

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss*

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## A Shaky Friendship

We had another gathering at work, this time to say good by to Emily who was headed off to school. As seems to happens at these things, we started to talk about my writing and about the super hero stories I written based on other people at work. The four people left decided that I should write a story with the four of them in it. I asked them what super hero power they would want and quickly four characters were forming. Unlike last time, two of them wanted to be the villains. I told them that would mean they would loose in the end, but they both insisted. So here is part one of **A Shaky Friendship**. I hope you enjoy.

Doug

Ma'an Purr lay curled up on the bar stool, the warm morning sun rays captured by her black fur. 'This is the life,' she thought. 'No responsibilities. No where to be.' Her thoughts were interrupted as the sun rose higher and the rays shifted off of her. She looked across the bar to the calendar, 'No, nothing I've got to do today. Ma'an closed her eyes and flicked her tail, when she opened then again another day was crossed off the calendar and the sun's rays were just starting to shine on her. 'This is the life.'

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Emily Ho shivered. The world was silent. A fresh coat of snow covered the small shack and the world around it. She didn't want to move, but there were things to do, so she stood and stretched. Slowly at first, she took her body through its morning routine. Graceful movements of hands and feet. A slow motion kick, frozen in time. As the routine progressed, warmth returned to her bones, the power of her chi building. An hour passed as Emily completed the routine she had been learning since she was three. The last kicks and flips left her body glistening and hot despite the freezing air.

Emily picked up her cloak and pack, then walked to the door. It opened easily, revealing three inches of snow. She took the first step of the day's

journey, conscious of her affects on it. She walked from the shack and into the trees, leaving no tracks in the snow - she knew it was important that she not be followed.

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Nelson Karats flipped the door open, the crowd that was always present, gasped as they saw him. He didn't have to scan the crowd for her, there was no missing this beauty. Long flowing black hair, curling around a flawless neck, bouncing off of bare shoulders, intertwined with the sheer fabric that teasingly concealed her curves. Nelson had picked the black Maserati because he knew it would complement Sindy Black's dress, his people were rarely wrong, and never more than once. He regretted not bringing the convertible, her hair would have danced so nicely in the wind, 'maybe next time.'

Sindy nodded to Nelson when he met her eyes. She liked it when people went out of their way for her, it was fitting. She liked what they say: tall, dark, handsome and rich. 'Yes, he'll do just fine.' He flowed out of the car, all tux and brawn. In a blink of an eye he was in front of her, her hand in his, his lips pressed softly against it, the air filled with the flash of five hundred cameras going off at once. 'Yes, he'll do just fine.'

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Two more days skipped by, the sun ever warm, but today Ma'an had something to do. She jumped off the stool and stretched her arms out in front of her. As she did, they grew and changed, her claws turning into hands, her fur into the finest silk. The transformation took twenty seconds, but it felt like a lifetime. Ma'an jumped forward, then pushed off with her hands into a forward flip. She landed on her silk slippers and didn't make as much sound as a butterfly flapping it wings. This evening she had to stop someone. Today she had to get ready.

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Emily walked out of the woods into the small town. It was nice to see that every town had a Starbucks. Double mocha half caf latte in hand, Emily pulled out her phone and turned it on. 'San Francisco' she typed in, '8-19-2017'. The screen was filled with pictures of happy families on their summer vacations, and of a car crash, and a protest march. She swiped through the pictures until she found a quiet one, a mom and two kids standing by a chocolate company's sign. She imagined herself in the picture, standing to the side, just inside the frame. She focused and saw herself appear in the picture, then, she close her eyes and opened them again. She was standing

on the sidewalk, the warm California air caressing her face, the laugh of the two kids who didn't want to hold still under their mothers grasps. Emily turned and walked away into the crowd.

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'The night had gone well,' Nelson thought. 'A couple of amazing shots where the ball had rolled around three or four times before going in and winning the game for his Clippers, a great meal with great conversation - she always knew just the right question to ask. Finished off with a drive up the coast.'

