

CLEOPATRA'S TOMB



ALSO BY NELLIE H. STEELE

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CLEOPATRA'S TOMB

A MAGGIE EDWARDS ADVENTURE



NELLIE H. STEELE



A Novel Idea Publishing

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✿ Created with Vellum

*For my cousin, Tim
Who always enjoyed a good "G.I. Jones"
adventure movie*

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CHAPTER 1



Maggie Edwards pushed through the darkened shop's door. The sound of her heels clicked across the marble tile floor. Sets of unseeing eyes from various locations peered at her. The smell of must filled her nostrils. She flipped the light switch to her right, brightening the room with the overhead lights.

"Good morning, everyone," she greeted her admirers. "Hello, Fluffy." She stroked the head of one. "How are we all feeling today?" She continued greeting everyone as she made her way to the cash register and display case. Owning a combination bookstore and antique shop had its perks. She had multiple friends in the form of exotic antique taxidermy mounts from various locations around the world. She greeted them every day as she opened the shop, a fun game she created to ease any fear that crept into her after she consigned the items.

Maggie had opened her bookstore, Maggie's Books and Baubles Boutique, several years ago following graduation from Aberdeen College's graduate school, putting her degrees in library sciences and business management to

good use. She added the antiques component after a few years to make the shop more interesting and inviting. She specialized in unique, hard-to-find or out-of-print books, dedicating a special section in her shop to them. She also carried top-sellers and mainstream books. Her cozy shop allowed customers to browse through unique objects, hard-to-find books and more. It even allowed them to enjoy a cup of coffee and peruse a book in one of the many comfy leather armchairs scattered around the shop before buying it.

Her keys banged against the glass countertop as she dropped them to scan the note on the display case. She rolled her eyes as she read it. It was scrawled in her assistant's handwriting.

Hey—Didn't get to dust and stuff last night, we were super busy.

Figured you'd get to it in the morning.

- Piper

Typical Piper, Maggie mused. What Piper described as “super busy” was likely the arrival of one customer coupled with a few friends. Still, the “Help Wanted” sign in her window hadn't garnered any other more qualified applicants. While Piper may be lax in menial tasks, she excelled in reliability and trustworthiness, allowing Maggie to leave the shop in her more than capable hands.

Maggie completed her opening duties, turning on all lights, opening the register, turning the “We're Closed” sign to “We're Open!” and propping the door open. Summer was waning, but the weather remained warm. She also brewed a fresh pot of coffee for her early customers. When she finished these tasks, she began dusting and tidying the shop, since Piper had failed to find the time before closing last night.

After she finished, she checked her cell phone. She found

a text message from her on-again, off-again, at the moment on-again boyfriend, Leo Hamilton. Though the two had dated for a few years, their relationship had been turbulent resulting in numerous breakups and subsequent reconciliations. She often wondered why she allowed herself to be talked back into a relationship with him, but she surmised it was because he usually possessed the ability to bring a smile to her face. Today was no exception.

His message beamed off of the screen at her: *Good morning, gorgeous!*

She smiled as she typed a good morning back. A return message arrived soon after, asking her about her morning so far. She took the opportunity to complain about her less-than-motivated shop assistant. Leo assured Maggie she would manage everything with ease, as she always did.

The morning hours passed quietly, with only a few customers filtering in and out. About an hour before lunch, the daily mail delivery arrived. "Thanks, Mike!" Maggie called as he exited the shop. She filed through the letters, sorting junk mail from important correspondence. Next, she moved on to the packages. One box contained a few office related supplies.

A much-awaited order of books also arrived from the distributor. She sliced the tape sealing the top of the box, as giddy as a child on Christmas morning. New items always excited her. She loved unwrapping the new things, rearranging the shelves and setting up new displays.

In her eagerness over the new pieces, she almost overlooked a small box amongst the packages. It clattered to the floor. Maggie picked it up, studying the package for a moment. It was a small, nondescript brown box. There was no return address. Her own address appeared to be scrawled in a shaky hand. She set it down on the counter, choosing to

open it later when she had finished with the shipment of new materials.

After unpacking the entire box, Maggie closed the shop and stepped out for lunch. She met Leo at a local café for a salad and an iced tea. Refreshed from her lunch break, she returned to her shop ready to redecorate. The overhaul to showcase the new materials took her the better part of the afternoon. Maggie just finished putting the last few touches on the front window display when Piper plodded through the door.

“Hi!” Maggie greeted her. “The new stuff came in! How’s the display look from outside?”

Piper didn’t respond. She bent down behind the desk, stuffing her bag into the cabinet below the register. Her pink, blue, and green hair bobbed behind the counter. When she popped back up, Maggie shot her a questioning glance. “Huh?” She pulled earbuds from her ears.

“I said, how does the window display look?” Maggie repeated.

“Oh, I didn’t even notice it. Good, I guess,” Piper responded with a shrug of her shoulders.

“Good you guess? You didn’t even spot the major change?” Maggie rolled her eyes and waved her hand at Piper. “Oh, never mind, I’ll check it myself.” She hopped out the door to glance at the display. When she came back in, she adjusted a few items before she was satisfied. “There, finished!” she declared.

“Great,” Piper said in a monotone voice. She waved a finger in a circular motion in the air.

“It might be helpful if you took an interest in your job, Piper. You might even enjoy it then.”

“Mmm, doubt it,” Piper responded. “Hey, I’ve got a massive term paper due tomorrow, do you mind if I close like half an hour early?”

Maggie considered it for a moment. "Okay," Maggie agreed, "but don't make a habit of it. You need to learn how to manage responsibilities, Piper. You can't always depend on your boss to let you out of work."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." Piper held her hands up in defeat. "I won't be in school forever. Soon, I'll just have a job to worry about."

Maggie smirked at her before a startled expression crossed her face. "Oh, shoot! What time is it?"

"Umm," Piper mumbled. She checked her phone. "Four forty-six."

"Oh my gosh, I've got to run! I'm having dinner with Leo and I need to change!"

"You look fine to me." Piper shrugged.

"I can't wear this!" Maggie exclaimed. "They're my work clothes!"

"It's a designer dress and heels. You're wearing more jewelry than jewelry stores stock. Perfect for a date. For you, anyway. I wouldn't be caught dead in that outfit."

"That's because you have no sense of style," Maggie stated. "The goth makeup and all those piercings do not constitute style. Anyway, I need to change. This, Piper, is a day-dress, not a date-dress."

"What? Your dust-covered day-dress won't cut it for the date?"

"Very funny," Maggie answered, a wry expression on her face. She raced behind the register to grab her purse and keys.

"You've got to learn to be more responsible with your appointments," Piper chided.

Maggie frowned at her, rolling her eyes. "See you tomorrow, Piper!" she exclaimed. She slung her purse over her shoulder after pulling on her jacket.

"Oh, boss lady!" Piper called after her. Maggie spun

around, finding Piper waving a small box in the air. "Did you want this? It was on the floor."

"Oh, yes, although I have no idea what that is! It came earlier. Here I'll take it and open it later." She waved her over as she took a few steps back into the shop. She retrieved the package from Piper, stuffing it in her purse, spinning around and dashing out the door.

She checked her watch when she hit the pavement. Yep, she'd be late, she surmised. Before meeting Leo, she needed to change into something more appropriate. If she was correct, tonight could be a turning point in their relationship and she wanted to be dressed for the occasion.

She and Leo had been together for six months this time, making this the longest stretch their relationship had seen over the years. When Leo asked her to dinner this evening, he told her they'd be dining at her favorite French restaurant and suggested she wear her favorite dress. "It's going to be a big night!" he teased during their lunch earlier. Maggie figured the fancy restaurant, suggestion to dress up and hint about the big night was a signal to expect something great. A smile crossed her face, and she bit her lower lip, a habit when she was excited, as she turned the corner onto her tree-lined street. Despite their tumultuous relationship, Leo was the image of what she pictured in a husband. Tall, handsome, affable, on his way to attaining a prominent position in an illustrious career. He could provide Maggie with the lifestyle in which she'd be very comfortable. A manager of marketing with his international company now, he was in a position to rise in the ranks within a few years.

