

Spirit of Fortune

Chapter 1

The twins were seven years old when I realized that my husband, Dodge, was not happy.

“Mom!” Peter yelled. “Emily is out of her body again!”

“Samantha!” Dodge yelled.

Their scrunched faces reminded me of raisins. That look was familiar; I’d seen it on our son many times. At seven, he was often broody, and, as his mother, I was used to that expression, although his twin sister Emily saw it more than I did. I hadn’t seen it on my husband before. Or had I not realized it until now, as he was standing next to his son.

Sure, our life was chaotic. Both of our children inherited my ability to separate their spirits from their bodies. The first time it had happened was when we were staying with my Uncle George while our home was being built next door. Our homes were five miles from Gold Camp, a small town nestled in the pine trees of the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. We’d given up our apartment in San Francisco and Dodge had quit being a police inspector to start an investigative division of his good friend Dexter’s company. We both wanted him to spend more time with our family and not have the crazy hours of a San Francisco homicide inspector.

Our thirteen-month-old daughter, Emily, had roused me awake with the request for a coco, her word for cookie. I had taken her into the kitchen to get a cookie and milk to go with it when Dodge had arrived with Peter.

“Peter wants a cookie, too?” I said to them.

Dodge ran his free hands through his hair, his indicator of stress, and said, “There’s just one thing. I checked on Emily when Peter came into our bedroom. She’s still asleep in her bed,” I glanced at Peter and he continued, “and so is Peter.”

I handed a cookie to Emily and said, “We should call Luke and get him started on a containment field for our house.”

Luke Collins was the foster brother of Matthew, a crazy religious-bent serial killer who had murdered several women. It was the case where Dodge and I first met. I thought I was a ghost at the time but it turned out I was in a coma and had just jumped out of my body. Matthew thought I was an angel God had sent to stop him. I helped Dodge solve the case and then returned to my body. Dodge and I got married and we conceived our children. Seven months later, Luke’s other foster sibling, Trevor, and Matthew’s twin sister, Miranda, turned Matthew’s obsession with the

angel into a deadly game. That led to a dual kidnapping—my body by Miranda and Trevor and my spirit by Luke. Luke was a physicist who was building an electronic trap for ghosts to prove ghosts existed. It had worked, trapping my spirit in a programmable virtual reality unit. My spirit had spent time on a lovely beach, a cabin nestled in a forest, and a county fair midway.

We contacted Luke that night and he installed a containment field around Uncle George's home. The kids could separate from their bodies within the house but not outside the field. He installed the same field in our new home after its completion. It worked for several years until Emily, always the more inquisitive and daring of the twins, figured out a way around the field.

After a week of my searching for her in my corporeal form, Luke designed grounding bracelets for the twins with magnetic locks that sent small electrical impulses through their bodies. This kept their spirits and bodies together until they were old enough to understand the consequences of the separation. During my pregnancy, every hour of separation of my spirit from my body had slowed the fetuses' development. It was the same with the twins, according to Sarah, Dodge's doctor sister. When they separated from their bodies, their bodies stopped developing, they remained in stasis. Sarah had insisted that allowing their spirits to separate from their bodies would be detrimental to the twins so they each wore a containment bracelet. Occasionally I would take them off and let them split. Peter wasn't fond of it so he usually declined the invitation but, like me, Emily relished the separation.

"Samantha!" Dodge shouted again, pulling me back to the present.

"Emily, get back in your body before your dad has a stroke," I sighed as I returned to my body lying on the bed in our master bedroom.

"Okay, Mom," Emily laughed.

We met at the top of the stairs and I snapped on her cute pink grounding bracelet, hearing the magnetic lock engage. She winked at me, her signal she'd had a blast out of her body.

She walked down the staircase, glared at Peter, mumbling, "tattle-tale!" then wrapped her arms around Dodge's waist. "Hi, Daddy."

Dodge sighed, wrapped his arms around his daughter and kissed her head.

As I traversed the stairs, I watched as Dodge's face smoothed as he calmed. Then he turned and smiled at me. "Hi, honey."

"How was your day at work?" I asked.

"Great," he answered in the same placid voice I'd heard for months and now knew was a lie.

He was miserable and was putting on his cop face, which showed none of his true emotions.

That evening, Dodge, always preferring to cook rather than using the faster and more efficient Auto Chef, fixed a fabulous meal of cheeseburgers, fries and chocolate milk shakes. He

added tons of sauteed mushrooms to mine and Emily's and double patties and cheese to his and Peter's. It was amazing how Emily and I liked the same foods and activities as did Peter and Dodge. It was as if each twin had taken on one of our personalities, likes and dislikes. Emily a free spirit and Peter a conformist.

