

Prologue

Victoria

Very pretty Victoria Madsen's husband found her in bed with another man, his business partner to be precise. She needed to wait out the ensuing turmoil, so she decided to leave town until things calmed down. She took their four-year-old daughter, Alix, away to the island of Nantucket, a place she'd heard of but had never seen.

Since Victoria had used all her cash to travel, couldn't use her credit cards, and had no discernible skills, she took a job as a live-in housekeeper/cook for Miss Adelaide Kingsley, an older woman who lived in a centuries old house just off Main Street. But Victoria was a terrible housekeeper and her idea of a meal was a PB and J sandwich.

Adelaide put up with Victoria because she adored little Alix, the grandchild she was never going to have, and they spent all their days together. Adelaide dressed Alix beautifully and took her everywhere on Nantucket, and introduced her to everyone. And like all her nieces and nephews, the child came to call her Aunt Addy.

Victoria spent her time reading gossip magazines and flirting with the men in town. One day while Adelaide and Alix were out, she accidentally knocked over an old cabinet (too much dancing with a handsome tourist) and found the hoard of Kingsley journals hidden in the wall. Around Nantucket they were rumored to exist, but no one outside the family had ever seen

them. Since 1742 it had been a tradition for the Kingsley women — wives, daughters, sisters — to keep journals of their everyday lives. Legend had it they left nothing out, from sex to scandals to secrets only they knew.

Victoria started reading from the beginning, working to translate the antiquated language. When she'd finished the first journal, she began to rewrite the story. She kept the basic plot of Martha Kingsley's life, of her marriage to a man she didn't love, and of her long term affair with another man whom she loved passionately. Victoria wrote of the three children Martha had and how the last one had the blue eyes of her lover.

She wrote night and day, but then she could because Adelaide and Alix had each other. Victoria was so absorbed in her writing that she didn't pay attention to her daughter's frequent references to someone called Caleb. What Caleb said and what Caleb did became common terms from her child. Victoria's mind was so taken over by the adventures of Martha Kingsley that she didn't ask who — or what — Caleb was.

When Victoria finished the book, she mailed it to a publishing house. Thirty days later they replied by asking if they could please publish the novel and send her lots of money. And by the way, would she please write more books for them?

By that time Victoria had read the second journal, this one belonging to Julia Kingsley, so she already had a plot for her next novel.

Talent is an odd thing. Extremely rare is a talent that is all encompassing — the renown "Renaissance man" who can do everything well. In Victoria's case, she could write. She could look at a photo and describe what she saw with such deep feeling that no one could believe that she'd not experienced it firsthand. But she couldn't invent a story. She couldn't face a blank piece of paper and fill it with a story that came from inside her mind.

But she did have a talent that enabled her to rewrite the Kingsley journals into page

turners. She skipped the boring bits about how many quarts of pickles the women put up, and went right to the drama and excitement. “Give me a hundred word plot and I can turn it into a hundred thousand word novel,” Victoria would come to say.

After her book was accepted for publication, Victoria reinvented herself. With regret, she divorced her husband, but she couldn’t bear his sad looks of recrimination for what had happened. They shared custody of their daughter.

And Victoria not only left Nantucket, but kept her time there out of her biography all together. Her revamped image didn’t include admitting that she’d worked as a cleaning woman. No, it looked better that she was a single mother living in a quiet suburb in upstate New York.

Victoria’s fears came to the surface when her first book hit the stands. There, for all the world to see, complete with vivid historical details, was the tale of Adelaide’s ancestor. Victoria knew it was a stolen story.

Another problem was that she no longer had access to the Kingsley journals, and try as she might, she couldn’t come up with a plot for her third novel. She *needed* to see those journals. *Had to*. Even if Adelaide hadn’t yet seen the published novel, how did Victoria get back into the woman’s good graces? After all, she’d left amid the copious tears of Alix and Adelaide at being separated.

