



“Bog bodies.”

Clare Reid turned from watching the parade of suitcases trundling past on a baggage carousel at Heathrow International Airport to gaze in bemusement at the slender, raven-haired seventeen-year-old girl standing next to her.

“Excuse me?” she asked, pitching her voice so that she could be heard over the drone of conversation and unintelligible PA announcements in the crowded terminal.

“Thirteen of ‘em.” Allie McAllister spoke without looking up, her nose buried in the glossy pages of a guide to the British Museum. “Perfectly preserved corpses from the first century. They’re on display and we’re going to get to see them.”

“Al ... why do you delight in tormenting me?” Clare asked.

“I’m not tormenting you. I’m generating fun and fascinating summer itineraries for you. This one’s for when we go to the museum.”

“‘Fun’ and ‘fascinating’ and ...” Clare counted on her fingers, “... ‘museum.’ Huh. Which of these things doesn’t belong?”

Al grinned. “You know as well as I do that sometime within the next forty-eight hours, Maggie is gonna haul our collective butts through the doors of the Hallowed Halls of History no matter how much you kick and scream in protest. *I* am simply planning ahead.”

Clare smiled wanly and shook her head. Typical Allie McAllister, Girl Genius. As usual, Al had applied keen-eyed analysis to a looming problem situation and was already working out a solution. Clare had to admit, though, Al had Maggie pegged.

Maggie—Dr. Magda Wallace—was Clare’s aunt. A highly respected, world-renowned professor of archaeology, special projects consultant to the British Museum, and—for the duration of the summer—the functional equivalent of Clare’s truant officer while her orchestra-musician parents continent-hopped on a world tour with the Symphonia Internationale.

Clare pushed away the brochure Al was waving in front of her face. “You actually want to spend precious minutes of our last summer vacation before final year hanging out with dead dudes.”

“Don’t knock it. Vampires and zombies are very hot right now.”

“First of all, vampires are *undead*. And zombies are ... ew.”

“So that leaves bog guys.”

Clare smiled indulgently at her best friend since grade three and turned back to the luggage conveyor. No sign of their bags yet, so she looked instead at her watch and frowned through the mental calculations necessary to set it to UK time.

“This whole time-difference thing wigs me out,” she muttered.

“It should,” Al said, tucking the museum pamphlet into the pocket of her neoprene computer bag. “We’ve lost hours. Actual time loss.”

“What?” Clare blinked, startled by the notion. “No we haven’t.”

“*Tempus fugit*, pal.” Al shrugged.

Clare stared at her blankly.

“Time flies.”

“That’s stupid.”

"It's true." Al pointed skyward. "The entire time we were up there, hurtling through the sky, confined inside a pressurized metal tube, events of the world took place all around us that we were fundamentally, chronologically detached from. It's like time travel."

Clare stared at Al for a moment. "You watch too many movies," she said and punched her on the shoulder.

Turning back to the luggage-go-round, Clare yawned and stretched, keeping one eye open for a glimpse of her hot-pink tartan suitcase. She'd slept through almost the entire flight over from Toronto and now felt stiff and dehydrated—and like her head wasn't screwed on quite right.

"Who's picking us up?" Clare asked. Maggie hated driving in the city, so Al had told Clare not to worry about it and made alternative arrangements for them on her end. "It's not that creepy chauffeur dude your mom had the hots for last time we were in London, is it?"

"Nope." Al snaked between two older men in suits and nabbed her sleek black suitcase from the conveyor belt. "When Mumsy's not on this side of the pond, we don't rate a limo."

"Charming," Clare said over her shoulder, lunging for her own overpacked bag as it tumbled down the chute. She hefted it off the belt and the two girls made their way through the terminal to the arrivals pick-up driveway.

"Milo's got a car. He told me he'd be waiting for us."

"Great. Milo the Übergeek." Clare groaned, trying to remember the last time she'd seen Al's cousin. It had most likely been in close proximity to a reference library or a Star Trek convention. "Seriously—how does somebody with glasses that thick even qualify for a driver's licence?"

"Dude. Harsh." Al grinned. "You haven't seen him in, like, five years."

"Your point being?"

"I think Milo's kinda cool."

“You think Math-a-lympics are cool. You are an unreliable source.”

The last time Clare had seen Milo the Mastermind he’d been about fourteen years old and practically a poster child for dorks everywhere, with floppy yellow bedhead hair and Coke-bottle lenses in thick black frames sliding down a nose perpetually buried in grad-school-level textbooks. Brains the size of planetary gas giants ran in the McAllister family genes.

Not that Clare, by comparison, was stupid—not by any stretch. In fact, Clare and Al both came from families brimming with high-functioning intellectuals and artists. It was one of the things that had brought them together when they’d first met in grade school. It had provided an initial foundation for their friendship. As they grew older, though, it had become increasingly apparent that—whereas Al was a chip off the ol’ family mental block—Clare’s potential genetic propensities had failed to manifest. Or skipped a generation. Or something. Despite an IQ that fell well within the “gifted” range, Clare had consistently defied her parents’ expectations and grown up to become—as she’d been told time and again by teachers and tutors and guidance counsellors—average.