She made her way halfway down the street to her home, a mid-rise art déco style apartment building. She readied her keys after she pressed the call button for the elevator.

The doors slid open, and she stepped inside, pressing the button for the top floor. She flipped through her phone while

the elevator whisked her upwards. One new text message awaited her from Leo: *Looking forward to tonight!* Maggie smiled at the message. She echoed those sentiments. She texted back informing Leo she was running late but wouldn't be long. His next text message made her laugh as she exited the elevator: *So what else is new?*

She unlocked her apartment door and entered her multi-room apartment, tossing her keys and purse down on the entry table. She hurried to her bedroom and ensuite bathroom. She spent a few moments touching up her makeup. She revived her eyeliner, added a coat of mascara and darkened her neutral eye shadow until her dark brown eyes sparkled. She curled her shoulder-length brown hair and added a pearl headband. She tore through her walk-in closet, pulling out several dresses before finally deciding on a baby pink sheath paired with gold strappy sandals.

She pulled on a white cashmere sweater before donning a pearl necklace, earrings and bracelet. She finished by slicking on a light pink lip gloss before hastening to the hall to retrieve her purse and keys. As she shoved her lip gloss into her purse, she noticed the package she had stuffed inside earlier. She pulled it out, tossing it onto her couch before leaving the apartment.

Despite her four-inch heels, Maggie hurried along the sidewalk to the restaurant. She was already late and eager to begin the evening. As she rounded the corner, the restaurant came into view. Its sparkling lights shimmered through the shrubs surrounding its patio dining area. Light music floated through the air as she neared.

Maggie loved this restaurant. An avid fan of the finer things in life since she was a child, Maggie appreciated no expense being spared. The daughter of a prominent doctor and an upper-class socialite, Maggie had never wanted for

anything in her life. European vacations, fancy restaurants and frequent parties had filled her childhood.

She pranced to the front entrance, offering a wide smile to the maitre d' as she inquired about her table. He led her to a table near the window. Leo waited with a glass of wine. "Hey, you're late!" Leo exclaimed as she sat. "I was beginning to wonder if you were coming."

"It takes time to look this good." She winked at him.

"It's okay, I told you to be here thirty minutes before our reservation. I figured you'd only be about fifteen minutes late then." He grinned at her as he leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table.

Maggie gave him a wry glance as she shook her head. "Then don't complain if I'm not that late." She unfurled her napkin and placed it on her lap.

Leo poured her a glass of wine. She sipped it, gazing at him over the glass. It promised to be a magical night, and she planned to savor every moment. They ordered their meal before settling into a conversation. "So," she said. She traced the rim of her wine glass. "Nice choice in restaurant."

"It's your favorite," Leo responded. He took a sip of his wine.

"It is," she confirmed. "What's the occasion?"

Leo smirked at her as the server delivered their appetizer. "You were saying?" she asked when they were alone.

"Patience, Mags, patience." He bit into a canape.

She smiled at him, annoyed by his stalling but willing to remain on the hook for the payoff. With Leo unwilling to share his secret, Maggie steered the conversation to the events of her day. She spent most of the meal discussing her new store displays. Maggie possessed the innate ability to monopolize a conversation when it came to discussions about her shop.

After their dessert was served, Maggie pressed the matter

with Leo. Taking a spoonful of her *dame blanche*, she stared at Leo. "I've waited long enough. Why my favorite restaurant? It's not my birthday. What's the occasion?"

He smiled at her. "Does there need to be an occasion?"

"You're such a tease." Maggie rolled her eyes. "Come on! This is quite a fancy restaurant for no occasion!"

"You'd tell me you're worth it, occasion or not," Leo countered.

Maggie met his stare, giving him an unimpressed look. "All right, all right. I do have a reason for my choice." A smile spread on Maggie's face. She expected an overture about their relationship, perhaps even a proposal. Leo reached into his pocket, withdrawing a small object. Maggie eyed his hand, expecting a small velvet box. She imagined the ring inside. Large and lavish if he selected well, she mused. Instead, she could spy nothing.

He set his closed hand on the table and, opening it, slid something across the table. A confused expression replaced Maggie's smile. Leo's hand, still covering the object, was flat. Was the ring out of the box?

He snapped his hand away, revealing the object. "I bought a new car!" he exclaimed.

Maggie stared at the object, highlighted against the white linen tablecloth sat a black key fob. "What?" she managed.

"A new car! Remember when we drove past that car lot and I mentioned how much I liked that yellow sports car? I bought it!" Leo's excitement was obvious.

Maggie didn't respond. "Speechless, huh?" Leo said.

Maggie stuttered, "I... I... I don't know what to say."

"How about 'let's go for a ride!'" Leo suggested. Maggie sat dumbfounded, frustrated and disappointed. "What's wrong with you?"

"Are you serious?" Maggie asked.

Confusion crossed Leo's face. "What do you mean?"

"You booked my favorite restaurant, invited me to dinner, told me to dress up, promised a big night, all to tell me you bought a new car?"

"What did you think I did it for?" Leo asked.

"Something to do with us. With our relationship, perhaps?" Maggie conjectured.

"Like what? A proposal?" he guffawed.

Maggie pouted, fluttering her eyelids. "You don't have to make it sound so ridiculous," she muttered.

"Oh, come on, Mags! We've only been together for a little over six months." He slumped in his chair.

"We've been together much longer than six months in the grand scheme of things," she contested.

He snorted. "You aren't seriously mad, are you?"

"I'm disappointed," she admitted.

"How can you be upset? Come on!"

Maggie continued to pout, anger brewing inside. The downside of Maggie's childhood was that it made her difficult when things didn't go her way.

"Mags, things are going good this time. But it's way too early for us to be considering marriage."

"Way too early for you, I guess," Maggie snapped.

"Really? Are you really going to ruin my big moment?"

"Ruin your big moment? I thought this was OUR big moment. You misled me!"

"Misled you? Are you kidding me? I didn't mislead you. It's not my fault you assumed I was proposing! This is a big moment for me... us! It was supposed to be a big moment for us, anyway!"

"Whatever," Maggie said. She threw her napkin on the table in disgust.

"You're being ridiculous!"

"Yep, it's always me. I'm always ridiculous!" Maggie held her hands up in frustration.

Leo rolled his eyes. "Oh, stop. Knock it off, Mags, let's not fight."

"Fine, we won't fight," Maggie said.

"Great! Now, how about a ride home?" He grinned at her.

"I'll walk," Maggie hissed. She stood and stalked from the table.

"Maggie!" Leo shouted behind her. "Fine, have it your way!"

Maggie stomped to the sidewalk outside, crossing the street and veering toward her apartment building. She made it to the end of the block, turning the corner before a yellow sports car pulled up beside her. The car crept along next to her. The passenger window rolled down. "Get in, Mags!" Leo called.

Maggie continued walking, refusing to answer. "Come on, Mags, just get in."

"No," she retorted.

"Maggie..." Leo started.

"Just leave it, Leo."

"Fine." He rolled up the window and sped away. His engine revved as he peeled out from the stop sign at the end of the road.

Maggie shook her head, her annoyance growing with every step. She stormed down the sidewalk, thundering through the door to her apartment building. She continued to poke the elevator button until the doors slid open.

As the elevator glided upwards, she tapped her foot on the floor, agitated. When the doors whisked open, she trudged into the hall, stomping to her door. She shoved her key into the lock and threw the door open. She slammed it shut behind her after entering and slogged to her couch, slumping onto it.