The sun was just raising over the hills as Nelson came to the end of the 280 and entered San Francisco. Sendy looked like a dream, sleeping in the seat next to him. Too bad the day was already booked, she deserved more attention. The drive into town was easy, not many people are up at 5 AM on a Saturday. Nelson pulled into the drive of the Karats Imperial Hotel and killed the engine. "Sendy, time to rise."

Sendy stretched and smiled up at him. "We're here?"

"Yes, Ma'am, with six hours to rest and get ready before our meeting."

Nelson popped the doors, they both got out and walked arm in arm through the gilded doorway - into a little piece of heaven.

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Ma'an left the Golden Dragon a bit reluctantly, lunch was yet to be served, and walked up Washington Avenue. At least she still thought of it as the Golden Dragon, Imperial Palace seems so haughty. It felt like only yesterday when the Joe Boys shot up the place. Ma'an hoped tonight would be less bloody. She weaved between the tourists and the locals who filled the sidewalk, each busy on their own way, none feeling the ripples in time that had drawn her.

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Emily found the address her contact had given her. It looked like the kind of place she expected, but not what she had hoped. 'Why can't I ever meet a contact in a nice place?'

She slipped past the boards blocking the door and walked down the hallway of what had once been Kim's Dojo. The walls had holes in them, some obviously from feet and hands, another that may have been from a persons head, a dozen or so that were most likely from bullets. She reached the end of the hallway and the main practice room. She was about to call out her contact's name when she saw the bodies. Three men and six women lay in pools of blood around the room. She looked at each until she found Lydian. 'At least she had held her own.' The other eight bodies were similarly dressed and wore the same mask over their eyes - The Griffin.

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A nondescript man in a nondescript suit stepped up to Nelson. "Sir, there's been a complication. The target did not want to be acquired. Our whole team has resigned. We did get word before the last one retired that the target has also retired. A janitorial team is in route to clean up from the party."

The look on Nelson's face made it clear that he didn't appreciate the news and just wanted it to go away. The man quickly turned and left. Sendy put her arm on Nelson's arm and felt the muscles bulging under his suit's jacket. "Don't worry, there's nothing that can stop us now. This was just an annoying loose thread and it sounds like it was cut off anyway, even if our scissors were damaged." She stroked his arm and then rested her head against it.

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Ma'an reached the spot. Nothing special about it, just another sidewalk in China Town, but in two minutes it would be pivotal. She stepped away from the spot and into the shadows to wait. She counted down the seconds until she saw the five of them walking towards the spot. At the last second she

stepped out, blocking their way - changing time's path.

"Out of the way," the one in the lead barked at her. A knife blade appearing in his hand to make sure the command wasn't over looked.

"Excuse me, sir," she said as she took a step to the side.

One. Two. Three of them passed the point, then she stepped forward again, placing her foot against the side of the fourth one's knee. The sound of the snapping stopped the three in front of him before a scream left him. As the third man turned around, her knee found his groin. His scream was added to the fourth's.

The two men fell to the ground. The other three circled her. She took a pose similar to theirs. Then she was gone. The three men that were paying attention, spun around, searching for her, but couldn't find her.

Forty-five seconds later she appeared again in the same spot and watched the three men dragging the other two down the sidewalk. Ma'an focused on the timeline and frowned. 'Pucha, this one must want to happen.'

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"Sendy, go and make sure that everything is going as planned. I just got word that our team ran into a delay. Nothing they couldn't handle, but they said the woman who got in their way vanished. Make sure she stays vanished."

"Sure thing, Ore. It was getting boring around here anyway." Sendy got up from the food laden table, grabbing a roll on her way, and left Nelson to the empty room and its dozens of ghosts.

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Emily dropped her pack on the chair. The thud of it was reassuring. With a practiced ease, her clothes were off. She unzipped the pack and removed white leather pants. She smiled as she pulled the one size too small pants on

and felt the transformation – Emily was fading, the White Shadow emerging. She put on the vest and zipped it up, its sun embossed across her firm abs, its rays across her chest. She held the mask in her hands, looking at it, looking at who it made her – who she could never admit she was. An angle or dove, the light of the sun chasing away the darkness, or just another lawless vigilante taking the law into her own hands. The transformation complete, she stuffed her other life into her bag and slipped out into the night.