Oh, how she hated that word.

It wasn’t that Clare didn’t *try* to pay attention, it’s just that she was easily distracted by shiny things and boys. Shiny things like the sleek silver BMW convertible parked beside the curb in the arrivals lane. And boys like the lean-muscled, golden-haired god leaning against it.

“Milo!” Al shouted.

Clare looked around. “Where?”

“There.” Al pointed and waved.

And the blond Adonis with the smokin’ hot ride waved back.

“THIS THING IS AWESOME!” Al enthused as Milo steered with practised ease through what to Clare seemed wrong-side-of-the-road traffic from the wrong side of the car. “I can’t believe they gave you a Bimmer for a company car.”

“Sweet, huh?” Milo grinned at his cousin. “I totally lucked out on this gig.”

“Oh please, Mi,” Al snorted from the front seat. “OS practically begged you to come work for them. They probably got all drooly on their ascots when you said yes.”

“OS,” as Clare understood from the conversation, was short for Ordnance Survey—the national mapmaking agency of Great Britain. At nineteen, Milo was the youngest employee of the venerable company; they’d hired him, Al had explained, to work summers when he wasn’t in class at Oxford. He did “topographical vector cartography something-something ...” Clare had lost the thread of his job description about halfway through. Something to do with making digital maps. And computers. Of course.

“You should totally apply for an internship, Allie,” Milo was saying. “I could give you a reference and you’d be a shoo-in no problem ...”

While the two cousins chatted, catching up, Clare sat in the back of the car surreptitiously analyzing Milo’s profile and trying to reconcile it with her memories of him as a boy. It wasn’t easy. Actually, it was impossible. Nothing about him fit that picture—not the wavy, wheat-gold hair or the broad shoulders or the lean-muscled, lightly tanned arms, not the strong square fingers lightly gripping the steering wheel or the long legs in the faded, fitted jeans that stretched out under the dashboard ...

“Clare?” Milo half-turned around and Clare got the impression he’d already said her name more than once.

“Hm?” She sat up, startled.

“I said ‘How about you?’” Milo turned back but Clare noticed that he kept glancing at her in the rear-view mirror. Probably trying to decide if she was ignoring him or just not that bright. “What are your plans for after graduation?”

Plans? What plans? The very thought of life post-high school made her blood run cold. “Oh, you know ...” She shrugged. “I’m sort of weighing my options at the moment ...”

“Cool.” Milo nodded as if he understood. He’d probably been buried under the weight of his options, whereas—no that she was going to tell him this—Clare’s were feather-light. “Hey. Do you ladies want to do a little sightseeing tomorrow?” he asked. “I can take a bit of time off and show you around if you want.”

Clare’s heart leapt for a brief instant ... and then plummeted off a cliff into free-fall. That just wasn’t going to happen. At least, not until she’d convinced Maggie through a few weeks of intensely good behaviour that she was worthy of an unsupervised day pass. “I ...”

“Thanks for the offer, Mi,” Al interjected. “But Clare’s kinda under house arrest while we’re here.”

“Excuse me?” Milo said, one dark gold eyebrow raised.

Al proceeded to explain—in Technicolor—about the house party debacle that had led to Clare’s exile: the now-legendary disastrous weekend when word of a two-day parental absence at the Reid household had leaked out on Facebook. Al regaled Milo with party highlight anecdotes while Clare sank deeper into the BMW’s leather bucket seat and wished she were dead. “And then some guy I’ve only ever seen while walking past detention hall threw up in the front hall closet. And on the dog. And then—get this—somehow he manages to throw up in Clare’s mom’s baby grand piano!”

And that, on top of everything else, was the unforgivable act that sealed Clare’s fate. Never mind the dog.

Al glanced back over her shoulder at Clare's face and tried to stifle her giggles. "Sorry, pal. But you have to admit ... it was fairly epic."

Milo was laughing, although Clare was fairly certain it was polite laughter. In the rear-view mirror his blue eyes flicked up and his reflected gaze met hers. "So," he said wryly. "Party girl, huh?"

"Oh. Yeah ... nonstop." Clare lowered her gaze so that she wouldn't have to actually see the look of superiority she *knew* would be there in his eyes. Maybe, back home in Toronto anyway, a guy who looked like Milo wouldn't necessarily have been out of Clare's league: she'd generated occasional passing interest from one or two of the school hotties. But a guy who *thought* like Milo? Forget league, it wasn't even the same sport.

"Hey," he said, "nothing wrong with that. Go crazy. Live a little before you die, right?"

Right. Before she died of embarrassment. Or, if her aunt had anything to say about it, boredom. *See?* Clare thought. *There are at least two options for you to weigh. Go crazy.* Well, it was going to be a long summer. She just might.