**Hide In Plain Sight**

 Twilight came and went. In its wake, the expanding blackness of night moved steadily across the island of Manhattan. Street lamps lit up, traffic eased and pedestrians scattered. October had brought cold, unseasonal weather, an early reminder that winter was on its way. Numbing cold was threatening the overnight hours.

Exiting one of the buildings, on an abandoned avenue in the Bowery District at ten that night, something’s shadow elongated across the sidewalk. Hidden beneath a hood, its owner could not be seen. The figure stopped just outside the door, scanning the neighborhood, and upon seeing the coast being clear hurried away.

In its haste, making its way across the avenue, its misjudgment caused it to bump into a parked car, jarring it heavily. The car’s alarm went off, the blaring horn breaking the quiet, sounding deafening to the ears of the escaping figure. Without a backward glance, it sped away, putting as much distance as quickly as possible between itself and the complex it had just left.

High up, on the seventh floor of that same building, the inside of a corner apartment appeared inky black. Reflected on the pane of glass, the moon cast itself in muted shades. The floors above the apartment and below it emitted light from still-awake residents. None of the inhabitants on the seventh, however, seemed to be up at that hour. An eerie stillness hung over the inside of the apartment, where the ongoing car alarm penetrated its silence.

The muffled sound of the alarm, both insistent and annoying, brought the young woman back to awareness. Moving through the closed window, the persistent wailing gave her something to focus on, as she ever so slowly regained her senses. Blinking, terror filled her at the surrounding darkness until she realized the lights were off. She found herself huddled in the far corner of the shadowed living room, disoriented and struggling to get her bearings. *What happened? How did I get over here?*

The last thing she recalled was a debilitating, torturous sensation, as though her entire body was being consumed by fire. She vaguely remembered sitting at her desk on the other side of the room. Her laptop, open on the last search page, still cast a radiant light across the desktop, displaying proof of its recent use. She had been researching something important, but in her muddled mind could not recollect what. The onset of the blistering pain had come swiftly, but was brief. Then, she had felt nothing. She must have lost consciousness. How she had ended up there, in the corner, had her mystified.

A final chirp sounded outside. The blaring alarm fell silent. In the now absolute silence of the room, the abrupt clatter coming from the refrigerator as it released its ice cubes into the receptacle, startled her. Trembling from fright, she wrapped her arms around her legs, bringing them closer to her body. Increasing fear kept her frozen, paralyzed. Her eyes darted here and there, unable to fathom a reasonable explanation for her situation. Then her eyes landed on someone sprawled across the floor in the center of the room. She had no clue who it might be.

With only the moonlight entering through the window to pierce the darkness, she could just barely make out an outline of the body that was facing away from her. From where she sat, identifying who it could be was impossible. The face of the person looked away towards the front door. Whoever they were, they lay very still, unmoving. She saw no indication the person was even breathing. A dire, ominous foreboding made her press further back against the wall behind her, as if to hide within it. With her sight adjusting to the limited light in the room, her eyes fastened on the body, and an involuntary shudder coursed through her.

The sprawled figure lay on their stomach. That the body was female was obvious by the clothing she wore. A light-colored dress rode up on the left bent knee, exposing a thigh and gave a glimpse of the woman’s pink underwear. The garments seemed familiar to her, as she took in the position of the body. Both of the arms were spread out above her head, as if the female had tried to soften her fall. Debating whether to go over to check and see if the woman needed help, she found she was unable to leave the safety of her hiding place. Something kept her rooted to the spot.

Panicked, even the familiarity of the room could not calm her. She knew each corner, each piece of furniture in sight. Her apartment was tastefully decorated in soft pastels. She had spent weeks deciding on the color scheme before moving in. The walls were painted a delicate peach color, while she chose the sofa and armchair for their unusual burnt rose shade. She still had not decided on the tables and lighting for the room. Her thoughts were harshly pulled back to the reality of her situation by the sound of approaching footsteps from the hallway outside.

She heard muted voices from the other side of her front door. The knock that followed went unanswered. Fearing for her life, not wanting to end up like the body on the floor, she stayed still, quiet, listening and watching. The rattling of her doorknob made her jump, freezing her as she stared transfixed at its turning ever so slowly. A whimper escaped her and she brought her hands to cover her mouth to silence herself. With the door inching its way open, the cast of light from the hallway spread into the living room. Two people, a man and a woman, entered, scanning the room before they moved towards the body on the floor. The young woman held her breath, hoping they would not notice her.

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Entering the room, at precisely eleven thirteen that night, the pair of forensic analysts approached the body expecting the worst. After shutting the door behind him, the man trailed after the woman, carrying a large metal case, which he deposited within easy reach of his partner, who was hunched down checking for a pulse. In the absence of light, both having enhanced sight, they could see from the waxen complexion, the glassy eyes and dilated pupils that the corpse had been dead a little over an hour. Their boss must have been alerted of the crime at the precise moment the young woman had died. It was not unheard of. They had the Faicinn, their felony notification device, to thank for that.

One of the founding members, who helped establish the Accords governing the preternatural worlds, created a device that alerted them to crimes perpetrated by the various races bound by the Accords. From the most inconsequential transgressions to the more significant infractions, this extraordinary invention led teams, such as theirs, to the locations of crimes they were tasked to investigate. The faerie race known as the Sidhe, led by Queen Eliana, had been instrumental in restoring peace between the many factions of preternatural beings.