Unlike most twins, ours never developed their own language to talk to each other and aren't as bonded, either. Emily arrived only a few minutes before Peter, but it is as if she was at least a year older. She watches after her brother just the way the Emily I met had when I was trapped in Luke's virtual reality ghost trap. When we were together in the trap at the beach or carnival, that Emily was an older sibling. Sarah thinks the two children I met in that fugue state were Emily and Peter. When my spirit was in Luke's machine so were the spirits of the two fetuses. She speculated that I gave them the ages of children I would meet at the beach or carnival because I would never have thought two babies would be at those places alone.

After dinner, it was Dodge and Peter's turn to pick the family activity for the evening so Emily and I endured the retro board games and watched the latest episodes of Starman. It was a science fiction show where a man visits other planets to solve problems. When it's Emily and my turn to choose, we use the hologram room and go to other planets and solve the problems ourselves.

At eight, Dodge and I each took a child up to bed, so I walked Emily to her bedroom decorated in pirates and planets. She changed into her horse-covered nightgown and picked up her latest book, a series with a girl who is a veterinarian.

As I tucked her in I asked, "So what is Maggie doing now?"

Emily's eyes widened, and her face stretched into a huge smile. "Well, she prefers to Mags now, and she's helping a farmer whose sheep dog won't help him with the sheep anymore."

"Well, set your alarm and make sure you go to sleep in an hour, okay?"

"Oh, I will. If I don't set it, I'll fall asleep and miss how she helps the farmer."

I kissed Emily on the forehead and closed her door.

Dodge was standing outside Peter's room, frowning.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

Dodge turned and smiled at me. "He's the most grounded kid but still loves to listen to those magical books."

I put my arm through his as we walked to our room. "Everyone needs fantasy in their life."

Dodge huffed but smiled. "What's Mags up to?"

"She's helping a farmer with his dog, and Henry?"

“He’s taking on an evil sorcerer.”

We both laughed. Given their personalities, you would think Emily would read magical books and Peter enjoy farming and dog books. It was the one quirk in their normally steady personalities.

I leaned up and whispered into Dodge’s ear. “And what would you enjoy tonight? Normalcy or fantasy?”

Dodge’s eyes sparkled as he leaned over and kissed me. He deepened the kiss as my body reacted with heat and desire.

When he pulled away, my pulse was racing and I was breathing in small gasps. Then he picked me up and said, “You’ve got too many clothes on.”

I chuckled as he carried me into the bedroom and fixed that little problem.

In the morning, I woke in an empty bed and the sounds of a running shower. I had two choices: lay in bed and wait to watch him come out and get dressed or get in the shower with him. The draw of the warm shower and Dodge’s body won. But by the time I opened the door to the bathroom, Dodge was coming out of the shower with a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Can I tempt you to get back into the shower?” I asked, letting the strap of my red silk nightgown slip off my shoulder.

Dodge smiled but chuckled. “Yes, you can, but I’ve got an early meeting with a client. And even your fastest jet-copter won’t get me to the meeting on time if we get into the shower together.”

“Ah, let the client wait,” I said as I sauntered closer to him.

“Don’t tempt me Samantha, I’m running a few minutes behind,” Dodge said. “It’s a new client and he’ll bring in lots of revenue for the company and Dexter wants to expand, again.”

“If he opens any more offices, he’ll take over the world and change the planet’s name from Earth to Dragon’s Breath.”

Dodge laughed. “I still hate that damn name.”

“You could never get him to change it?”

“Nope.” Dodge shook his head and walked into our bedroom towards his closet.

I pulled up the strap to my nightgown and followed, remembering his face last night. “So how is the investigative division going?”

“Great,” Dodge replied, pulling on a pair of black slacks, then socks and shoes.

“Is it everything you thought it would be when you agreed to give up police work and join Dexter’s company?”

Dodge nodded and smiled. It was the face I now know means he is not telling me the truth. Then he pulled on a light blue dress shirt, buttoning it as he continued, “Did I tell you that Marge joined us?”

He changed the subject, too.

“Really, when?” I asked.

“A few weeks ago. I’m swamped so Dexter and I talked and we offered her a partnership in my investigative division. She jumped at the opportunity and has been a big help. We take turns vetting new clients and it’s my turn today and I’m running late.” He kissed me on the lips and grabbed his black suit jacket and a tie from his closet.

“I’ll see you tonight,” I said to his back as he jogged out the door.

I sat on the bed and remembered the conversation we had when the twins were a month old and Dodge didn’t come home until after one in the morning. I was waiting for him at the front door.

“What is most important to you, Dodge?”

“You, Peter and Emily, and being a cop, Samantha,” Dodge said.

“Why a cop, Dodge?”

“I enjoy helping people and the investigative work,” he said.

I got Dexter on the phone and he opened the investigation division of his company. Dodge had taken over the division and I thought he’d be happy.

What the hell was going on? Dodge was running to meet a new client? When had my cop turned into a pencil pushing businessman? And why?