Adelaide cleared up the question about whether she had read the book by threatening Victoria with a lawsuit for plagiarism.

Victoria saw her beautiful future about to be snatched away from her. Never one to sit back and not take action, she sent little Alix to stay with her father, and Victoria went, uninvited, to visit Adelaide. On the journey there, Victoria worked hard at rehearsing her tears and her apologies — and explaining how she needed to borrow all those journals and photocopy every page of them.

But what Adelaide had to say was shocking. She knew exactly how Victoria had found the journals, then used them to write her own novel. She further surprised Victoria by offering a deal. Adelaide said she wouldn't sue her — and thereby ruin Victoria's brand new career — in return for a healthy percentage of her future earnings. Further, she said that Victoria could spend one month of every year with her on Nantucket where Victoria would have access to the journals *one at a time*. No journal was to leave the premises or to be photocopied.

Victoria had been taken aback at the firmness of Adelaide's demands, as well as her knowledge. If Victoria hadn't known better, she would have thought the woman was being advised by someone, but she swore she wasn't. "I've not talked to a living soul about any of this," Adelaide said, while smiling in a way that said she had a secret. And Adelaide kept looking to Victoria's left, as though she were asking for approval and encouragement from someone. But they were alone in the house.

In the end, Victoria agreed to everything because, really, she'd had no choice.

In spite of the fact that their friendship was based on blackmail, extortion, and plagiarism, during the ensuing twenty-plus years, Victoria and Adelaide became quite fond of each other. Their personalities were so wildly opposed that they got along well. During Victoria's annual month-long visits, she kept her mornings quiet while she read and worked on a detailed outline for her current novel. She and Adelaide lunched together, followed by more work, then at four the excitement began. Adelaide — Addy, as Victoria came to call her — knew everyone on the island so she called and invited them to tea or cocktails. Dinner invitations followed — and laughter came with it all. Wherever Victoria was, there was laughter. For eleven months of the year, Kingsley House was a place of Addy's committee meetings and good works, but in August, while Alix stayed with her father, the house rang with music and dancing and laughter.

But for all Victoria's love of entertainment, one thing she was fierce about was that her readers, her publishing house, her off-island friends, and especially her daughter, were *not* to know that her popular novels had any connection to Nantucket or to the Kingsley family. In her books she changed the name of the family and the town. It was still a sailing community, still in New England, but there the resemblance ended.

As the years passed and Alix grew up, the fame and readership of Victoria Madsen increased. Whole generations grew up reading her books and they eagerly awaited each new installment that took the glorious family down through the centuries. Fans of the series followed the loves, the deaths, the triumphs and tragedies of Victoria's supposedly fictitious family. Her readers felt as though they truly knew each one of them.

But she came to a standstill with her books when she hit the year that Addy's mother died and her daughter was given the job of continuing the tumultuous family saga. The modern age had arrived and no longer did the Kingsley descendants live on the island and write in a journal every day. Instead, the family dispersed, moved elsewhere. Most of the latest generation didn't even know it was related to the Kingsleys of Nantucket.

Addy's journal wasn't in the stash of diaries hidden in the wall behind the old cabinet. But that wasn't the problem. Through their years of friendship Victoria knew that Addy's entire life, from a novelist's point of view, was a dud. Dull to the point of stupification. She'd had a boyfriend in the 1950s, but they didn't get married. When Victoria asked why, Addy just shrugged. "We weren't suited," was all she would say before taking another sip of her nightly rum. Victoria was stuck, buried in a hole of boredom. What could she write to bring her series into the twenty first century? Addy was probably a virgin, and for all the good she achieved on-island with her many charitable committees, she'd never been anywhere or done anything that would make a good story. Victoria couldn't understand how such a perfectly *good* person could

be descended from the magnificent, always-in-trouble women whose lives had entertained the world.