A frown settled onto her face as she recalled the conversation over dessert. She crossed her arms, sighing. The

evening had not gone the way she expected or hoped. Why did their relationship take so much work, she mused? They were never on the same page. Another disappointment, another fight with Leo. At this point they were on track for another breakup rather than a commitment. She tossed her purse to the side, throwing her head back onto the pillow.

She closed her mind, trying to shut out the world and her agitation. Within seconds, she popped her eyes open, unable to relax. She blindly reached for her purse, intent on grabbing her phone for a distraction. Her hand hit something hard instead of delving into the purse's lining.

Maggie turned her head, glancing at the object her hand hit. The small cardboard box peeked out from under her purse. She recalled tossing it on the couch before her doomed date with Leo. Her brow furrowed as she pondered what waited inside.

Her head dropped back on the couch as she continued to pout. Did she even care what was inside? Her eyes slid back to the package. Perhaps it would distract her from her misery. She grabbed the package, studying it. The sender scrawled her name and business address in dark ink. No return address appeared anywhere on the package. She turned it over in her hands, examining each side. No other markings existed other than the postage and postage processing. The package appeared to have originated in Jordan.

Jordan, she mused, she didn't know anyone in Jordan. She viewed the top of the box again. The handwriting looked vaguely familiar but she couldn't place it. "There's only one way to find out, I guess," Maggie muttered to herself.

She pushed off the couch, heading to the kitchen for a knife. She sliced open the brown packing tape sealing the box. Packing material filled the box. Maggie used the knife to push the material around until an object revealed itself.

A tiny gold fleck gleamed from beneath the packing peanuts. Maggie pushed more peanuts away, some of them spilling over the side of the box. She peered into the box at the curious object. Gems in red, green and blue adorned the gold object.

With her thumb and index finger, Maggie picked the item out of the box. She rotated the object in her hand, studying it from all angles. It was a gem-encrusted beetle. If Maggie remembered her ancient history, it was a scarab beetle. Who would send her this, she wondered?

She dug into the box again, searching for anything else. At the bottom, she found an envelope bearing her name. Opening it, she pulled a note from inside. She held the golden scarab in her hand as she read the note.

Maggie—I have little time to explain. I have found something... something big. This little scarab is the key to the greatest archaeological find of our time. I can't say more. I don't want to endanger your life and I need to lay low for a while. The stakes are high.

Maggie—Keep this object secret and safe. DO NOT let it out of your sight! When I am able to return for it, I will. Until then, good luck.

Your favorite uncle, Ollie

“Uncle Ollie?” Maggie said aloud. She furrowed her brow. She flipped the page over, searching for more. A blank page stared back at her.

She re-read the note, furrowing her brow even on the second read. The handwriting was recognizable despite being shaky. It appeared the note was written in haste. The

scrawled handwriting suggested this, along with the overall tone of the note.

Oliver Keene was Maggie's maternal uncle, her mother's brother. A renowned archaeologist and professor at nearby Aberdeen College, Uncle Ollie, as Maggie called him, traveled the world often in search of precious artifacts. Maggie's love of antiques was cultured from a young age by Uncle Ollie.

It wasn't unusual for him to be out of the country. What was unusual was for him to send a precious object to anyone. Was it some kind of joke? She couldn't recall ever receiving even a postcard from Uncle Ollie when he visited an exotic location. She studied the object again. The beetle was heavy, its gems sparkled in the light. While Maggie worked with antiques at her shop, she was not qualified to determine if an object like this was real or fake.

Whether or not it was, Uncle Ollie had implored her to protect it. Its value to him was obvious. Moseying back to the couch, Maggie spent another few moments studying the golden beetle and the note that accompanied it. Learning nothing else, she tossed both in her purse. She checked her phone, hoping for an apology message from Leo. Nothing awaited her but spam email. Disappointed, she collected her phone and purse and wandered to her bedroom to change for bed. She checked her phone one last time. Still no messages awaited her. She slammed the phone down on the night table before turning out the light.

CHAPTER 2



Maggie padded barefoot back to her room, coffee in hand. She climbed under the covers, pulling her laptop onto her lap. Maggie often enjoyed her morning coffee snuggled under her covers before starting her day. She checked and answered her emails, then scrolled through her social media accounts. Pictures of Leo's new car caused her to roll her eyes. She checked her phone, still nothing. Annoyed, she grimaced and tossed her phone onto the bed.

She sipped her coffee, her mind turning to the odd object she received the night before. She jumped out of bed, grabbing the object and note from her purse.

She scanned the note again and studied the object. Nothing new jumped out at her. She grabbed her phone, opening her text app. She sent a text message to her mom: *Hey Mom! Have you spoken with Uncle Ollie lately?*

As she waited for a response, she performed an internet search on golden scarabs. She checked a few articles, learning nothing about the object in her possession. Perusing the images returned in the search, she unearthed nothing

that resembled the item from Uncle Ollie. She leaned back in bed, pondering her next move when her phone chirped. She swiped it open, hoping a text from Leo awaited. Instead, she discovered an answer to the question she posed to her mother. *I haven't... the last I heard he was out of town.*

Maggie considered the response. The package had originated in another country, consistent with the story of Uncle Ollie being out of town. But why send it to her? Why the dire warning? Was the object that valuable? If so, why not send it to the museum he worked with to retrieve these types of objects? Or why not send it to her mother, his sister?

Maggie spun the object in her hand. "What is your story?" she whispered to it. "Why are you so special?"

The object remained silent. With no answers, Maggie answered her mother. She texted back: *Thanks! I have a question for him regarding an item I came across. If you hear from him, let me know!*

Her mother confirmed she would text if Oliver appeared on her radar. Maggie swallowed the last sips of her coffee and rose from her bed to shower and dress for the day. As she slipped on her shoes to finish her outfit, she checked her phone again. Still no new messages. Maggie seethed inside, frustrated at Leo's stubbornness.

She grabbed her purse and keys, heading to the store. Her favorite pastry shop was on the route to her shop. She stopped to purchase an éclair, planning to indulge for her breakfast given her less-than-stellar mood.

She unlocked her front door, turning her sign to OPEN. As she flicked on the lights, illuminating the store, her phone chirped. She raced to the counter, dropping everything in a mad rush to retrieve her phone. Her preview screen revealed a message from Leo. She swiped at the screen to open the message: *Good morning... you out of your mood yet?*

A scowl formed across Maggie's face and she slammed

her phone onto the counter. In the process, she knocked her purse over, spilling the contents. The gold beetle clattered across the glass desk. "What a great start to the day," she murmured. She shoved the contents back inside. As she reached the bottom of the pile, the gold scarab commanded her attention, shining against the glass countertop. The item's beauty possessed the ability to distract her from almost everything.

For a moment, she forgot the text, admiring the small object again. She held it up to the light in the store, watching the gems sparkle. As she studied them in the light, something caught her eye. She peered at the object. Small etchings appeared inside the gems mounted on the beetle's back. They were too small to make out. After shoving the rest of her belongings into her purse, she pulled open the drawer to retrieve a magnifying glass.

Maggie peered through the magnifier at the gems. She shifted it at several angles but could not distinguish anything. Frustrated, she shoved the magnifier back into the drawer. She stuffed the item into her purse. She would deal with it after completing her morning chores.

Maggie spent over an hour reviewing the sales from the previous evening, dusting, readjusting and tweaking displays in the shop. When she finished, she collapsed onto the stool behind the register. She pulled her laptop onto the counter, opening it. As it started, she checked her phone. Another message from Leo awaited her: *I guess you're not*

It was a reference to the previous message. When Maggie failed to send a response earlier, Leo assumed annoyance still coursed through her veins. His assumption was correct. Maggie considered making him wait even longer, then decided against it. She typed a message back: *Not a mood... if you can't understand why I am annoyed, we have nothing to say to each other at the moment*

She slammed the phone onto the counter, turning her attention to her laptop. Again, she attempted an internet search on golden scarabs and related terms. She turned up nothing. Changing tactics, she called her uncle's office phone and cell phone. Both went to voicemail, but Maggie chose not to leave a message. It wasn't unlike Uncle Ollie to be unreachable even when not overseas. However, the peril hinted at in his note made her concern grow.

