

# Taming Shadows

## Revelations Trilogy Book One

### Chapter One

in which snow falls in the desert

One early February morning, four years after the Night of Revelations—the night when Onyx and I revealed the presence of the Preternatural during a live TV news conference—I pulled into the parking lot of the company I'd launched a year before, Black Cat Media. Our offices were in a converted adobe house, which was tinted pink and had a terracotta-tiled roof, bright blue wooden doors and window frames, and a carefully tended desert wildflower garden surrounding it. The space inside felt cozy, but there was room for me, my receptionist and assistant; a TV studio; offices for the technical crew, writers and directors; and a large conference room.

I eased my Mercedes SUV into my assigned spot and gathered up my briefcase and purse. I'd bought the SUV with a book-signing bonus to replace the ancient Honda that had been destroyed in the confrontation at Tucson Police headquarters. It was a great car, but sometimes I missed the old Honda. My grandfather had given it to me on my sixteenth birthday, and it had made the trek across country when I moved from Pittsburgh to Tucson six years ago.

Once inside the building, I greeted my receptionist with a smile. “Morning, Paula. Any messages?”

“Good morning, Ms. O'Rourke. There are a few, but you may want to take a look at your schedule for today first; Lainie added an appointment while you were on-air last night.”

“Really?” I frowned. “That's weird.”

“Should I hold your calls, ma'am?”

“Hm? Oh. No, thanks, I'll be fine. Was there anything else?”

“That should be everything.”

Paula flashed me a smile before going back to the phones and I headed to my office in the rear of the building. Unlike the bright tones of the rest of the building, I'd chosen soothing colors for my inner sanctum: dark wood, and green and cream upholstery and carpets. My desk was a huge antique English banker's affair that I'd inherited from my grandfather's law office. It sat in front of floor-to-ceiling windows that commanded a stunning view of the city's skyline and the Tortolita Mountains to the west.

I would never have imagined that I'd be here, just four years after I'd turned the world on its ear, in this gorgeous office, prepping to tape a talk show that would be viewed by millions of people. After the chaos and world-wide panic caused by the Night of Revelations, I figured I'd be hunted down and killed in the streets like some sort of mindless animal. Instead, the government had passed an actual amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, that gave Preternatural citizens the same rights as humans.

I slipped gratefully into my chair and read over my schedule of appointments and appearances. It was mostly as I'd remembered it from the previous day, with the exception of the eight o'clock

appointment that Paula had mentioned; it was noted only with the name "Neve". I frowned, running my fingers over the smooth edge of my desk, trying to remember ever speaking to someone with that name. Coming up blank, I hit the intercom button, "Lainie?" I asked. "Could you come in here?"

A moment later, my office door opened and my personal assistant stepped inside. With her looks and red hair, no one would have guessed Elaine Patterson was in her early forties. Her large, expressive eyes and boneless grace gave away her true nature; Elaine was a Leopard and my best friend, not to mention the main reason I was still sane and on time to all my appointments and meetings.

"What's up?" she asked, holding a stenographer's pad and a pen in one hand as she took a seat in one of the client chairs across the desk from me.

I gave her a smile and pointed to the printout of my schedule. "Who is 'Neve'?"

Lainie leaned forward and edged the paper towards her, a little frown furrowing her flawless brow. "Oh," she said slowly. "Yes. Her." The distaste was palpable in her voice. "She phoned yesterday afternoon while you were on-air and demanded an appointment for today. I tried to tell her that you were booked well into next month, but she was very insistent. And rude." She sat back and shrugged a bit helplessly. "I juggled your schedule some and cut your lunch by half an hour so you could meet this morning. She wouldn't have accepted anything else."

I matched her frown with one of my own. Changing things without talking to me first was not typical of Elaine. This Neve must have amazing powers of persuasion. "Huh," I said thoughtfully, chewing on the issue for a moment. Then I phoned Paula over the intercom. "Paula, do you remember Lainie forwarding a call to you yesterday afternoon while I was on-air?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I do. It was strange; Lainie said she wanted me to start a file for someone, but when I picked up the line, there wasn't anyone there. I'm sorry; I couldn't even get her basic information into the computer."

"Curiouser and curiouser," I murmured. "Is Danny around?" I asked Paula. Daniel Tej was another Leopard who worked for me as an investigator and security consultant. Whenever we had an especially belligerent client or a stubborn reporter who wouldn't behave, Danny would escort him or her from the building or babysit until the police could come and handle things for us.

