

Artemis's concentration was broken by the jingling of the bell, indicating someone had just entered DL's Secondhand Bookstore & River's Restoration. They took their glasses off and stood from the book they were working. They stretched out their limbs and took their red hair out of its small ponytail. They went to see who it was and saw Darcy holding two greasy bags of food in her mouth and a drink in each hand. Artemis smiled and hurried to help their friend.

The atmosphere which normally smelled of freshly printed pages and sweet musky books was now muffed by the smell of food. Old and new books mingled together on the packed shelves in the small store. Artemis could see a few people perusing among the stacks in contented silence.

"Is that 206 I smell?" They stood behind the checkout counter and took in the smell of Epic's Burgers as they took the bags from Darcy and set them on the counter.

"Yep." Once Darcy had set the drinks down she peered into the bags, black hair glided like a curtain over her shoulders obscuring her mocha eyes and strong cheekbones. She pulled her order closer to her, and the curtains were drawn back.

"You know for a restaurant that only opened in two thousand fourteen, they are very popular. Too bad the entire country can't have what Seattle has." Artemis pulled out their vegan burger and fries, placing them on top of the to go bag.

"Art, you need to get your sense of time straightened out. Two-thousand fourteen was only eight years ago." Darcy took the lid off her chocolate shake and used a fry to stir it more before stuffing the chocolate covered fry in her mouth.

"Yeah, well for me anything past the last five years is old, and I'm thirty-five I think the time to get *my* sense of time fixed is long gone." They took a bite of their vegan burger, ending the conversation.

“Have you made any progress on that old book of yours? Is it back with the living?”

Darcy stuck another fry in her milkshake, swirled it around and pulled it out, holding a hand underneath it as she transferred it to her mouth.

Artemis grabbed a few salty fries and bit them in half. “Mmm, nothing past the initials R.M.N. and that secret letter I found hidden between the cover the end sheet.” They finished off the fries in their hand, wiping their fingers together to get rid of the salty residue.

Darcy slammed her hands on the counter, “Secret letter?” The customers turned their attention to see what was breaking the comfortable silence. She gave them an “I’m sorry” smile then turned back to Artemis “You didn’t tell me about a secret letter.”

“I didn’t? Oh, well, yeah I found a secret letter with the phrase.” Artemis took on an ominous tone “Keep the secret, protect the book, and guard its knowledge at all costs.” They slumped their shoulders “I have yet to discover what that means.”

Darcy looked around the store then turned back to look closely at Artemis “Is it just me, or do we have a mystery on our hands?”

“Since when did this become a ‘we’ thing?”

“Uh, this became a ‘we’ thing since we became friends twenty-five years ago, and anything that happens under this roof has become a ‘we’ thing since we became business partners seven years ago.” Darcy laced her fingers and propped her elbows on the counter “So, spill.”

Artemis grabbed onto the edge of the counter and leaned back. They let out a long sigh before agreeing this mysterious book was a ‘we’ thing.

The duo grabbed their food and headed to the stockroom, otherwise known as River’s Restoration. Artemis didn’t mind sharing a space with extra books and store supplies. It was

better than having no store at all, because that was where they were headed when Darcy offered them the stock room as a place to conduct their book restoration and binding business.

After moving a few tools out of the way, they set their drinks and food on the end of the worktable which was covered with a white cloth. The tools that had started out neatly laid next to one another that morning, were now scattered everywhere.

While Artemis gathered what they needed, Darcy created a peaceful and organized corner out of the scissors, lace point knife, nose cut pliers, tweezers, cloth and leather cutting knives, mount cut knives, a folder and creaser, and bookbinder hammer.

Artemis wiped their hands on their jeans, leaving dark stains on the light denim before sitting down and adjusted the table's light magnifying glass over the paper. When Darcy didn't immediately come to their side they looked up, "Come look at this."

Darcy gestured to the organized corner of the worktable, "'Thank you, Darcy, for cleaning up the mess I made.' 'Why, you are so welcome Art.' You need to work on your gratitude skills."

"Thanks, now come look at what I found."

Darcy rolled her eyes and joined Artemis by the light magnifying glass.

"The paper is like tissue paper, or the paper used for bibles, very thin and fragile so be careful."