The front door's bell jingled, pulling her attention away from the object and its mystery. She greeted her customers and made herself busy while they browsed the shop. The remaining morning hours proved busy with a steady stream of customers browsing the shop. Maggie stepped out for a quick lunch before returning for the afternoon. Her busy day prevented her from studying the mysterious beetle any further. It also kept her from her phone and any messages waiting from Leo. Maggie considered that a good thing since it appeared they were heading for yet another argument.

Piper arrived in the late afternoon to take over her duties as the self-proclaimed "night manager." While it was not the title Maggie gave her, Piper insisted on using it, claiming she did the same work Maggie did all day. Since she was a capable worker, Maggie allowed her to use it, and left the store in her hands for the evening.

Maggie checked her phone as she stepped into the warm afternoon air. She had several unread messages from Leo. She read through them as she began her walk home. The messages began with the assertion that Leo did not understand why Maggie was upset. Another stated if she preferred not to talk, that was fine by him. Still another launched into the usual accusation that her behavior was "ridiculous." He also questioned why she was not happy for him.

Maggie rolled her eyes, deciding to answer him when she reached her apartment rather than attempt to type a

response while walking. Why did she continue this relationship? It usually brought her grief. Were all relationships this hard? She shoved her phone into her purse and focused on enjoying the day's fading warmth. She enjoyed living in her mid-sized midwestern town. The town offered everything a young woman could want: great restaurants, fabulous boutiques and enough nightlife to keep things interesting. And all within walking distance. With all the amenities of a city and none of the drawbacks, the quaint town, with its tree-lined streets and picturesque shopfronts, represented perfection to Maggie.

She reached her building and took the elevator to the top floor. After shoving her key into the lock, she turned it, not hearing the usual sound of the lock releasing. Confused, she tried the door, finding it unlocked. She figured she must have missed the clicking noise that accompanied the lock releasing.

She stepped into her apartment and came to a halt. Her jaw dropped open as she glanced around the living room. The entire room was a wreck. Couch cushions lay haphazardly strewn about. The couch itself was overturned. Table drawers were pulled out and dumped on the floor.

Maggie hurried to her bedroom, finding it in a similar state. Her heart raced, and she felt weak in the knees as she dialed 9-1-1 on her phone. The operator answered and Maggie stated her emergency, assuring the dispatcher the responsible parties were no longer on site.

She stepped into the hall and sunk to the floor to await the police, having been told to touch nothing inside. Within minutes, police arrived, and she recounted her brief story of arriving home to find her apartment trashed. Several officers entered the apartment while one took Maggie's statement before they both entered.

Inside, they continued to ask her questions, determining

if she had any problems or issues with anyone or anything valuable. They asked Maggie to confirm, to the best of her ability, if anything was stolen.

She checked several items in the living room, finding everything that came to mind. She moved to the bedroom to determine if anything of value was missing there. It appeared nothing had been taken, only torn apart for some unknown reason. Her drawers were all emptied, shoe boxes were opened and tossed around the room and closet. Clothing items were heaped everywhere.

As she finished confirming the contents of her jewelry box, she overheard shouting from the other room. She hurried to the living room, finding Leo engaged in an argument with an officer at the door.

"Oh my God! Maggie, are you okay?" He peered over the police officer's head.

"I'm fine. It's okay," Maggie said to the officer. "You can let him in."

Leo pushed past the man, eyeing the apartment. "Mags, are you sure?" He pulled her into a hug then leaned back to study her face as she answered.

"Yes, I'm sure. I wasn't here when it happened. And it looks like they didn't take anything." She stepped out of his embrace.

The lead detective on the scene approached them. "And you are?" he asked Leo.

"Boyfriend," Maggie and Leo responded in unison. "Leo Hamilton," Leo added. He extended his hand.

"Ah." He flipped his notebook open, ignoring Leo's hand. "And where were you earlier this afternoon?"

"What?" Leo questioned. "Are you serious?" He turned to Maggie. "What the hell did you tell them? Did you tell them we were fighting? Are you kidding me?"

"You're fighting?" He raised his eyebrows.

"No," Maggie replied. She shook her head at both men. "He had nothing to do with this. We're not fighting. We had a minor disagreement last night. It was nothing beyond what all normal couples go through."

The detective jotted a few notes in his notebook. "What are you writing?" Maggie asked. She peered over the top of the notebook.

"Just basic information. And as long as your boyfriend, Mr. Hamilton, was it? As long as he can account for his whereabouts earlier, we'll be fine."

Leo rolled his eyes. "I was at work. Ask anyone I work with. Tons of people saw me."

The detective took down information about Leo's workplace and closed his notebook. Frustrated, Maggie rolled her eyes again. "You should concentrate on finding who is responsible for this instead of wasting your time with people who aren't."

"Well, we often find, Ms. Edwards, that someone you were acquainted with is the culprit. It's obvious this wasn't about money. You have a number of valuables, but nothing was taken. They were searching for something here. So, I'd venture to say it's someone looking for something specific and figured they'd find it in your apartment."

"How much longer do you think you'll be here?" Maggie asked.

The detective glanced around. "The team's almost finished dusting for prints and photographing everything. They should be finished within the hour."

"Can I clean up then?"

"Sure. Oh," the officer said. He pointed to Maggie. "And you'll have to come to the station at your convenience and give us a sample of your fingerprints. A lot of the prints we pull will be yours. We'll want to rule those out when searching for a suspect."

"I'll make a point of coming tomorrow morning," Maggie answered. The detective wandered away to oversee the last bits of evidence gathering. Maggie assessed the damage, mentally calculating how long it would take to put her apartment back together.

"Mags, about last night..." Leo began.

"Listen," Maggie snapped, "I don't have the time or the patience to deal with that now. I've got to clean all of this up plus the mess in the bedroom. Just leave it, Leo."

"I'll help. I just wanted to tell you I was sorry."

Maggie glanced at him. "Really? After all your texts, you stopped over to apologize? Somehow, I find that hard to believe."

"Well, actually, when I didn't hear from you, I figured I'd stop to talk about it at least..." he began.

Maggie cut him off. "So, in other words, you weren't coming here to apologize, you were coming here to continue the argument. But now you feel bad and you don't want to come across as an uncaring heel."

"Oh, come on, Maggie, give me a break here."

Maggie held up a hand to him. "I just want to straighten up this mess and go to bed. I don't want or need your help so you can leave. I am absolving you of any duty to help me."

"Go to bed? Here? You can't stay here, at least not tonight!" Leo argued.

Maggie considered it. She would feel unsettled if she stayed the night. She imagined tossing and turning, wondering if the robbers may come back to finish searching for whatever they were hunting for earlier. While she hated to admit it, Leo was correct.

"Fine," she said, "I'll clean up, but I won't stay here."

"Good. You can stay with me. I'll take the couch. You can have the bed."

"I'll go to a hotel, thanks," she answered.

Leo dropped his head back onto his shoulders, frustrated by her response. "Are you kidding me? You're being impossible. Can I do nothing right?"

"Yes, I know. I'm being impossible. So perhaps you should leave."

"Come on, Mags." Leo pulled her close to him. "I care about you. I'm concerned. I just want to help."

"I'm still bothered by what happened last night. And I'm not willing to give you a free pass because I was robbed." She pushed him away. "Now, please. I'll be fine at a hotel."

"Well, we could always, I don't know, talk about it? There's a novel idea!" he mocked.

"Yes, that's just what I want to do during or after I've cleaned up my wrecked apartment: talk about why I was upset and listen to you tell me I shouldn't have been and how it's my fault and how I need to grow up and get over it and whatever else you decree to be the case."