It was one night when Addy and she were having a drink that Victoria yet again heard of Caleb. If someone as perfectly proper as Addy could be said to have a flaw, it was her liking of rum — in particular, the kind so strong that most people got drunk on one shot. Addy liked drinking companionship, but Victoria couldn't keep up, so she sipped white wine.

"I've done a terrible thing to Caleb," Addy said, her old eyes beginning to tear.

Victoria's ears perked up at this hint of scandal. "What did you do?"

"I kept him here."

Victoria's elation faded. "Is that all?" She waited as Addy poured herself more rum. "Surely you must have done something worse than that."

"But you don't understand," Addy said. "I'm one of the women who can see him. No men in our family ever could. And I should have helped him. Alix said I should, but I didn't. I was too selfish, too —"

"Who is Alex?"

"Your daughter," Addy snapped. "Don't tell me you've neglected that poor child so much that you don't even remember her. I felt so sorry for her when you worked for me. Such a sweet, intelligent, pretty little girl, and all you did was lie around and read those journals that —"

"My daughter?! She hasn't been here since she was four, but you're saying that she asked you to . . ." Victoria didn't understand exactly what Addy was saying. "Who is Caleb?"

"The only man I've ever lived with."

"I'm confused," Victoria said. "I didn't know you were ever married."

"Never was." Addy laughed. "Had a few good times elsewhere, if you know what I mean, but then I had Caleb at home so I didn't need more of the physical side. You see, he

can't leave this house, and as long as I had him for companionship, I didn't need to get married. Who needs a man hanging around all the time?"

Victoria couldn't untangle the words. "You openly lived with him, but you didn't marry him — and this was in a different era — and my daughter talked to you about him?"

"Oh yes. But then, Alix could see Caleb. They used to play checkers, although she had to move the pieces for him. They tend to slide through his fingers." She looked to Victoria's left and giggled.

Victoria turned, saw no one, and looked back at Addy. She was at last beginning to understand. She leaned back in her chair. "When did Caleb die?"

"1811," Addy said, then seemed to listen. "No. Caleb reminds me that it was 1809. He left his ship so he could hurry back home to the woman he loved and their son, but he didn't make it. The second ship went down. If he'd only stayed on the first ship he would have lived. But then I would never have met him. Isn't life ironic?"

"Yes, very," Victoria said softly. It looked like Addy's life experiences might not be such a dud after all. "Tell me more," she whispered, her excitement making her almost unable to speak. "Tell me every word about you and this . . . uh, man Caleb. And about my daughter and him," she added as she felt a smile coming from somewhere deep inside her very soul. On impulse, she poured herself a shot of actual rum, then turned and lifted it in tribute to the empty chair behind her. Still smiling, she looked back at Addy. "Is he handsome?"

"Oh yes," Addy said, sounding like she was twenty again. "Very handsome, and that was part of what caused all his problems. Women couldn't resist him. Certainly not Valentina."

"Valentina?" Victoria said under her breath. "Tell me about her. Is she the woman he loved? But first tell me about *him*, about Caleb, a man who died while trying to get back to his True Love. I want to hear *all* of it."

Addy laughed. “Do you think I don’t know what you’re up to? You want what *I* have written, and I’ve recorded everything about my life with Caleb. Day by day. And you know what?”

“What?” Victoria asked. Her breath was coming quickly.

“I’m the only one who wrote about Caleb.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean those Kingsley women you wrote about and made so much money off of, they —”

“Money that I shared with you,” Victoria couldn’t help adding as she glanced upward. Last summer the old house had been reroofed and Victoria’s books had paid for it.

“Yes, well . . .” Addy said. “Be that as it may, you thought their lives were so very exciting, what with all their bed jumping and even a murder or two. But all of those Kingsley women were keeping their biggest secret to themselves.”

“Caleb,” Victoria said.

“Yes, Caleb.”

“But you didn’t lie?” Victoria asked. “You wrote about him?”

“About every single day I spent with him.” Addy smiled smugly. “And *you* thought my life was so boring you wouldn’t be able to get a book out of it.”