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Sendy rode the elevator down. The small box, the slight rumbling of the old machinery brought back memories from two years prior. Trapped in the safe room of her father’s castle. Trapped with Francisco, her one true love. The earthquake shaking her, him, the room. Dust filling the air, pieces of ceiling raining down on them, then collapsing. It spared her, but Francisco was knocked to the ground, pinned under a mountain of rubble. She remembered falling to the ground, holding his hand, of crying. How she could hear his thoughts, feel his pain. She had told him to hold on, but she heard his resignation. She pleaded with him. The door had opened, a servant was there. He told her to come, that she had to leave. She refused to leave Francisco. The servant insisted, she knew he would use force if she said no. Francisco told her to leave, and she heard him think that the only thing worse than dying alone would be to know that if Sendy died to stay with him, it would be his fault. She left. The servant took her to safety. Behind her the castle collapsed, and with it her Father, her Mother, her Lover and her life.

The feelings overwhelmed her and she fell to her knees. Tears streamed down her face and her body shook. As the rumbling stopped, as the elevator doors opened to the sub-basement, Sendy’s grief was replaced with anger, with the need for vengeance. Tonight the Wongs would know the hell she had gone through as their town fell down

around them. Tonight she would make things right.

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Emily stopped outside the Wong building. Its glass facade rising dozens of stories into the sky. She looked through the windows, into the empty lobby. No one was there, no one but her standing by the elevator, and then she was by the elevator pushing the down button. She hoped the information she had found in Lydian’s pocket was real and not planted. The ‘bing’ of a bell brought her back and she stepped into the waiting elevator.

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Nelson sat in his penthouse, a glass of Champagne in one hand, the other flipping over the screen of his pad. Everything was progressing on schedule. Six teams were in place, each with the ability to bring the city down. His helicopter was idling just outside the door, ready to take him away. Insurance policies were in place, fake logs of assets being brought into his building were in place, and stocks in insurance companies had been shorted. Yes, everything was moving along as planned. He had even gotten that mind-reading Sendy to go to the basement of one of the buildings that was going to collapse without her being able to read that it was a trap. Yes, even Sendy’s small fortune would soon be his.

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Ma’an closed her eyes and focused on two days ago. She opened her eyes and a gentle rain fell on her. She walked to the Ford building and went inside. The sun caused shadows to race along the lobbies floor. She closed her eyes again and when she opened them it was night. She found the elevator and rode to the bottom. There was only one guard there. He saw her. She jumped forward in time. He had moved past where she had been. Now she was behind him. He didn’t stand a chance.

The machine was huge. It looked like a giant doughnut, with coils of wire wrapped around its thirty foot core.

Lydian had said it was dangerous, looking at it, Ma’an would have to agree. She found the access panel and began the rewiring she had studied. Finished, she dragged the still unconscious guard to the elevator and then to a janitor’s closet on an unused floor. Secured and drugged for the next two days, Ma’an left him, returned to the lobby and today.

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Sendy leaned against the wall, watching with little interest as the team of technicians flipped switches and typed on computers. One of the monitors showed a map of San Francisco with one red, one yellow and four green circles on it.

“Contact team three,” Sendy ordered. “Find out why they’re not on line yet.”

One of the women stepped aside and pulled out a phone. “Status!” she said. “Yes. Are you sure? How long.”

The woman turned to face Sendy. “The coil at site three is not working. They’ve run diagnostics and it comes out good, but preflight’s not working. They says its either incompetence or sabotage. They’re investigating.”

Sendy let out the breath she didn’t realize she was holding and rubbed her forehead. “Fine. Check with site five.”