"All right, fine. I give up!" Leo held his hands up to signify surrender. "You want to do this yourself? Fine! Go ahead. Have at it, Mags. You keep acting stubborn and one day you will find yourself with no one." Leo stormed from the apartment.

Maggie shook her head, biting her lower lip in frustration. Perhaps she should have given in and let him stay to help her. She had done it several times in the past, but his behavior frustrated her over and over. Allowing him to stay would have buried last night's incident only to be resurrected in a future fight. Then he would accuse her of never letting things go. She pushed the argument from her mind. She had many other things to handle. She wouldn't waste energy on a petty argument.

Maggie spent her entire evening restoring her bedroom. She rehung her clothes, put her shoes back where they belonged, refolded and filled her drawers, shoved her

mattress back onto the bed and changed the sheets. Exhausted, she decided to tackle the living room tomorrow. She packed a small suitcase with clothes and other essentials and left the apartment for a hotel.

Maggie dragged her suitcase to her car and drove to the town's Grand Hotel. The hotel was the best rated hotel in town, which was why Maggie selected it. No stranger to luxury, Maggie preferred to indulge in all the comforts life offered. She checked into a suite, expecting to stay for a few nights until she felt safe enough to return to her apartment.

Maggie unpacked her suitcase and changed, climbing into bed and nestling under the covers. She flipped on the TV before pulling her purse across the bed toward her. She dug into the front pocket, searching for her phone. Her hand hit a cold, hard object. She clasped it and removed it from her purse. The golden scarab stared back at her.

Maggie frowned at it, recalling the note that accompanied it. An idea crossed her mind. "Were they looking for you?" Maggie asked the beetle. She laughed, dismissing the idea as ridiculous. Or was it, she pondered? "We should figure out what your story is, little guy," she said, setting it down on her night table.

She dug further into the pocket, retrieving her phone. She unlocked it, checking her messages. Finding none, she set the phone on the night table next to the beetle. The room plunged into darkness as she switched off the light, nestling into the covers. She sighed in the darkness as she settled back into her pillow. After a few moments, she snapped her eyes open. She searched the darkness for any movement.

The break-in at her apartment unnerved her more than she was willing to admit. She second-guessed her prideful decision to opt for a hotel over Leo's apartment. Her mind wandered back to their argument. She grew annoyed all over again. She turned over to grab her phone to check for

messages again. No messages awaited her. She spotted the beetle next to her phone. Her mind returned to the mystery surrounding the object. She let her head rest against the pillow as she stared at it. Maggie dozed off speculating about the object.

* * *

A shrill ringing startled Maggie awake. She jumped, bolting upright from a sound sleep. Confused, she glanced around, getting her bearings. As her mind focused, she recalled being in the Grand Hotel following a break-in at her apartment. She took a deep breath, relaxing. Only then did she realize ringing still filled the room. She swiveled her head in the direction of the noise. Her cell phone jangled, buzzing and sliding on the night table, signaling a call coming through. Who would call in the middle of the night, she pondered, reaching for the phone?

“Hello?” she answered.

“MAGGIE!” a voice shouted on the other end through static.

“Uncle Ollie?” Maggie questioned.

“Yes...” The voice answered through static. “... get the scarab?” The conversation cut in and out.

“Uncle Ollie, I can’t hear you. The line is cutting in and out. I got the package...”

“Good! Maggie, it’s... protect it... worse than I imagined... danger... careful... safe.”

“Uncle Ollie, I’m losing you.”

“friend... help... important... notes... talk... no one...” The line disconnected. Her phone beeped, signifying a dropped call. Maggie redialed the number, but she could not connect with anyone. The line rang and rang, but no one answered.

Maggie set her phone down, unnerved by the call. She sat in bed, parsing through the few words she made out in the conversation. None of it pointed to anything good. She laid back on the pillow. What was worse than he imagined? Why did the scarab need protection? What was so important?

Her mind whirled with questions. She considered texting her mom but didn't want to wake her with upsetting news in the middle of the night. She had already opted not to inform her of the break-in, finding no reason to upset her. Closing her eyes, she took several deep, steadying breaths. With her eyes still closed, she reached to the night table, grabbing the gold beetle. It was cool against her skin. She pulled it close to her, squeezing it in her hand.

"Are you what's causing all the trouble?" Maggie asked it. She opened her eyes. The beetle stared back at her, silent. Maggie stared at it another moment. She needed to find some answers. Uncle Ollie mentioned the word 'notes' in his cryptic call. Was he referring to the note that accompanied the beetle? No, Maggie surmised, he said notes, not note. It was plural. Did he have notes on the object? Perhaps in his office. It was the best place to start her search for answers.

Maggie resolved to check his office the following day. Piper could cover the store from lunch on, freeing her up to make the trip to Aberdeen College. With a plan in place, Maggie fell asleep, still clutching the golden scarab in her hand.

CHAPTER 3



The next morning, Maggie awoke, the golden beetle still clenched in her fist. The gems made indentations in her palm. She placed the object on the night table, wiggling her fingers to release the stiffness.

Maggie stretched, sitting up. The mysterious call from her uncle flooded back into her mind. She must find answers. But first, her morning cup of coffee was calling her name. She rose from the bed and padded to the coffeemaker, starting the machine for her morning cup. The process completed, she snatched her cup and raced back to bed, sliding under the covers.

She grabbed her phone from the night table. Swiping it open, she checked her email. She found nothing important there. No text messages awaited her. She opened her recent calls, dialing the number Uncle Ollie called from last night. It rang several times with no answer.

Maggie disconnected the call. She received no answers from Ollie over her morning coffee. With no information gained, Maggie climbed out of bed to prepare for her day. After showering, applying makeup and pulling her hair into a

ponytail, she slipped a dress over her head, donned a pair of heels, a necklace and earring set. She stuffed her phone and the golden scarab into her purse and left her room, heading to her shop.

Maggie spent her morning dusting the store and rearranging products. Piper arrived just before lunch, and Maggie left her in charge of the store for the rest of the day. She strolled to the hotel, retrieved her car and drove the short distance to neighboring Aberdeen.

Maggie eased her car into a spot in the visitor parking area, gazing at the collegial buildings surrounding her. She recalled fond memories of her college and graduate school days. She wandered among the buildings, crossing the green to a small building that housed her uncle's office. While Maggie didn't have keys to his office, she knew where she could get them.

She climbed the building's central stairs to the second floor. Navigating to the main office of the Department of History and Classics, she popped her head in the door. She found a familiar face sitting behind the desk. "Knock, knock!" Maggie said.

"Maggie!" the woman said. She leapt from her chair and rushed around the desk to draw Maggie into a hug. "It's so good to see you, honey! How have you been?"

Molly Williams was the department secretary and was Maggie's supervisor when she worked as a graduate assistant in the office during her graduate work. "I've been doing well. My shop is thriving! I expanded it last year! Have you had lunch yet? I was hoping to take you to lunch," Maggie answered.

"I haven't! And I'd love to go. I have so much to tell you! Let me just grab my purse!"

"Any special place you'd prefer? It's been so long since I've been here," Maggie mentioned as Molly retrieved her purse.

"There's a new Italian place that opened a few months ago. We could go there if you're up for it?"

"Sure! How's the food, have you tried it yet?"

"I have. I had lunch there a while back with Dr. Kensie. You remember Dr. Kensie, don't you?"

"Yes, I remember Cate," Maggie answered as they exited the office. "How is she? I should stop by and say hello to her before I leave."

"Don't bother!" Molly answered. "She's not here anymore. She moved... to SCOTLAND! Can you believe it?"

"What?" Maggie exclaimed. "For another position?"

"No, no," Molly informed her. "She inherited a castle and now she's a countess."