Since her ascension to the throne over three thousand years before, the queen’s main focus was upon governing and protecting her people. From the Sidhe’s shielded, invisible island off the coast of Scotland, she saw the need to take on a leadership role if her people and those of other preternatural beings were to survive undetected by humans.

Queen Eliana freely offered the felony notification device to the governing body, a collection of Council members duly elected by their peers. She had named the device Faicinn, their word for envision. Its usual sky-blue colored, monoclinic, crystalline shape pulsed a vivid indigo when detecting a crime. From inside the crystal, the location, the victim and the team to be called were projected to the administrators. The image appeared to the administrators as a scrolling text. Cast out into the darkened room from within the crystal, the words hung in the air in the middle of their workplace.

The Faicinn was linked to the Sidhe’s powerful crystal named the Kaemorra, meaning sanctuary. The Kaemorra protected the island of Eruva, which the Sidhe called their home, and also allowed the queen to harness its energy to foresee the future, protect her people and cloak their island in invisibility. If the Faicinn could identify the guilty parties, the job of the investigators would become obsolete. But they were not so lucky. Queen Eliana had purposely limited the power within the device making it the responsibility of the teams to do the investigating. Her reasoning, the purpose of it, she had never let known.

Crimes such as the one they were presently investigating were quickly assigned to teams of two analysts and a lead investigator. Humans were never aware of the crimes, petty or more heinous, which were committed by criminals within the preternatural world. Some of what these diverse beings were capable of still managed to shock even the most seasoned investigators. This death lacked the blood and gore they had grown accustomed to. The dead woman showed no signs of violence or that she had put up any struggle against her assailant.

The female analyst rose and stepped away from the body. Nodding to her partner, the action confirmed they did indeed have a murder on their hands. Getting to work, she leaned down to open the case and proceeded to extract a series of sterile swabs and plastic, re-sealable bags. These she placed on the case’s open tray where she would have access to them as needed. She left the body in its position so that her partner could capture the scene with his digital camera. Moving out of his way, she gave him room to maneuver while he snapped photos from different angles. Their routine was well established after years of working together, making words unnecessary between them.

With nothing else to do until her partner was finished, she took the opportunity to wander around the room, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. Everything appeared in its place, organized and impeccably clean. The only light in the room came from the open laptop sitting on a simple desk. Walking over to it, the laptop showed her the results of a search the woman had initiated earlier. She leaned forward to read what the dead woman had been interested in.

Curious was all she could think upon seeing the letters forming the words, *hide in plain sight*. The search engine had spit back different links to a movie of that name. Not sure if it meant anything relative to the case, she called her partner over to snap some additional photos. The laptop they would bag and tag as evidence for further analysis, once the postmortem was completed.

“I’m done. You can examine the body.” He informed her. Having taken the shots of the desk, he moved to snap photos of the rest of the living room.

Leaving the desk, she returned to the dead woman, beginning her usual routine of viewing the body before collecting specimens. As she pulled on a pair of latex gloves, she crouched down to visually examine the victim. The woman’s name was Eve. She was young, just a month over her nineteenth birthday. Her importance was not lost on the two analysts. She was a female werewolf, employed by the Council member representing their kind.

Pretty came to the analyst’s mind while she examined the little she could see of the dead woman’s face. Long strands of strawberry-blond hair concealed half her face, fell down to cover her neck and then fanned out onto the floor. Pushing the strands out of the way, the side of her face and exposed neck came into view. The sight of the wound forced a gasp from the analyst’s lips.

Hearing the sound, her partner came over to see what had caused it. His customary pale complexion seemed to blanch further. Eve’s long, elegant neck exhibited the telltale signs of what had caused her death. Two pinprick points, about an inch-and-a-half apart, had pierced Eve’s jugular. The sight of the wound caused an instant reaction from her partner.

Watching his canines elongate, the woman heard a low hiss escape him. She knew enough to calm him before he completely lost control. She needed him focused on their work. Using her ingrained talent for soothing, her touch on his arm had the desired effect. His feral eyes lost their glazed countenance, returning to the shade she found endearing.

“We may have no choice but to call Elle.” She had spoken only once she was sure he had settled down. “Get the light, please. No point in working in the dark.”

“Maybe. Let’s finish our work here before we decide.” He answered her first comment, moving to the wall by the door to flick on the light. From there, he stepped away to continue his work, leaving her to do hers. The woman caught his glance back at the body, and saw the shudder that raced through him. Seeing her concerned look, he turned away.

Sighing at his now-stiff back, she resumed her examination of the body. The area around the marks on the woman’s neck appeared blistered and swollen, but no sign of blood was present. Reaching with her gloved fingers, she pressed the skin to find it hard, unyielding. She made no comment on that fact. Continuing, she turned Eve over onto her back to check for any other wounds. Eve’s facial expression seemed peaceful, as if she were sleeping.

No other marks were visible, but that did not mean there were none. She would have the chance to examine Eve more thoroughly back at the lab. For now, she collected the necessary specimens of tissue, fiber and anything else that caught her eye. They would have to keep an open mind on the evidence. Her partner, she saw, had stopped his work and was staring out the window. There were no words she could speak to allay his fears.

The presence of the young woman huddled in the corner had gone unseen by them both. Whether she was grateful not to be discovered or alarmed at the fact they did not notice her, only she knew. Wide-eyed, she followed their movements in her apartment, completely unable to make sense of anything that was happening.