

Shelby, like most Seattleites had never been inside City Hall. She and the other three were escorted into the upper lobby. Intended to impress visitors the vast open spaces were decorated with murals and large pictures of local landmarks and points of interest. She also saw sculptures and artworks that she had no doubt were commissioned from various local artists. She dimly remembered mentions of such on the news over the years. The entire space gave the impression of extravagance, a showy unashamed display of the availability of money. Like most Seattleites she also recognized it was taxpayer money that had been spent. The sight did indeed spark the realization that those who held power here tended to think of themselves a touch above the rabble they sought to govern.

In contrast to her experience over the last two days the lobby lights were on and the air-conditioning was also working. The absence of the acrid smell of smoke was a refreshing change. Beyond the first impression the decor and somewhat cleaner air barely registered on Shelby. Her attention was on her fellow volunteers. Her extra vision showed just how different they were.

She now walked beside three creatures that seemed to exude magic.

When Robert had appeared right next to her his sudden presence was the equivalent of a visual shout. Instead of when humans walked through the magic essence without interacting with it; the seven foot plus tall cat changed and affected the flow of magic around him.

The instant he'd appeared the essence around him had suddenly brightened and also organized into lines of force. It gave Shelby the impression of iron filings around a magnet, only painted in the tenuous medium of the magical essence. In her magical sight he shone as though lit by a fire within, her normal vision simply cataloged the differences in his form. Faint, and looking like a double exposure the magical essence had confirmed to Shelby the cat's radiance altered and affected the magic around him. It looked as if he were heating the air around him. It was to Shelby what staring at the surface of a cold sun might be like.

Looking up at his face only confirmed the impression when seeing the glow from his eyes. It took her a second to notice that the faint glow from his eyes had a fainter yet still real counterpart.

They arrived at a conference room and were introduced to several more people. They were all offered a seat. The room held a typical long conference table with over a dozen chairs placed around it. Before taking a seat she asked to be allowed to plug her phone in for charging. After seeing to her phone she was the only one to take a chair. Robert stood, with all the extra appendages coming from his back he was going to have a difficult time finding a comfortable chair. Glen had simply sat on the floor while Anna took a place on the large desk. As the questions began Shelby listened with half an ear. She was still considering her companions.

She carefully observed the three changelings that she had to assume had been changed into magical creatures. Being next to them she could sense the difference in the magic they were exuding. As she watched it seemed they were taking in raw magic, altering it, processing it and expelling it after having changed it somehow. It was by no means a fast process, it was about as fast as watching an old Polaroid photo develop.

After watching for a few minutes she thought that maybe they were refining it. Taking in raw stuff of magic and in some way metabolizing it into something else, something cleaner, perhaps more pure. On another level they all looked to be taking even more into themselves than what was being expelled. It came to her that perhaps they were the magical equivalent to trees. If that were so Shelby wondered if perhaps they were in some similar way to trees slowly growing stronger through the process. It made sense that they would become more powerful as they metabolized the magic to a new different form.

She could see with her mystic vision the essence that came from them slowly flowed to her staff. It was as if that magical essence that came from the three creatures was meant to be used, stored by others. Changing raw magic into something others, maybe magic users like herself, could use. She wondered if the processed stuff from them would be easier to use.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a question thrown her way. She answered "What would you suggest? Understand, I'm learning something new. For all we know there was no magic three days ago."

Lucas Menninger shrugged and looked around at everyone sitting at the table. He had asked Shelby to give a display of what she was capable of. "How about, oh, I don't know, pull a rabbit out of a hat?"

Shelby saw the look Robert gave him. It didn't take a super perceptive genius to catch the sarcasm in the man's tone. "I have a better idea." She said focusing on the magic filling the room, taking control of it and finishing "How about you go to a corner and stand on your head for five minutes."

She relaxed her control on the magic as Lucas stood. She had noticed a difference. It was becoming easier. They all watched as Menninger went to the corner and after a bit of preparation stood on his head. Nothing of substance was discussed for several minutes as every other human in the room talked at once.

Robert smirked at her while Glen blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling through both nostrils. Anna sat passively, although Shelby thought that she noticed a humorous gleam in the gryphon's eyes.

For all the humor she saw from her companions Shelby was having second thoughts about her impromptu demonstration. The men and women in the room while not reacting overly threatened had changed their behavior. Seeing that reaction brought home to her just how strange and unusual her situation really was.

She was sitting in City Hall with many of the council members, and the reason for her presence was that they sought her help. Add to that they were now negotiating from a position of, if not fear then extreme caution. Add also that she now was capable of magic powerful enough to make someone perform as if they'd been mesmerized by a circus sideshow hypnotist. If that wasn't enough her other volunteers were creatures that hadn't existed in reality two days ago. They also had not a stitch of clothing on them and no one had said one word about it. And last but certainly not least, they were also creatures of magic, one had even personally demonstrated to her his ability to teleport from one place to another.

Should anyone have told her she'd be in such a position before all this started she'd have questioned their sanity. She should be having more trouble coming to terms with the situation. The only reaction she was having was reconsidering the advisability of her demonstration. The others seemed comfortable in their positions, and had even accepted her show of power.

She'd changed jobs a couple times in the past, each time there had been a period of getting used to the new situation, of starting over. She had to admit, this was a little more profound than that. This made changing jobs as simple as buying a new pair of shoes, and yet it seemed to have had an even shorter break in period. In light of all that; she was forced to consider something was at work on all of them.

She also admitted that she wasn't ungrateful for the intervention.

Ken Sercliff finally brought the meeting back to order and made the suggestion that Shelby be assigned to aid the police in crowd control.