Darcy picked up the paper ever so gently, holding it by the top corners. "Huh, well I'll be damned. We got ourselves a secret message."

"And a cryptic one at that. I was just in the process of trying to figure out what each section means when you came back." They picked up a notebook that was lying beside the naked, worn book.

Darcy moved to inspect the book. There was no dust jacket, and the cover was dulled by time making the once rich red cover look like a bruised blush. There was no title on the cover, or on the spine. “Either this book is older than dirt or this isn’t a book at all.”

Artemis looked up from their notes, “Huh? What do you mean?”

“Excuse me, I would like to buy a book.” A customer called from the front of the store. Darcy held up a finger to Art and went to ring up the customer, then raced back.

“What I mean is, there is no copyright page, no title page, no chapters, nothing that would indicate this is a normal book. The secret note is proof of that already.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m saying I think this is a journal of some kind.”

Artemis leaned an elbow on the table “Yeah, but if it looks so used, why are there no journal entries? The only words in this entire journal are the initials RMN.”

Darcy flipped through the pages to see that Artemis was right, there was no other writing.

“Let’s worry about one part of the mystery at a time. This is what I have so far.” Artemis handed Darcy their notebook.

*Keep the secret, protect the book, and guard its knowledge at all costs*

*The secret = I have no idea*

*The book = Possibly this book*

*The knowledge = No idea. The book has no writing.*

Darcy looked up from the notebook “So we got nothing.”

Artemis thought on this for a moment, “We got the book.”

Darcy repeated her statement and Artemis agreed. They had nothing.

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Darcy rang up her last few customers before closing for the night and rejoined Artemis in the back. They did research on what they had which was a really old book and the initials RMN. Their search was quick and resulted in nothing new.

Darcy was attempting in vain to find anything on the book or the initials, thinking a second search would turn up something new.

Artemis ran their fingers over the secret phrase again and was able to feel them indented on the thin piece of paper as well as something else they couldn't see. They felt all over the paper and underneath the ominous note they could feel another indentation, as if someone wrote on a piece of paper on top of this one.

Artemis lurched across the worktable for a pencil.

Darcy's head shot up at the sudden noise, "What—what are you doing?"

"There's something else here." At an angle they rubbed the pencil against the paper to reveal the indented words.

*Dúisigh an t-eolas atá istigh*

Darcy got up from her metal chair on the opposite side of the table to see what Artemis had discovered. "That's not English, so you're up."

"I think it's Gaelic. I'm a little rusty, but I'll try. *Dúisigh an t-eolas atá istigh*." The florescent lights above the duo flickered for a moment, then stabilized. They looked up, waiting for something else to happen, but nothing ever did. They looked at each other then back to the paper.

"What does it mean?" Darcy clung onto Artemis's shoulder shaking them.

They looked over, annoyed.

"Sorry," she removed herself from her friend "I'm just so excited."

“If my translation is correct, I think it means, awaken the knowledge inside.” The light flickered again. Artemis shot their head up and narrowed their eyes.

“Should we be concerned?”

A loud knock came at the shop’s front door.

Artemis looked at their watch which read 10:06. “Now we should be concerned.” They slid out of their chair and stood with Darcy in the doorway of the stockroom peering at the front door. The duo slowly made their way to the front, picking up heavy books to defend themselves with, along the way.

It was pitch black outside and raining heavily. Artemis could only make out the silhouette of the hulking figure. They pushed Darcy to the door and she looked back with fear.

“Your store.” Was all Artemis said, as they propped the heavy book up ready to throw.

Darcy grimaced, unlocked the door then immediately back up using her heavy book as a shield.

The towering figure took one big step and was inside the bookstore with the two terrified friends. He crossed his arms, his face hidden in the shadow of his broad brimmed hat. The man lifted his head to reveal piercing green eyes, a crooked nose, bushy black sideburns, and a scowling mouth broken by a scar traveling from the top of his upper lip and curving to the base of his chin.

Artemis gave a weak wave and squeaked, “Hi.”

The man ignored their greeting and looked at Darcy, “You have something that doesn’t belong to you. Give it back and no harm will come to you or your friend.” His voice was low and menacing like the growl of a tiger.

