flopped back into her chair and pulled her headdress off. If this was what it was to be mystic, she suddenly very much wanted to go back to being ordinary. She wouldn’t.