"Wow! Hey, I'd have moved, too!" Maggie said.

"Me too! I'm visiting her in October. Leaving on the eighteenth and staying just over a week!"

"Aww," Maggie lamented. "You'll miss the Fall Ball!"

"I will, but Lady Cate, as they call her in Scotland, is hosting a costume ball at the castle, so I get the better end of the deal."

Maggie and Molly strolled into town, continuing their conversation about Molly's trip to Scotland. Over lunch, they discussed their lives and caught up on anything that had happened since the last time they had spoken. As they walked back to campus, Maggie explained her true reason for the visit. She recounted the story of receiving the golden scarab from her uncle along with the cryptic note and phone call. She explained that he mentioned notes in the call, and she hoped to check his office for them.

Molly agreed Ollie's office was the best place to begin a search, and using her master key for the building, opened the door for Maggie. "Just make sure you lock it before you leave," Molly said. "I hope you find something to help. Keep me informed! Gosh, I hope nothing's happened to him!"

“Me too. I’ll stop by before I leave and let you know if I find anything. Hey, enjoy your trip to Scotland if you leave before I finish my search!”

“Oh, trust me, I plan on it!” Molly chuckled as she disappeared down the hall.

Maggie giggled at Molly’s statement. She sunk into the chair behind her uncle’s desk, staring at the piles of unsorted clutter covering it. Neatness was not a trait Uncle Ollie possessed. As she assessed where to begin, a tinkling sound whispered through the air. It dawned on her after a moment the noise came from her phone, stuffed in the front pocket of her purse.

She reached down and pulled it out. The phone’s display signified a call from Piper. Was there a problem at the shop? Maggie swiped the answer button. “Hello, Piper, everything okay?”

“Dude, answer your phone once in a while.”

“Sorry, I’ve been busy. What did you need?”

“It’s not what I need. Your goofy boyfriend is here, and he’s pestering me about where you are. I told him I don’t know what you’re doing. He tried to call you like seven times and you didn’t answer, so he insisted I call you.” Maggie overheard Leo’s voice in the background. “No way, dude, it’s my phone,” Piper murmured before her voice grew louder. “Listen, I will not play intermediary between you two. Just answer your damn phone.” The line clicked as Piper ended the call.

“Ah!” Maggie said, staring at her phone. She noticed several missed call notifications and a few unread text messages. She hadn’t checked her phone after arriving at the college or during lunch with Molly. As she swiped into her text message app, her phone rang. This call came from Leo.

She swiped to answer it. “I...” she started.

“Where the hell have you been? I have been texting and

calling you all morning and no answer. Finally, I stopped by the shop only to have Piper tell me she has no idea where you are either.”

“I’ve been busy,” Maggie said, annoyed. “I had a few things to do, and I wasn’t checking my phone.”

“Really? A few things to do. And it never occurred to you to check your phone or let me know, given what happened last night at your apartment?”

“No, it didn’t,” Maggie stated. “Why would I have let you know? After last night, I didn’t feel the need to run anything past you.”

Leo sighed. “I’m sorry I said that. I overreacted, but I’m concerned about you. I was worried when I couldn’t reach you this morning. I even brought a peace offering when I came to ask you to go to lunch.”

Maggie sighed. “Thanks, but I went to lunch with a friend. And I’m fine. You can stop worrying.”

“So, am I forgiven? I realize we’ve hit a bit of a rough patch, Mags, but we can work through it. Let’s have dinner tonight.”

“I’m not sure I’ll be back in time for dinner.” Maggie eyed the stacks of “notes” on the desk to sort through.

“Really? What’s got you so busy, Mags? And why so secretive about it?”

Maggie clamped her mouth shut, seething. “I’m not being secretive. Just because I didn’t call you after your outburst last night to clear my schedule with you doesn’t mean I’m being secretive. I’m busy. What I’m busy with is my business.” Maggie poked the screen to end the call before shoving the phone into her purse.

She pushed the conversation from her mind as she dug into the stacks of papers on the desk. It took her hours to sift through the clutter. Most of it was ungraded student papers. She moved on to the desk drawers. She found office supplies

in each drawer. In the file cabinet, there were more student papers from previous semesters.

Maggie spent hours searching every corner of the office. She uncovered no notes tied to the golden beetle. She sighed, sinking into the desk chair. She glanced around one last time before grabbing her purse. She'd try one other place before returning to her hotel.

Maggie popped her head into Molly's office before departing, thanking her again for providing access to her uncle's office and telling her again to enjoy her trip to Scotland. Molly promised to email pictures from her trip. Maggie descended the stairs and entered the warm late afternoon air. She sauntered across campus to her car. Throwing her purse into the passenger seat, she climbed behind the wheel and fired the engine.

Maggie backed out of the parking spot and pulled onto the road, aiming her car toward Uncle Ollie's house. He lived only a few minutes from campus in a Craftsman-style house with a big front yard. Maggie always found it ironic that he had such a beautiful house since he was rarely home to enjoy it. She pulled into the driveway, parking her car near the path leading to the house.

Maggie approached the front door, knocking just in case. As expected, there was no answer. Uncle Ollie kept a key hidden under a large potted plant. Maggie struggled to lift it but managed to tip it enough to grab the key from under it. As she did, her hand hit another object. She pulled it, too, from under the plant. It was another key with an orange marker reading 148. Shoving it into her purse, she inserted the house key into the front door.

She unlocked the door, letting it swing open as she placed the house key in her purse. When she stepped inside it took a moment for her eyes to focus in the waning light. When they did, her jaw dropped to the floor. The house was in disarray.

Drawers were pulled out, their contents dumped. The couch cushions were sliced open and strewn about the room. The scene was almost identical to her apartment last night.

She pulled her phone from her purse and dialed 9-1-1. As she waited for the police to arrive, she texted her mother to update her on the situation. While her mother was concerned, she was too far from Aberdeen to offer any assistance. Maggie assured her she was fine and had the situation under control.

When the police arrived, Maggie explained the situation, telling them she was checking on her uncle's house while he was away. Although she felt disingenuous, Maggie did not mention the package, note and mysterious call she received.

The police spent several hours collecting evidence. Maggie waited until they were finished, locking the house after they left. She chose to keep both keys with her. She also chose not to clean up the house. The long day exhausted her, and she craved a warm bowl of soup and a cup of tea to soothe her nerves.

She tossed her purse into the passenger seat and started her car. Her mind rambled as she drove the short distance back to the Grand Hotel. Exhausted, she slogged through the front door, intent on ordering room service the moment she arrived at her room.

As she entered the lobby, she saw a figure stand from one of the seats near the fireplace. Maggie repressed the urge to roll her eyes as she recognized Leo. She was in no mood for a discussion with Leo.

"Maggie..." He approached her.

"No, Leo," Maggie interrupted. She held up her hand. "I can't do this now. I'm exhausted."

"What is going on, Mags?" He squeezed her arms. "Talk to me. Where have you been all day? Does it have anything to do with your ransacked apartment?"

Stress overcame Maggie for a moment. She sank into Leo, putting her forehead against his chest. He pulled her closer to him. "It's okay, Mags. Just tell me what's going on."

"I'm okay." She pulled herself upright. "I'm fine. There's just a lot happening."

"Come on, let's talk about it over dinner," Leo suggested.

"I'm too tired and sore. I'm planning to order room service and eat in my room. I just want to change and sit down," she muttered, stepping toward the elevator. "Come on." She glanced to Leo. "I'll fill you in while we wait for room service."

Leo nodded, following her to the elevator. Leo ordered room service while Maggie changed, donning her pajamas and a bathrobe. She shuffled into the living room in fluffy slippers, finding Leo sitting on the couch. "I ordered us a bottle of wine to help you relax," he said, patting the couch next to him. "Now what's going on, Mags?" Maggie collapsed onto the couch next to him.