"He's in the conference room with Ernie," Paula replied, referring to the show's director. "Shall I send him back?"

"If you could just ask him to be up front when my eight o'clock shows up, and then maybe have him escort her back here and hang around while I'm meeting with her, that'd be fantastic. Thanks, Paula." I clicked off the intercom and then spent the next ten minutes with Elaine addressing requests for appearances and scheduling meetings.

At five minutes past eight o'clock, my intercom rang. "Your eight o'clock appointment is here," Paula said. "Danny's here, too. They'll be back in five minutes. I'm just having her fill out an intake form."

"Thanks, Paula," I said before clicking off and giving Lainie a wry grin. "You'll be at your desk?" I asked her, knowing full well that she'd be studying Neve in minute detail in order to get grist for the office gossip mill.

"Oh, yes," Lainie said, the glint in her eyes belying the serious, solemn expression on her face. "I've got all those speaking engagements to confirm and those appointments and meetings to schedule."

I'll be working very hard." She rose gracefully from her seat, notebook and pen in hand, and left my office. There might have been the barest hint of a wink as she closed the door behind her.

A few moments later, there was a knock at my door and it opened to reveal Danny, a short, compact man with black hair and mahogany skin. He'd been living in Southern California before the Night of Revelations, spending his mornings working in an Indian restaurant owned by his uncle, his afternoons training in aikido, judo, and tae kwon do, and his nights at any one of LA's more exotic nightclubs. After the world of the Preternatural had been exposed, Danny had come out to Tucson in search of a job with me. Because of his martial arts training and his uncanny ability to get anyone to talk to him, no matter how tight-lipped and unwilling they might be, I had hired him as my investigator and head of security. It was a pretty flush gig for a twenty-two-year-old who had dropped out of school in the tenth grade.

Danny stepped into the office, his eyes wide and a tiny smile on his lips. The woman must be quite the looker, if Danny was reacting like this. Normally he was very controlled and kept his thoughts and feelings hidden. Then I saw the woman who was following him and chuckled softly. Danny's girlfriend might have some competition.

I've been told that I'm beautiful, exotic-looking even. I have all the advantages of a mixed heritage—my father's Irish blood had given me height, reddish tones in my dark brown hair, and the freckles across my nose and cheekbones. From my Japanese mother, I'd inherited almond-shaped eyes, tawny skin that rarely burned in the sun, and a willowy grace. In my line of work, I'd met plenty of beautiful women as well, but the woman who entered my office on Danny's heels was so stunning, so flawless that it hurt to look at her. She was angelic, really, with raven black hair, porcelain skin, and large, expressive dove-gray eyes. And yet, despite her beauty, she seemed cold and unforgiving, like winter above the Arctic Circle.

I nodded my thanks to Daniel. He lingered in the doorway, not getting the hint. "Thank you, Daniel," I said firmly, "that will be all."

"I'll be just outside, Ms. O'Rourke," he said before reluctantly stepping back into the hallway and closing my office door.

I stood up and extended my hand to the woman. "I'm Riley O'Rourke," I said as she took my hand and shook it. Her skin was cool to the touch and I felt a tingling in my palm. This woman was a magic user, but her power was unlike anything I'd ever encountered. It felt fierce and bitterly cold, like a blizzard in Minnesota. It took my measure, and I got the sense that it found me lacking somehow.

The woman smiled vaguely, an expression that somehow looked out of place on her face. "Neve MacAlpin," she said.

"Please," I smiled and indicated one of the client chairs across from me. "Have a seat and tell me how I can help you."

She folded herself gracefully into the chair I'd indicated and waited for me to retake my own seat before she fixed me with a shrewd look. "You've done well for yourself," she said, "building your own personal fiefdom on the pain and suffering of others."

I stared in shock at her for a brief moment, utterly taken aback. Once her words sank in, my eyes narrowed dangerously. "Are you here for business, or did you just drop by to insult me?"

