

The Painting

"Don't lose the painting." That's what my mother told me the day before she died. I was sitting on the end of her bed, as she talked to me. "I won't mom." I whispered, "I won't." My mom was a painter, some of her paintings were worth millions of dollars, especially the one I clutched in my hand right now. The one of the pale man standing in an alley. I look at the painting in front of me now, hanging on the wall of my Uncle's house. He inherited it against my mom's objections. Its eyes seem to follow me as I walk down the narrow hallway, Right now I'm home alone, my Uncle? Out drinking with his friends. I sigh and sit down in an armchair and cup my head in my hands. Suddenly a bang echoes through the hallway. I force myself to not get scared; I have a lot of fears. "It's an old house Cleo." I say to myself, "Old houses make noise."

Another bang, this time louder and angrier. I jump to my feet and run down the hall, I stop at the stairs, two shadows silently move across the hall. My stomach jumps to my throat and I run. "Get the kid." A voice whispers behind me. I stop and look at the painting, my painting. They must be after it, I grab it and run. "I need to get out" I think. "But where?" Then it dawns on me. "The back door." I fumble the key from a drawer and unlock the back door. Heavy footsteps are getting louder. I chuck my painting over the back fence and then climb over myself. "Hey... Kid... Stop..." The man chasing me is obviously out of shape, I can hear him panting from all the way up here. I cut through my neighbor's backyard and run into the forest. I weave in and out of trees and bushes until I'm sure I had lost them. Unfortunately, I was also lost. I lay down on my side, scared to move. After what seems like hours, I finally stand up and walk over to my painting, lying in the grass in front of me. I flip it over, look at it, and almost have a heart attack. The pale man is gone.

There are footsteps behind me, I flip over and gasp. The pale man from the painting is standing in front of me. "Hello Cleo." He says. His voice is quiet and soft, "Who are you?" I manage to say. "You don't know?" He says. "The painting" I stutter. The man smiles a warm smile and nods. "Your mom gave me to you when you were very young. She gave me to you, to protect you." "From what?" I ask. He smiles again. "At first, just normal things that a mother would worry about, being kidnapped, falling from things, getting hit by a car. Normal, ordinary things. But when she discovered the truth about you, and what's inside you. That's when she realized you needed more protection than ever. "And what's that? I whisper, "Magic" he says.

"You are the last human to have magic inside you; many creatures from where I come from have magic." He pauses, as if choosing his words carefully. "But no humans." He continues, "That's what those men were really after. Not the painting, you! They want the magic inside you for themselves." "Who were they?" I ask horrified, "Oh just ordinary humans. Although they did put up quite the reward for you." "A reward?" I stutter. "Why yes," he whispered, "one that I accepted." That's when he lunged at me. I sidestepped as he flew through the air, but instead of crashing to the ground he flew straight through it as if he were dissolving. I panic and start to run, the woods fly by me as I run, but when I looked behind me

there he was, the pale man, picking up speed. It doesn't look like he's running exactly; it looks more like his feet dragged against the ground as he flew by. But when I looked in front of me, it was too late. I slipped and fell down the hill. It was quite steep, and I struggled for a hand hold as I fell. The reason why I was panicking so much? I knew what was coming... the cliff.

Before I knew it, I was falling. The air pushed against my face as if trying to keep me afloat. Before I knew it I hit the ground.

I sat up in bed sweating. "Just a dream, it was just a dream Cleo." "It was?" A voice said. I turned and saw the pale man standing beside me.