Darcy was frozen like a deer in headlights until Artemis jabbed her in the ribs. “Um actually I think you should talk to them.” She dropped her book and took Artemis by the shoulders and pushed them in front of her, using them as a shield.

Artemis turned to look at Darcy and rolled their eyes, “Could I at least know the name of the person who is threatening me and my friend?”

The man cracked his knuckles, “The name’s Robin Nemo, and I would like my book back, now.”

“I don’t know wh—” Their eyes lit up with recognition “Wait, your middle name doesn’t happen to begin with an M, does it?” Artemis braced for the answer.

Robin gave a brisk nod and held out a hand. “The book.”

Artemis sat their defense book on the counter and put hand on hips, “So you’re the RMN that lost their book. Gotta say, I think you deserved to lose that book. You obviously didn’t take care of it; it’s so battered and beaten.”

Robin growled and clenched his fists.

Artemis was undeterred “May I ask what this book is?”

A little of Robin’s bravado flaked away “It’s none of your concern.”

The half-lit store started growing brighter and the trio’s attention turned to the stockroom simultaneously.

Artemis stopped pandering, “Okay, you can have your book!”

“What did you do?” Robin asked, before pushing past the pair.

They followed Robin to the back to see what was going on. They found the book glowing and hovering in midair. “I may have accidently, sorta, unintentionally, found your hidden note and read the secret phrase out loud.” Artemis squeezed their eyes shut.

Robin turned back to Artemis, “You have just doomed us all.”

He explained that he was from another world where time moved faster, and magic existed. That old book was actually thousands of years old, just like Robin, and imbued with the magic of Robin’s world. The incantation that Artemis read had started the process of releasing magic onto their world which was unfit to handle such power. They had less than five hours until the world would collapse in on itself and cease to exist.

“Why didn’t you lead with that?” Artemis led the way to the restoration/stockroom.

“This never would have happened if you didn’t mess with something that you know nothing about.”

“Well, you shouldn’t have lost such a dangerous book,” Artemis shot back.

Robin glared at them but kept walking. “I was not the one to put that book in the box, my insolent nephew Tom did by mistake.”

They entered the room and moved along the wall. Artemis stepped out to grab the paper they had found and showed it to Robin. “This is what I found hidden in the book.”

“We weren’t able to figure out what knowledge the note was talking about.” Darcy pipped in, then when quiet again.

Robin explained that this note was a vow everyone associated with magic had to take and his nephew had broken it by stupidly losing the book. He pointed to the phrase shaded into existence, “How did you figure this out, only those from my world should be able to speak thing language.”

Artemis looked from Robin to the paper, “Is this your first time in this world? That’s Gaelic, people in Scotland speak it. It’s a difficult language but I was able to learn it.”



Robin's neck took on a red hue "I don't get out much. My nephew usually does the errands for me."

"You can't keep using Tom as an excuse. It's getting old." Darcy said.

As Darcy and Robin bickered Artemis inched closer to the book and found that the pages were no longer empty but covered in runes and Gaelic phrases. "The knowledge was hidden by magic." They said under their breath.

Robin swept in between Artemis and the book, "This book is dangerous for mortals, you can't be near it when it's activated."

At that moment the book started glowing brighter and Artemis and Darcy had to shield their eyes. Robin was unaffected by the bright light and began ushering Artemis and Darcy out of the room when all the electricity in the store shut off. The trio rushed out the front door to find the night had gotten darker and not because of the rain, but because every light in their vicinity was out. The few cars that were on the road lost control and their drivers slammed on broken breaks.

A car was skidding straight toward them. Robin grabbed Artemis and Darcy throwing them out of harms way. A blue rune appears in front of him acting as a shield and the car bounced off it away from the store.

Artemis gapped with open mouth as the sight of magic. "You just—you used magic!" They pointed stupidly at Robin in amazement.

He turned to them "I told you, magic is real." He looked woozy, swaying on his feet before he collapsed.

Darcy and Artemis rushed to get him back into the store. They were only able to drag the behemoth past the front door before they collapsed from exhaustion.

“What happened to you?” Darcy asked as she caught her breath, “And what are you made of? Man, your heavy.”

Artemis hit her arm.