"I've come to warn you, Daughter of Summer." She glowed like sunlight on a virgin snowfield for a brief second, and her eyes became hard and thunderous, like the skies before a major snowstorm. The

air in my office turned freezing; I could see my breath when I exhaled. Frost rimed glass surfaces, skittering across the windows like cracks across the sidewalk, creating ephemeral and dangerously beautiful designs. I shivered, but it had very little to do with the sudden plunging temperatures. “Cease your campaign to bring light to the shadows,” Neve intoned. “Pursuing this course further will only cause you harm.” Was she seriously threatening me in my own office?

“I’m afraid I don’t take kindly to threats, Ms. MacAlpin.”

“It is only a threat if you choose to make it one by not heeding my words.”

I stood up and stared down at her imperiously. Sure, she scared the living bejeezus out of me, but there was no way I’d ever allow her to see it. I slipped Jaguar off-leash a bit and wrapped Her around me like a warm, thick-furred mantle. I could feel Her tail lashing back and forth inside me, hear Her hissing and spitting Her annoyance and growing anger. As far as Jaguar was concerned, whoever this woman was, whatever magic she flung at us, it would be no match for our combined strength.

“Even if I believed that,” I said through clenched teeth, an inhuman growl flavoring my words with a bit of Jaguar’s power, “you’ve been rude to me and my staff, demanding an immediate appointment and then using that time—time for which we made special accommodations—just to insult me. It would be best if you left. Now.” I risked a quick glance at my office door. “Daniel?” I called out.

He opened the door and stepped inside the office. I watched him react both to the woman’s arctic magic and to the fact I’d let Jaguar come out from Her mental cage. His nostrils flared as his pupils contracted, and he took a deep breath and held himself as if balanced on a knife’s edge, all his weight on the balls of his feet and his arms held loosely at his sides. “Ma’am?” he said; his voice, while carefully neutral, still managed to hold the threat of more than a little violence. “I’ll see you to your car now.” His tone and body language gave the woman no wiggle room.

The woman split a look between Danny and me. Then she rose from her seat and the temperature spiked back to normal, leaving the room feeling drained and empty and me slightly out of breath. “See that you heed my warning,” she said to me with a hint of annoyance before sweeping regally out of my office. Danny glanced at me to make sure I was all right. I gave him a tight smile and he was out the door, hot on the woman’s heels.

I sat down hard in my chair as my legs gave out beneath me and pressed my hands against my forehead. Pushing Jaguar back into Her cage was difficult; She wanted out all the way so She could run down the puny creature who had threatened us and snack on the marrow of her long bones.

“Crap on toast,” I murmured. What the hell had just happened?

I stirred after a moment and called Lainie. “Could you grab the MacAlpin file from Paula and bring it back here?”

“Sure thing,” she responded. “Are you all right?” I wondered just how much of my conversation with Neve she’d overheard.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. Thanks.” I hung up and turned in my chair to stare out the window. Strange things were afoot and I wondered—not for the first time—if the Night of Revelations had been a good idea after all. If creatures like Neve MacAlpin were hiding in the shadows, wouldn’t it have been better, perhaps safer, to have left them there?

When Lainie came back, I could see the confusion stamped cleanly on her features. “What?” I asked. “What’s wrong?”

“It's blank,” Lainie said and handed me the form. Sure enough, it looked as though Paula had just taken it from her desk and handed it over. “Paula swears up and down that this is the form the woman filled out. It was sitting inside a file with her name on it.”

“What the hell?” I murmured, staring at the blank form, my mind trying for a rational explanation for what I was seeing. I looked up at Lainie. “When I shook hands with her, I felt magic but... it wasn't like anything I've ever felt before. I think she's a new kind of witch.”

“Do you think we should call Deacon and let him know about her?”

I groaned softly. After the new amendment had passed, the federal government had created a new agency called the Preternatural Law Enforcement Bureau, or PLEB for short. Deacon had been tapped to lead up the first office, which was located here in Tucson. Our relationship, while never healthy, had become as antagonistic as the one between Kennedy and Khrushchev and talking to him or anyone in his office was not high on my list of fun things. Still, Deacon couldn't do his job very effectively if I kept things like this from him, and despite our many differences, I wanted him to succeed, if only because it meant further acceptance of the Preternatural community. “Bleh. Yeah, maybe I'll let someone in his office know there's a new magic user in town and that she's not above using mind control tricks to get what she wants.”

I set the form down on the corner of my desk near the phone and sighed, pushing away the weirdness. “So, what's next?” I asked Lainie, anxious to get on with business as usual.