Maggie reached for her purse, digging into it and removing the gold beetle and the note. "This came in the mail from my Uncle Ollie." Leo read the note and studied the object. "I received that Wednesday. Last night I received a call from Uncle Ollie. The call was breaking up, I could only catch a few words. He mentioned something about danger and protecting the scarab and staying safe. Anyway, he also mentioned notes about the beetle. At least I assume that's what he meant; it was the only word I caught. I went to his office and his house today to look for them."

"Did you find them?" Leo asked as she paused.

"No. But what I found was his house trashed the same way my apartment was."

"What?" Leo exclaimed. "Did you call the police?"

"Yes, I just finished with the Aberdeen police. These incidents have to be connected. My apartment is wrecked like

someone was searching for something. My uncle's place is the same. And all this happens within days of me receiving this scarab."

"We don't know when your uncle's house was broken into," Leo argued.

"Oh, come on, what are the chances..." Maggie began when a knock sounded at the door.

Leo answered it, allowing the room service attendant to push the cart into the room. The attendant reviewed the items, ensured the order was correct, and retrieved a signed copy of the bill before leaving them alone.

"One tomato bisque." Leo delivered the bowl to her.

"Thanks," Maggie answered. "Like I was saying, what are the chances my apartment gets tossed the same week Uncle Ollie's does?"

"Again, we don't know it was the same week. And over this? Come on!" Leo argued. He picked up the small beetle and studied it again before digging into his meal.

"What else could it be?"

"It doesn't look THAT valuable," Leo said.

"Oh, your vast knowledge of ancient artifacts tells you that, does it?" Maggie asked between spoonfuls of soup.

"No, my common sense tells me that. Are these jewels real? Is this solid gold? Come on, Mags, you're somewhat of an antique dealer. Would you assess this as a high-value item?"

Maggie shrugged. "What other explanation can there be? Perhaps it's not valuable in terms of cost, but in some other way?"

"What way?"

"I'm not sure. That's why I tried to find Uncle Ollie's notes. Perhaps there's a clue in them about why this little guy is so important."

Leo laughed. "Little guy? Have you named it?"

Maggie shot him a wry glance. "Watch it. I still haven't forgiven you for the last few days."

"Ah, yes." Leo grabbed his wine glass with a sigh. "The real issue comes to light. Our argument. You can't still be mad? Are you still mad about the whole dinner thing?"

"It's not the 'dinner thing,'" Maggie answered. "It's the idea that you built this up over some stupid car and then when I was disappointed you laughed about it."

"Okay, first, it's not a stupid car. I was excited about that car, Maggie! And I didn't laugh about it."

"You did!" Maggie insisted. "When I told you I assumed you wanted to discuss something important about our relationship, you laughed."

"I'm sorry I laughed, but come on, Mags. We're nowhere near a place to discuss marriage. I'm not saying we won't get there, I just think we have a lot of growing up to do."

"You mean you think I have a lot of growing up to do."

"I didn't say that, you're putting words in my mouth."

"You didn't have to." Maggie dumped her empty bowl on the coffee table.

"Don't start, Maggie."

"Don't start? Don't start what? Overreacting? Anytime I disagree with you or don't see it your way, I'm overreacting. And you wonder why I didn't bother telling you anything about what I was doing today."

Leo rolled his eyes, then leaned forward and kissed Maggie's forehead. "I'm going to head out. You're tired, I'll let you get some rest."

"How magnanimous of you."

"Good night, Maggie." Leo strutted from the room.

Maggie sunk back onto the couch. Her and Leo together were like oil and water, they didn't mix. They were like a powder keg that could explode at any minute. While she didn't want to continue the conversation they were having, it

frustrated her to no end when he played the “bigger person” and walked out on her.

She sighed, standing and collecting the dishes. She stacked them on the room service cart and wheeled it into the hallway. Exhausted, she stumbled through the living room into the bedroom, collapsing into bed. After a few moments, she rose, popping a few over-the-counter pain relievers for the aches. She slid back under the sheets and dropped off to sleep within seconds.

CHAPTER 4



Maggie awoke the next morning stiff. She stretched and crawled from bed, heading straight for the pain relievers and a cup of coffee. She dreaded restoring her living room tomorrow. Her muscles ached already. But she would give her muscles a break today by working at the shop instead of her apartment.

Maggie grabbed her laptop, settling in bed with her coffee. She checked her email, finding one from Molly. Molly stated how enjoyable she found their lunch and passed along the email address for Dr. Kensie that Maggie requested. Maggie thanked her, then opened a new email. She typed *Hello from Maggie Edwards* in the subject line. In the body, Maggie typed:

Hi Cate! I'd say I hope you are doing well but from the sounds of it, you are doing VERY well! I was on Aberdeen's campus yesterday and had lunch with Molly. She told me all about your recent developments. A Scottish Castle, wow!!!! How exciting!! And I bet Riley is LOVING his new yard!

Too bad we weren't able to get together for lunch before you

moved. I would have loved to have seen you before you left and that cute pup of yours.

Please send me some pics of your new home. I'd love to see it, I bet the castle's full of beautiful antiques! I'm sure Aberdeen College misses you and all your hard work. Molly is so excited for her upcoming trip. I'm sad she is missing the Fall Ball, but it sounds like she'll have another ball to enjoy (and perhaps a better one!).

Well, I'll let you go, I'm sure you have much more fun things to do than read emails. Go enjoy that Scottish countryside!

Yours,

Maggie Edwards

After finishing her email and coffee, Maggie climbed from bed and dressed for the day. As she finished applying her lipstick, she received a message from Leo: *Good morning, babe, hope you slept well.*

Despite being mad, Maggie returned his text. This was not unusual for their relationship. They always got through it. Mad or not, life continued and eventually, Maggie would get over it.

She drove to the shop, opening it for the day. Within minutes of opening, bells announced her first weekend customer. "Good morning, welcome!" Maggie called from the back of the shop.

"It's me," Leo's voice answered her.

"Hey," Maggie greeted him, returning to the front of the store. Leo held two coffees and a bag in his hand.

"I stopped by your favorite bakery and got you one of those chocolate croissants you love and a coffee."

"Aww, thanks!" Maggie relieved him of a coffee and the bag.

"Did you sleep?"

"I did," she said, "with a little help from a pain reliever. I

am not looking forward to finishing the work at my apartment tomorrow.”

“Want some help?” Leo sipped his coffee as Maggie bit into her croissant.

“Mmm,” she murmured. Her enjoyment of the pastry clear with the gesture. “Yes, please.”

“I would have helped you the other night, too, if you weren’t being so stubborn.” Leo winked at her.

Maggie rolled her eyes. “Don’t start. I’m still mad at you.”

“You are not,” Leo insisted. He leaned over the counter to steal a kiss.

“I am so,” Maggie countered. She avoided his kiss.

“I’m sorry I disappointed you, Mags.” Leo stared in her eyes. Maggie gave him a soft kiss. “Am I forgiven?”

“Let’s say you’re on probation.” Maggie flashed him a coy glance.

“It’s like that, huh?”

“Mm-hmm, it’s like that.”

“Well, I better start my community service then. Do you need any help here today? And does the pastry delivery count?”

“I’ll count it since you remembered my favorite kind. And to answer your first question, yes. I want to move a few things. I could use your help with some boxes.”

Leo finished his coffee. “Lead the way.”

Maggie and Leo spent Saturday rearranging items in the store, packing away others and reorganizing many. They grabbed dinner at a local restaurant before Maggie returned to the hotel. Sunday was spent restoring Maggie’s living room to its normal state. Her next task was to tackle cleaning her uncle’s house. But Maggie did not plan on dealing with that project for several days. Her aching muscles and busy schedule with the shop prevented her from starting earlier.

When Monday arrived, Maggie dragged herself from bed.