The woman placed the call. “Status. How long? That’s not an acceptable answer. Well, do it faster.” She ended the call. “They’re still fifteen minutes from operational status. They’re down two team members. He claims the system wasn’t designed for three people to start up. They’ll try to speed it up.”

“We’re not going to wait for them. Initiate the startup sequence.”

“Yes Ma’am.” The woman turned back to her computers and typed in some commands. The four green dots on the map started flashing, a counter appeared in the lower corner of the screen and started counting down from

ten. With each flash the count decreased.

When the count reached zero, a yellow halo surrounded the green circles, a hum filled the room, an invisible force went through their bodies, and dust started falling from the ceiling. The yellow halo raced away from each of the dots. A second later another formed, another hum, another pulse. More and more yellow circles expanded across the map, then some of them deformed. Arcs of yellow reversed directions and raced back across the map.

As the first arcs crossed the circles that had formed them, the pulsing slowed. Not by much, but the space between the expanding circles increased. One minute, then two went by. The pulsing of energy became a wave, each larger than the one before it. New waves started at the same moment the reflections returned, adding to each other.

On the map, parts of the yellow circles became orange.

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The elevator started to vibrate - a slow and steady rhythm. White-Shadow looked at the display - three floors to go. The elevator jumped and then froze in place, sending White-Shadow to her knees. The vibration increased in strength, sending pieces of the elevators ceiling crashing down around her.

She waited a few moments for the shaking to stop, but it didn't - it got stronger. The words, "Lord, help us," escaped her lips and she move towards the elevator's doors. With a heave, she pulled the doors apart and slipped out onto the floor two feet below. The lights in the hallway were blinking to the vibration running through the floor. To the left she saw the stairs. She moved, pulling open the door and descending deeper into the buildings depths.

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The chandelier swayed. The map on Nelson's pad showed the force waves racing through the earth below him. It showed yellow, orange and red arcs traversing the rock below. Blue lines started to map out the faults in the rock - the red arcs intensifying along them.

"Time to go," he said to the blond lounging in the leather chair next to him. As he rose, she followed, grabbing the bottle of Champagne and two glasses. They made it across the room and out the glass doors, looking a lot drunker than they were. Moments later the swaying stopped, replaced by the thump-thump-thump of the helicopter.

"A thousand feet and hold. I want to watch this."

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Ma'an felt the shaking start. She had broken two paths and had not stopped the disaster. She was running out of time, and she knew it. She cataloged the times she had been in during the last few days. She could only exist in each moment once, and she had already cut up the last couple days with her jumps. She needed a plan, she jumped three days back to figure one out.

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Sendy held onto a railing as the first earthquake shook the room. She had known this was coming, but the truth of it hadn't been real. Her team continued at their tasks. The map on the monitor grew redder and redder.

She forced herself to smile, to find the hatred that had consumed her heart. Tonight was her night.

"Status," she yelled above the rumble.

One of the men turned his head towards her and yelled a reply. "System at 80%. With only four stations running we're running about 50 seconds behind the models."

With out a pause, the young woman continued the report. "San Andreas fault is 30% activated. San Gregorio Fault is 40% activated. Hayward Fault is only 5% activated."

Another man continued. "The tremor we just felt was a 2.3 on the San Andreas fault, about five miles from here. Next tremor should occur in about 45 seconds."

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White-Shadow burst out of the stairwell. In front of her she saw five figures around a great machine. Each was staring into a computer screen, typing on their keyboard. One of them looked up at her and drew a gun. She took two steps forward, and then with practiced ease she popped forward the twenty feet that separated them and planted her fist in his face.

His head snapped back and the gun went flying across the room. The other four started moving, two rushing towards her, the other two drawing guns. She flittered from spot to spot around the room, getting close enough to land a punch or a kick, then far enough away to avoid a counter strike.

She grabbed one of the women from behind and spun her around just in time to catch the bullet that the older man shot at her. Five more bullets hit the woman's body. She popped above the other man with a gun, still holding the now dead woman. She released the woman and popped behind the machine, leaving the woman to fall and take out the shooter.

To be continued ...