Chapter 14 ()

The morning air was crisp and damp, with a chill you could feel in your bones. Dark clouds rolled in from the eastern seaboard threatening a storm. The campus was quiet and dark, the predawn sun just starting to rise somewhere behind the thick grey thunderheads. A shell of ice covered the snow that had fallen the previous night. It was the kind of morning that would keep most souls safely tucked in their warm beds, not daring to venture out into frigid gloom the day had to offer. Four figures huddled together on the front steps of the women's dormitory, arms crossed in heavy coats clutched tightly for any extra warmth it could provide. It was seven in the morning, but the darkness made it feel much earlier. The weather matched their general mood, bleak and oppressive without a hint of respite. The four figures waited in silence for a fifth who emerged from the damp darkness, hands in the pockets of his trench coat scarf pulled up over his mouth, and fedora hat pulled down against the cold.

Isaiah approached the four huddling under the eaves lined with icicles. He had worked through the night, and he was dead tired. The other four looked about as good as he felt. It didn't look like anyone got a restful sleep last night. Isaiah had told Cynthia that he would come with her this morning to check on Anita. He thought it should be a quick visit, as he felt that Anita must be in Boston as Mr. Edgerton said. Isaiah didn't want to overthink Mr. Edgerton and what the man may have said to Big Danny. Edgerton assured him that he'd paid Isaiah's debt in total, and he would hear no more from Danny or his thugs. Isaiah didn't care what Edgerton said, as long as he was out from under all of this. His mother's dangerous book had paid his way out, thank you, mom, Isaiah thought.

"Does coffee sound good to anyone?" Isaia said as he approached the stairs. "I need to find a third or fourth wind."

Cynthia handed Isaiah a thermos and started down the steps and out to the snowy campus. She didn't stop to check if anyone was following her. "I got the address last night. We should be able to walk there in about twenty to thirty minutes. There's a dinner nearby where we can stop in after we check on Anita. That should hold you over until we get there."

Isaiah was still looking toward the stairs at the other three, who jumped to attention and began to follow Cynthia. The thermos felt warm in his gloved hands. He turned toward the whirlwind of determination that was Cynthia and tried to keep up.

Cynthia had been dead-on as they found themselves standing in front of a three-story Victorian home in the French Hill neighborhood twenty minutes later. The place had diminished considerably from its original elegance, but the house seemed to be in good repair. Snow blanketed the sloping rooftops above icicle-adorned window sills. A thick sheet of ice covered the front steps. No one had cleared them yet this morning, and it was almost eight. Carefully they made their way up the slippery steps and into the foyer of the home. Initially a single dwelling, the house was separated into three apartments, two on the second story and one on the third. The first floor consisted of a large foyer with a broad flight of stairs on the right wall leading to the second story. To the left of the stairs, the entry continued back into darkness. Cynthia continued up the stairs to the second floor.

"Number two is her's. I assume it is right up here." Cynthia waved her hand in front of her as she headed up the stairs.

The second-story landing extended to the left, revealing a door at the end of a small dim hallway beyond the landing's railing. To the right, just at the top of the stairs, a door with a prominent number two stood closed. Cynthia wasted no time and knocked loudly on the door. "Anita?" She called in a loud voice.

Anthony waited expectantly for an answer to Cynthia's call. It was cold inside the house. The warmth he was hoping for after their walk through the miserably damp chill outside was sorely lacking. It was dark. The charcoal black clouds blocked out the daytime sun, which would have difficulty penetrating the drawn curtains covering each window at its brightest. A single light from the foyer struggled to illuminate the landing above it. Anthony moved past Cynthia standing behind her as she waited for some indication of anyone occupying the room behind the door to apartment two. He noticed a stairway leading up from an opening in the middle of the wall opposite the railing. The silence that followed Cynthia's knock was ominous, only broken by the creaking of the floorboards as the rest of the group moved onto the landing.

"It seems as though she went to Boston after all." Isaiah's words startled the others who stood waiting in the gloomy quiet. No one said a word as they all uncomfortably eyed each other, waiting for Cynthia's response. Cynthia knocked loudly again. "Anita? It's Cynthia. I just wanted to make sure you are ok." The whistling sound of the wind picking up outside was the only answer.