Victoria started to deny it, but then she leaned back in the chair and laughed loud and hard.

Addy was looking at something across the room and her old face wrinkled.

“Is he here now?” Victoria asked.

“Yes.” Addy was smiling in that secret way that deep friends share. “He likes you. He always has. Maybe because of Alix. They were such good friends before you took her away.

She was the only grandchild I'll ever have. Alix and I —”

Victoria had heard it all before. She'd often had to put up with Addy telling her that she'd neglected her daughter — and while writing that first book she had. But afterward, Alix was all that Victoria had. Writing and Alix were everything to her. Men came and went, but her precious daughter was always there. “Yes, yes, I know,” Victoria said impatiently, not wanting to argue the point yet again. “I didn't even know you kept a journal and where is it?”

“I filled journals. Plural,” Addy said. “Volumes of them. It'll take you years to read them all. Caleb and I have had many adventures. Oh, the acting Caleb has had me do over the years!”

“When do I start?” Victoria tried to keep the eagerness out of her voice but Addy heard it.

“I think. . . Maybe . . .” She again looked at the far side of the room. “Caleb is holding up two fingers. Is that weeks, months, or years?” she asked in amusement.

Victoria couldn't help the hair that stood up on the back of her neck. An hour ago, if anyone had asked her if she believed in ghosts, she would have said no. But believe or not, she knew a good story when she heard it. “Days,” Victoria said. “He means that in two days you'll give me the journals. I'll need to take them —”

“Caleb says no.”

Victoria narrowed her eyes. “Are you going to let some man make decisions for you?”

“Oh yes,” Addy said. “But then Caleb is very insightful. He's the one who told me that Edwin — the man I was going to marry — just wanted me for my family's money and that he was having his way with that dreadful Lawrence girl. At first, I didn't believe Caleb, but he arranged it so I saw them together.” She smiled. “And later, Caleb told me what I must do to get this house away from my brother, who would have let the roof fall in for all he cared about it.

He's the one who sold Kingsley Soap, but then you wrote about that, didn't you? You just left out the part Caleb and I played in it all."

Victoria's eyes were getting wider with every word. "So you've lived here with a . . . with a ghost for all these years?"

Addy emptied her glass, nodded, then slowly stood up. She was usually so active that she belied her age, but tonight she was looking every year of it. "Caleb says I need to go to bed. Tomorrow we'll discuss what's to be done about my journals. I hid them separately because the others were too cowardly to mention Caleb. And now they're in a place where no one will ever be able to find them." When she took a step she had to catch herself so she didn't fall.

Victoria got up to help her but the Addy waved her away. "No, no, I don't need your help tonight. Caleb is all I need. I'll see you tomorrow and we'll discuss my journals more." Her eyes glittered like black diamonds. "Mine are much more . . . shall we say, exciting? . . . than what you've read before."

Victoria watched the woman clasp the rail as she went up the stairs. She kept smiling up at some unseen person with so much love that for a moment Victoria could almost imagine what Addy looked like when she was a girl.

Victoria went to the living room where she'd left her laptop and began typing all that she'd heard and added what she could make up. With each word she grew more excited. This book was going to be her best ever. She could feel it! In the last few years her sales had gone down a bit. Well, actually, the sales had fallen off rather drastically. But this book would revive them.

The sun came up and Victoria continued typing. At one point she took a break to make herself a sandwich, but she only ate half of it before inspiration once again hit her and she went

back to her computer.

At noon she couldn't go on anymore. She closed her laptop and went upstairs to the bedroom she'd used through all the years she'd stayed at Kingsley House. Addy's door was closed. Poor thing, Victoria thought with a smile. She needed her rest.

Victoria fell across the bed, her thin computer clutched to her like a teddy bear, and was asleep instantly. Voices woke her. It was twilight outside and she was hungry and groggy.