While her apartment had been restored to its normal state, she had chosen to remain at the hotel. Uneasiness still lingered within her over the incident. Perhaps in the next day or so she would return, she reflected.

Maggie started her day in the usual manner, with a cup of coffee while lounging in bed with her laptop. She began by checking her email, finding a response from Cate Kensie.

Hello Maggie—It's good to hear from you! I'm sorry we weren't able to see each other before I left. Everything happened so fast. I never realized I had relatives in Scotland, then suddenly I was inheriting a castle. Riley loves it here. He has plenty of open space to bound around.

I attached some pictures. The castle is incredible! Lots of antiques, it's like living in a museum. You'd love it! You'll have to visit us sometime; we'd love to see you.

I hope everything is going well for you and your shop is thriving (I have no doubt it is; you are an excellent businesswoman)!

Hope to hear from you again soon!

Cate

Maggie smiled at the email. It appeared Dr. Kensie was doing well. She was happy for her, if anyone deserved happiness it was Cate. She decided to answer the email later. Instead, she used her morning to try another bevy of internet searches, attempting to locate any information on the mysterious object sent to her. Again, she found nothing.

Frustrated, she hopped out of bed and dressed for the day. Despite the distance, she enjoyed a slow walk to her shop, appreciating one of the last few warm mornings before cool fall weather set in. A slow trickle of customers wandered in and out of the store during the morning hours.

During lunch, Maggie closed the shop, leaving a note that she would reopen mid afternoon. She planned a trip to the area's museum, hoping to track down some information about the item she received from Uncle Ollie.

It was a long shot but if anyone could identify the object or determine if it was valuable, it would be someone there. The museum employed several individuals whose expertise was artifacts and antiquities. The local Museum of Natural History was a mid-sized museum with several experts in various time periods and locations.

Maggie grabbed a sandwich on her way to the museum, taking a few bites as she strolled toward the building. The large, tan building stood in stark contrast to the blue sky. Maggie climbed the stone steps, glancing at the massive columns supporting the stone peaks of the roof. The building was beautiful. She loved the museum ever since her Uncle Ollie had taken her here as a child. Ironic that she was returning now with a mysterious object from Uncle Ollie.

Maggie swung through the revolving door, approaching the docent. She asked to speak with Amy Nash, one of the curators in the antiquities department. Since her uncle was a frequent consultant for the museum, Maggie was well acquainted with many staff members here.

The docent picked up the phone, dialing a few numbers. She waited a moment, then spoke into the receiver. After she replaced the receiver, she directed Maggie to the offices on the left. Maggie thanked her and strode to the offices.

She found Amy in her office, bending over a small object while she munched on her salad. Maggie knocked before stepping through the door. "Hi, Amy!" Maggie greeted her. "Thanks for seeing me on such short notice. Sorry for not calling ahead."

"Hey, Maggie! No problem! Come in, have a seat."

"Thanks," Maggie said, sitting down across from Amy.

"What brings you by, Maggie?" Amy asked.

"I've got something I'd like you to take a peek at." Maggie opened her purse and removed the gold beetle. "My Uncle Ollie sent this to me with a rather cryptic note. Have you ever seen anything like it?"

Amy reached across the desk, accepting the object from Maggie. She studied it a moment, turning the object over in her hands. She peered closer at it before giving it an overall glance again.

"Well?" Maggie asked.

"You received this from Oliver?" Amy inquired.

"Yes, a few days ago. I haven't been able to track down much information on it."

"I'm not surprised. I've never seen one like this before. I mean, I've seen scarabs, even golden ones, but nothing with gems like this. And it appears there are markings inside the gems. I can't make them out, but they don't appear to be the result of damage or random."

"Do you imagine it's valuable?"

Amy didn't respond. She studied the object with interest.

"What is it?" Maggie asked.

"I'm not sure." Amy's eyes never left the object as she spoke. "I mean, I've never seen a scarab like this in person, but something about this reminds me of a picture I saw once."

"A picture?" Maggie questioned.

"Yes, just a minute." Amy set the object on the desk and stepped to a bookcase nearby. After a moment of perusal, she pulled a thick book from the shelf and paged through it. When she located the correct page, she plopped the book in front of Maggie, pointing to the center of the page. "Here."

"The Golden Scarab of Cleopatra," Maggie read. She glanced at the picture. It was a sketch of Cleopatra holding a bejeweled golden scarab. Hieroglyphics decorated the page

behind her. "It's not an exact match, but it looks similar. But this is just a drawing!"

"Yes." Amy sat down behind the desk again. "That's about all you'll find of it. It's never been seen by anyone other than the ancient Egyptians. Well, assuming it exists."

"Assuming it exists?" Maggie screwed up her face.

"Yes," Amy answered. "It's really something of a legend. The supposed key to finding and opening Cleopatra's tomb. Many archaeologists consider it only a legend. That there is no actual truth to the rumor, and it originated as a story to keep tomb raiders busy seeking the key rather than the tomb. Others deem it a true story. There is little information, however, about the object or its potential location. Finding any information is often painstaking."

"What do you deem is true?" Maggie inquired.

"I'm not sure to be honest," Amy responded. "The existence of an object like this makes sense to an extent, but given the fact that there is little information regarding it makes me question its existence. Someone must have kept records somewhere, right?"

"Or perhaps the lack of information points to it being real rather than fake," Maggie conjectured. "Perhaps it was a well-guarded secret with as much information concealed as possible."

"Now you sound like your uncle." Amy laughed.

"What do you mean?"

"He supposed the same thing you did. The lack of information pointed more to the existence of the object than against it. I'm not sure. Either way, I'm not sure I can be of more help to you. Oliver would be the best one to answer any further questions. He's built a repository of information on the object. I only have stories like this one to share." Amy pointed to the book.

Maggie smiled at her, not wanting to give too much away.

"Thanks. Uncle Ollie is still out of the country, so I figured I'd take my chances here before he was back. This is helpful. Would you mind making a copy of this page for me?"

"Not at all," Amy agreed. "Just give me a sec." She grabbed the book and disappeared from the room. Within two minutes she returned, handing a warm paper to Maggie and placing the book back on her shelf. "Sorry, it's only black and white, my copier isn't color!"

"No problem, this is all I need. Thank you so much for your time, Amy. I really appreciate it!"

"No problem! Tell Ollie I said 'hi' next time you see him! And if you wouldn't mind, could you let me know the origin of this once you speak with him? I'd love to know where he found it!"

"Sure! Thanks again." Maggie stood and retrieved her purse, slipping the beetle inside along with the folded copy.

"Your welcome. How's your business going?"

"Good! My customer base has increased with the addition of the antiques. Stop by sometime if you have a chance. I'm sure you'd enjoy looking through our collection."

"I've been meaning to, but I always end up staying at work too late. With my master's defense around the corner, it seems all I do is work."

"Ha! I understand completely! Well, whenever you need a break, we're open! Thanks again," Maggie said. She exited the room, making her way down the hall and back to the lobby.

She exited the museum, descending the large stone steps. The warm sun shone overhead. Maggie strolled through the parking lot, a shortcut to the nearest street. As she passed the cars, her mind turned to her conversation with Amy. She failed to notice movement to her left until it was too late.

A figure darted from between two vehicles, approaching Maggie from the rear. A scream rose from Maggie's throat as hands grabbed her. It was muffled when a firm hand clamped

over her mouth. She struggled but was dragged backward toward a van and tossed inside. Maggie scrambled toward the door as it was slammed in her face.

Is Maggie doomed? Find out Maggie's fate by grabbing your copy of the full book here: [Cleopatra's Tomb](#)

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading this free book sample! I've always loved adventures and *Cleopatra's Tomb* was an enjoyable experience to write!

I hope you enjoyed reading these chapters as much as I enjoyed writing them! If you enjoyed this preview, I hope you'll read the full book!

It's available here: [Cleopatra's Tomb](#)

All the best, Nellie