"Maybe one of the other residents saw her leave?" Evelyn said, moving toward the small hallway beyond the landing, flipping the light switch on instantly illuminating the door at the end marked with a number one. Something kept her from continuing to the door. Shaking it off, she took a deep breath and moved into the hallway. A faint chemical smell mixed with a sweetly foul odder grew stronger as she approached the apartment. She could hear a low droning sound from within that reminded her of the wet mop sloshing in a bucket. Evelyn knocked on the door, and the sound stopped abruptly. Knocking on the door again, calling out, "Hello? Is anyone home?" there was no response.

She turned from the door, walking back to the group, now huddled around Anthony, who crouched down at the doorway to Anita's apartment. Before she reached them, the door opened, and Anthony stood up. "Sometimes, having a grandfather who was a locksmith comes in handy—a little trick from my less than wholesome days as a kid," Anthony announced, putting something back into his pocket.

"Do we think it's necessary to break into her apartment like this?" Isaiah tried to be the voice of reason. He believed that Anita went to Boston. For what reason, Isaiah couldn't say. He couldn't explain why she would lie about having family in Boston either, but it made sense that she was simply out of town.

Cynthia entered the apartment without addressing the question posed by Isaiah. She knew that Isaiah believed that Anita had gone to Boston, and she didn't blame him for thinking so. He was a pragmatic man. There was something, though, a feeling that Cynthia had. Since she was a child, she had learned to follow her instincts. She didn't hold much stock in the current rage of spiritualism these days. Her grandmother called it the knowing, but Cynthia believed it was simple instinct and common sense. Whatever it was, when she had a feeling this strong in her gut, she knew better than to deny it. At the moment, the feeling she was having was that Anita had not left town and was likely in trouble.

Whatever the others thought about Anita's whereabouts, no one voiced any objection and followed Cynthia into Anita's apartment. Once inside, they could see that Anita still had some unpacking to do. Various open boxes half-emptied peppered the reasonably sized room. A couch positioned in front of a small fireplace was the most prominent item in the room. A small table with one chair sat by a makeshift kitchenette with a sink and hotplate on a countertop next to a small icebox. Three other doors, two on the left wall and one on the right provided access to other apartment areas. One of the two doors on the left was left open, revealing a small bathroom.

Anthony opened the other door on the left closest to the entryway, revealing a compact, well-organized closet. He noticed a slight indent in the carpeting in the shape of a rectangle, perhaps a suitcase. The coat he had seen Anita wearing most often was also missing from the items in the closet. She had gone somewhere that was certain.

"I'm just going to say it. There doesn't seem to be any sign of a struggle here." Evelyn spoke her thoughts aloud. She was not sure what she expected to see in the apartment.

Cynthia opened the last door apprehensively. A neatly put-together bedroom greeted her inside. It was small but comfortable with a single bed and writing desk. The bed was made, and it didn't seem as though anything was out of place. Cynthia began to doubt herself. Maybe Anita had gone to Boston for something that she did not want to express to the group. Nothing in the apartment seemed to be out of place. Still, she couldn't shake the feeling that there was something she was missing. Cynthia moved slowly around the room, stopping at the writing desk. She felt odd rifling through Anita's personal belongings, but Cynthia thought Anita would understand under the circumstances. She found nothing but well-organized draws typical of Anita. Her ever-present journal was not among the contents which lent more weight to her having left town. As she turned to leave, she noticed a small portion of paper peeking out from behind the wastepaper basket next to the desk. She bent down and pulled it free. It was a small scrap of paper, torn from a larger sheet and slightly crumpled.

Cynthia entered the main room inspecting the slip of paper she had found. There were three hastily scrawled entries on it. Cynthia recognized Anita's writing, but it seemed agitated in some way. The entries appeared to be unconnected. A name, Sigvard Krag, followed by an underlined statement "Children?" and finally something that Cynthia did recognize. It was a name of a book, one that had come up in a meeting with the Society and one that Cynthia knew was in the restricted section at the Miskatonic's Oren Library. It was Unaussprechlichen Kulten by Friedrich Whilhelm von Junzt