She pushed her hair out of her eyes, and clutching her laptop, she went out into the hallway. Three strangers **were** there, two women and a young man, all wearing suits and looking very official. "What happened?" **Victoria asked.**

They stared at her in surprise, unaware that Addy had a houseguest. The young man put his hand firmly on Victoria's arm and led her to the stairs.

She jerked away from him. "I'd like to know what's going on!"

The man halted. "Miss Adelaide Kingsley has passed on."

"She what?"

"This afternoon some ladies came for tea and found her in her bed. She went quite peacefully. She was even smiling."

Victoria could only stare. Addy was dead? Her friend of so many years was gone? Lunches, dinners, whole days of reading aloud to Addy while she listened in awe to stories of her own family, were never to be again?

"Of course I fudged a bit on the truth," Victoria would say after telling Addy of her proposed plot over one of their many lunches at any of several restaurants in town.

Addy would think about what she'd heard, then say something like, "Perhaps if she ran away and hid in 'Sconset it would be more romantic."

"What a good idea," Victoria would say, and later she'd change her outline to match

Addy's suggestion.

"But she can't die!" Victoria whispered and turned away from the bossy young man and headed toward Addy's room.

The man caught her arm and held it tightly. His face was cold and unrelenting. "I'm sorry for your loss, but we're from Miss Kingsley's law firm in Boston and strict instructions were given to us. Only a few select people are allowed in the house until after the will is read." His eyes said that Victoria was *not* on the list.

"But —" she began, then her head came up. The journals! She needed Addy's journals about the ghost. She couldn't finish her next novel without them. "She told me —" She looked at the steely faces of the three people gathered in front of Addy's bedroom. What could she say? That she needed full access to every inch of the old house, preferably with a crowbar in her hands, so she could find Addy's hidden journals?

"I understand your grief," the man said, even though his face said otherwise, "and we all share it. Miss Kingsley was beloved by everyone who knew her, but we have to abide by her wishes. There are some valuable artifacts in this house and they must be protected."

Victoria's heart was pounding as she looked around the hallway as though she'd never seen it before. There were fabulous examples of scrimshaw on the tables, sailor's valentines — old ones — on the walls. Portraits, china, furniture from the 1700s. Victoria wanted to scream that she didn't want any of that old junk. She just wanted some worthless journals that weren't even old. But the officious trio were now frowning at her. "Yes, of course I'll go," she said and started down the stairs, but then turned back for one last look. Never again would she share evenings with her friend.

"If you'll wait downstairs we'll pack your things and take you to a hotel." The young man's tone was almost a threat.

Victoria could only nod. The tears were beginning to form. At the foot of the stairs she paused and couldn't help a surge of anger at Caleb. If he did exist, it was likely that he'd known that last night was Addy's final time on earth. Victoria let her anger show when she said aloud, "So what did the two fingers mean? She had two hours to *live*?"

Behind her came a male laugh, rich and deep, but when Victoria spun around to look, no one was there. While still clutching her laptop, she managed to rub the goosebumps on her arms. With her shoulders down, she went outside to sit on the front porch.

Jared

“She’s coming on Friday,” Jared said in answer to his grandfather’s question. “I’ll get someone to pick her up at the ferry. Lonnie maybe. No, I’ll get Wes. He owes me for drawing the plans for his garage.” Jared ran his hand over his face. “If someone doesn’t meet her, I’m sure she’ll get lost. She’ll wander down some alley and we’d never see her again.”

“You always did have too much imagination,” his grandfather said. “But perhaps in this instance you could imagine less and try for some kindness. Or has that become an outmoded commodity in your generation?”

“Kindness?” Jared said, suppressing his anger. “This woman is going to take over my house for an entire year. *My* house. And why? Because as a kid she could see a ghost. That’s it. My house is being confiscated because now, as an adult, she might possibly be able to see someone other people can’t.” His tone conveyed his disgust at the whole arrangement.