Robin laid there for a beat before sitting up and turning to the duo. “Magic takes a bigger toll on me in this world than it does in my own.” He ignored her second question.

Artemis stood, “Wait, so if doing a shield spell takes this much out of you... what will happen to you when you reverse the incantation on the book?”

Robin sighed “I don’t know, I’ve never done such a powerful spell before; in this world or in mine.”

The light from the stockroom grew ten times brighter. Artemis could feel the heat emanating from across the store. “Then we better get to it.” They all stood up and made their way to the back.

Robin blocked their path, “Stand back.” he put an arm out to stop Artemis and Darcy from going inside the room.

“But—” Artemis was about to say but Robin cut them off.

“Stay here—and no matter what happens—do not open this door.”

Artemis was about to protest when Darcy cut them off, “Let the big scary man deal with the glowing thingy.” And to Robin, “We’ll just stay right here sir, Mister Nemo, sir.”

Robin rolled his eyes then looked to Artemis for confirmation. “Yeah, okay I’ll stay here.”

He went inside the room and closed the door putting a protection spell on it before locking the door.

They looked at each other then back at the door. “What did we get ourselves into?”

Artemis could hear Robin reciting something unintelligible. A low humming sound emanated from inside the room. The duo stepped away from the door, but the humming soon grew louder and louder until Artemis could feel it in their bones. It was becoming a weight upon them both, and they were pushed to their knees. Artemis could hear Robin's voice grow louder over the din.

A bloodcurdling scream was heard coming from the other side of the door. Artemis rushed towards it only to be pushed even farther down by the crushing weight of the hum. Artemis called out to Robin and tried to make their way to the door, but Darcy latched her hand onto their pantleg holding them back.

"Robin!" Artemis tried screaming but they couldn't hear their own voice. "Robin!" Artemis shook their leg free of Darcy's grip and started crawling towards the door. The weight of the humming was getting stronger the closer they got. It was a force like no other.

Artemis was two feet away from the door but couldn't get any closer. They were about to just give up when, like a vacuum, the humming pressure was sucked back. Artemis jumped to their feet calling for Robin when they unlocked the door with Darcy right on their heels and an explosion of light and pressure came bursting out, knocking Artemis and Darcy flat on their backs and unconscious.

The last thing Artemis saw was Robin and the book enveloped by the light.

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When Artemis woke up, they were on a stretcher surrounded by flashing lights. They sat up and saw books strewn on the sidewalk and street; like a hurricane had just gone through DL's Secondhand Bookstore & River's Restoration. They sprung up and raced inside.

An EMT called after them "Hey, you need to be checked out! Get back here!"

“Don’t worry I’ll get them.” Darcy got off her stretcher and ran in after Artemis.

Artemis ran to the front door which was missing its glass and hanging by one hinge. They stepped through the doorway carefully and walked over and under toppled and destroyed bookshelves. When their brown eyes met the stockroom door they ran. The door was made of thick wood, but it was warped by whatever Robin did in there. What happened to the bookstore was a blessing compared to what happened to the restoration room. Artemis looked around the room for any sign of the burly man but found no trace of him. There was no Robin Nemo, no glowing hovering book. The room smelled and tasted of burnt paper.

Darcy stopped in the doorway “Hey, Art, you need to get checked out you might have a...” the rest of her comment faded on her lips as she looked around the destroyed room.

Artemis surveyed the damage. The other books that were there were charred, the plastic drawers filled with their tools were melted, and all the metal tools had melted through to the concrete floor.

“Whatever that rune was that appeared on the door must have contained the majority of the damage this this room.”

“So that’s why we’re alive.”

Darcy gasped and Artemis turned to her. She had a hand covering her mouth in shock and the other pointing at an inverted silhouette on the backdoor the same height as Robin Nemo. Artemis looked away quickly and saw the same thing on the worktable except it wasn’t of a person, it was of a book, *the* book. Etched into the metal of the table were the words: It’s done.

“Robin.” Artemis whispered under their breath and laid a hand on the words. They turned to Darcy, “We must never speak of this.”

Darcy tore her eyes away from the scarred door to stare at Artemis with watery eyes and nodded. They walked out of the wreckage together.