“It’s a little more complicated than that, and you know it,” his grandfather said calmly.

“Oh right. How can I forget the Great Kingsley Mystery? The two-hundred-year-old unanswered question that has plagued our family since —”

“Two hundred and two.”

“What?”

“For two hundred and two years it’s been unsolved.”

“Right.” Jared gave a sigh of frustration as he sat down on one of the old chairs in the house his family had owned since it was built in 1805. “A mystery that no one has been able to solve for two hundred and two years.”

His grandfather stood with his hands clasped behind his back and looked out the window. “Perhaps it hasn’t been solved because no one has truly looked into it. No one has really tried to find . . . her.”

Jared closed his eyes for a moment. His great aunt Addy died last summer and it had taken all winter to sort out the ridiculous will she’d left. The will said that a young woman, **Alixandra** Madsen, who hadn’t been in the house since she was four years old, was to live in it for one year. During that time she was to try to solve the family mystery — if she wanted to, that is. Aunt Addy’s will clearly stated that if she didn’t want to do any searching, she didn’t have to. Instead, she could spend her time sailing or whale watching or doing one of the thousands of things that Nantucketers came up with to occupy the god awful number of tourists who invaded their island every summer.

Jared took a breath. Maybe he should change tack. “I don’t see why an off-islander was given this job. There are lots of researchers here. You can’t throw a harpoon without hitting someone whose family has been here for centuries. Surely one of them —”

His grandfather’s look stopped his words. There wasn’t anything that hadn’t already been said.

“You’ve made your point,” Jared said. “One year and that’s all, then she leaves here and everything goes back to normal. I will get my family home back.”

“Except maybe by then we’ll know what happened to Valentina,” his grandfather said

softly.

It was annoying to Jared that he was so angry and the old man was so calm. But he knew how to even out the playing field. “So tell me again why dear Aunt Addy didn’t look for her.”

His grandfather’s handsome face immediately changed to stormy. Like at sea. His shoulders went even further back, his chest out. “Cowardice!” he bellowed, a sound that had frightened shiploads of men. But Jared had been hearing it all his life and was unperturbed. “Pure cowardice, which she inherited from that weakling her father married. I told him not to marry that insipid little woman, but he did and look at the result. Adelaide was afraid of what would happen if she *did* find out the truth.”

“Meaning that her beloved ghost might disappear and leave her all alone in this big old house,” Jared said. “A spinster lady with few relatives she could trust, and friends who were after the money they thought she had. Family money. Inherited from Kingsley Soap. But we know differently about that, don’t we?”

His grandfather looked back out the window. “You are worse than your father. You have no respect for your elders. And you must know that I advised Adelaide in the matter of the will.”

“Of course you did,” Jared said. “All done without consulting me.”

“We knew you would say no, so why should we have asked?”

When Jared failed to answer, his grandfather turned to look at him. “What are you smiling about?”

“You’re hoping this girl will fall in love with the romance of the Kingsley ghost, aren’t you? That’s your plan.”

“Of course not! She knows about that world thing, that . . . What’s it called?”

“Why ask me? I’m not consulted about anything.”

“Spiders . . . No, that’s not it. Web. That’s it. She knows about the Web and can look on there.”

“For your information I also know about the Web, the Internet, and I can assure you that the Valentina Montgomery you’re looking for isn’t on there.”

“It was all a very long time ago.”

Jared got up from the chair and walked to the window to stand by his grandfather. It was April and the tourists were already beginning to arrive. They were as different from Nantucketers as dolphins from whales. However, it was amusing to watch them stumble across the cobblestones in their high heeled shoes.

“How is this girl going to find what we can’t?” Jared asked, his voice calm.

“I don’t know. It’s just something I can feel.”

Jared knew from long experience that his grandfather was lying, or leaving out information. But Jared also knew that he’d never get the full story out of him. There was more to why Alix Madsen was being given possession of Kingsley House for one whole year.

But Jared wasn’t giving up. Not yet. “There are things about her that you don’t know.”

“Then you must tell me all.”

“I talked to her father last week and he said his daughter is in a bad way right now.”

“And how is that?”

“She was engaged to be married but they recently broke it off.”

“I see,” his grandfather said. “And so that makes you think she’s like Adelaide, because this girl also lost her fiancé?”

Jared was having difficulty remaining calm. “You aren’t listening. She’s just broken off her engagement. You know what that means, don’t you? She’ll be all weepy and miserable

and stuffing herself with chocolate, then she'll see . . ."

"A ghost."

"Yes," Jared said. "A tall, handsome, never-aging ghost who is so very sympathetic, so courteous, so charming, and she'll fall in love with him."

"Do you think so?"

"This isn't a joke," Jared said. "She'd be what? A woman from yet another generation to give up her real life for an empty one."

His grandfather frowned. "Adelaide never wanted to get married and her life was far from empty."

"If you call four tea parties a week fulfilling then no, her life wasn't empty at all."

He looked at his grandson with a face full of fury.

"All right," Jared said as he threw his hands up in the air. "So I'm off base about Aunt Addy. You know how much I loved her. This whole island did and it wouldn't be half what it is today if it weren't for my dear aunt's hard work." He took a breath. "It's just that this girl is different. She's not from our family. She's not used to ghosts and family mysteries and two hundred and two year old legends. She's not even used to creaky old houses or islands where you can buy a thousand dollar jacket but no store carries cotton underwear."

"She'll learn." His grandfather turned to him with a smile. "Why don't *you* teach her?"

A look of dread went across Jared's face. "You know what she is and what she would want from me."

"Why don't you tell me again?"

"You know that she's training . . . to be a . . ."

"Get it out, boy!" his grandfather yelled. "What is she training for?"

"To be an architect."

His grandfather knew this but he didn't understand Jared's dislike of the subject. "Isn't that what *you* are?"

"Yes," Jared said. "That's exactly what I am. But I have an office. I have — I am —"

"Oh," his grandfather said. "I see. You're the master and she's the cabin boy. She'll want to learn from you."

"Not that you have any reason to know this, but there's a recession going on right now. A collapse in the housing market. One of the jobs hardest hit has been the architect's. No one is hiring. It makes recent graduates desperate and aggressive. They're sharks feeding on one another."

"So give her an apprenticeship," his grandfather snapped. "After all, you owe her father for —"

"Yes, I do and I've always planned to," Jared said. "But right now, thanks to my aunt's idiot will, Miss Madsen is going to be here on Nantucket, not in New York where my firm is. For a year it'll be me who has to deal with her on a personal basis."

"And why should that bother you?" He was incredulous.

Jared grimaced. "She'll want me to teach her, to look at her drawings, to analyze and critique them. She'll want to hear about my contacts, my . . . My everything."

"Sounds to me like a fine thing."

"It isn't!" Jared said. "I don't want to be the bait that gets fed on. And I like to *do* not teach."

"So what glorious deeds do you plan to *do*" — he emphasized the word — "while she's here? Will it involve any of the floozies you parade past her window?"

Jared gave a **weary** sigh. "Because girls today wear fewer clothes doesn't mean they have low morals. We've been over this a thousand times."

“Are you referring to last night? How was that one’s morals? Where did you meet her?”

Jared rolled his eyes. “Captain Jonas’s.” It was a bar near the wharf and it wasn’t known for its decorum.

“I daren’t ask what ship *he* captained. But who are the parents of this young woman? Where did she grow up? What is her name?”

“I have no idea,” Jared said. “Betty or Becky, I don’t remember. She left on the ferry this morning but she might be back later this summer.”

“You are thirty-six-years old with no wife, no children. Is the Kingsley line going to die out with you?”

Jared couldn’t help mumbling, “Better that than an architecture student to deal with.”

Although Jared was taller, his grandfather managed to look down his nose at his grandson. “I don’t believe you need to worry about her attraction to you. If your sainted mother were alive even she wouldn’t recognize you as you are now.”

Jared stood where he was by the window and ran his hand over his beard. His grandfather had told him this would be Aunt Addy’s last year alive so he’d rearranged his architectural firm so he could spend the final months with her on the island. He’d moved into the guesthouse and spent as much time as he could with Aunt Addy. And she was an understanding woman. She’d always warned him when she was going to have a tea party so he could go out on his boat. She never mentioned the women who occasionally came home with him. And most of all, she pretended that she had no idea why he was there.

In their last weeks together they’d shared a lot. Aunt Addy had told him stories about her life, and as the days passed she began to mention Caleb. At first she explained who he was. “He’s your fifth great grandfather,” she said.

“I’ve had five of them?” he teased.

She was serious. “No. Caleb is your great-great-great-great-great grandfather.”

“And he’s still alive?” Jared had asked, playing dumb as he refilled her glass with rum. All the Kingsley women had a remarkable capacity for rum. “Sailor’s blood in them,” his grandfather said.

Jared saw the way his aunt got slower every day. “She’s getting closer to me,” his grandfather Caleb had said to Jared, and Caleb stayed with her every night. They had lived together for many years. “The longest of any of them,” Caleb said and there were tears in those eyes that never aged. Caleb Kingsley was thirty-three when he died and over two hundred years later he still looked thirty-three.

But for all that Jared had shared with his aunt, he never came close to telling her that he too could see, talk, and argue with his grandfather. All the Kingsley men had been able to, but they didn’t tell the women in their lives. “Let them think Caleb belongs to them,” his father told Jared when he was a boy. “Besides, it emasculates a man for it to be known that he spends his evenings with a dead man. It’s better to let the women worry that you’re having a flirtation.” Jared wasn’t sure of that philosophy, but he’d maintained the code of silence. All seven of the Jared Montgomery Kingsleys could see Caleb’s ghost, and most of the daughters and a few of the younger sons could. Jared thought the truth was that Caleb could let people see him or not, but the old man would never clarify the matter.

To say it was odd that this young woman, this Alix Madsen, could see the Kingsley ghost was a great understatement.

His grandfather Caleb was frowning at him now. “You need to go to a barber and remove that beard from off your face, and your hair is much too long.”

Jared turned to look in a mirror. It was a China import that Caleb had chosen in that disastrous voyage so long ago. Jared saw that he did indeed look bad. Since his aunt’s death

he'd hardly been off his boat. He'd not shaved or cut his hair for months. There were gray streaks in his beard and strands of gray in his hair, which now reached down the back of his neck. "I don't look like my New York self, do I?" Jared said thoughtfully.

"I do not care for what you're thinking," Caleb said.

Jared turned back to smile at his grandfather. "I'd think you'd be proud of me. Unlike you, I'm not trying to make some innocent girl fall in love with me." That was another statement guaranteed to take the smile off his grandfather's face.

The explosion was instant. "I have *never* made a woman —"

"I know, I know," Jared said, taking pity on the handsome ghost. "Your motives are pure and clean. You're waiting for the return — or the reincarnation, whatever — of the woman you love and you've always been faithful to Valentina. I've heard it all before. Heard it all my life. You'll know her when you see her, then you two will go off into the sunset together. Which means that either she dies or you come back to life."

Caleb was used to his grandson's disrespect and general insolence. He'd never say it but this particular grandson was the one most like himself when he was alive. He kept the frown on his face. "I need to know what happened to Valentina," he stated simply. What he didn't add was that he now knew there was a time limit. He had until the twenty-third of June, just weeks away, to find out what happened to the woman he loved so much that even death couldn't separate them. If he didn't put it all back together, he didn't think that any of them would find the happiness they deserved. All he had to do was make his stubborn, never-listens-to-anyone grandson *believe*.

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