

# A Knight in New York

By Joshua Montreal

## Chapter 2

### Not All Eyes Can See

#### Present Day, New York —

“But how bad would it really be?” a young woman says into her phone, standing in the center of a busy, early morning sidewalk. “A lot of people have dropped out of college and still become successful! Just look at Bill Gates!”

“Yes, he did drop out of college, Harvard to be exact. But he also had money, I suppose, and was smart enough to create Microsoft Windows,” the voice on the other end of the phone call replies. “Amanda, I know you’ve been through a lot, but this college came to you! They gave you an opportunity that we couldn’t have afforded otherwise and you wanna throw it out?”

Amanda sighs. “It’s not that I want to, I just feel like I don’t belong here.” She whispers into the phone while keeping her head down, trying to avoid the stares of people passing by.

“Please, Amanda, just give it a little more time and I’m sure you’ll love it there,” the voice replies in a happy, hopeful manner. “Just one more month and if you still don’t like it, you can come back home.”

Amanda sighs again and reluctantly agrees, one more month. Before she hangs up, she says, “Bye, Dad, I love you.” And her father says, “I love you, too.”

Amanda keeps her phone in her hand, opening a directions app, but still keeps her head down. She walks with the early morning crowd down the street, blaring car horns blending into the conversations of the people nearest her. Every now and again, Amanda raises her head to look at the street signs and then back down at her phone. “Where is it?” she says to herself in a frustrated voice. “Did I go the wrong way? I couldn’t have, I know I’ve been following the directions correctly.” Then her head bumps a man in the back. Her head quickly jolts up as the man turns around. “Sorry,” she says very quietly, her eyes looking down. Thankfully, the man only half smiles and shrugs. He takes a sip from the coffee he’s carrying and turns back around.

Amanda takes a few deep breaths, then realizes her phone is buzzing in her hand. She looks down and the phone displays a message, “You have arrived.” She looks up from her phone and sees the giant white building in front of her. “Oh, so this is the Museum of Natural History.” Her eyes read the banner that hangs from the top of the museum, “New York City welcomes the Camelot Monolith, King Arthur’s Boulder!”

Amanda remembers reading about the boulder on the internet back when it was the hottest thing in England. And learning how the boulder supposedly tells the story of King Arthur and of Merlin and of their grand adventures in Camelot.

Just the thought of it brings back fond memories.

When Amanda was a little girl, her father would tell her stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. How they slayed monsters and vanquished evil from the land. Stories of the Black Knight and of Lancelot. Of Merlin, the Master Wizard, and his power over all magic. As well as tales of the magical Lady of The Lake.

Each story her father told was more enchanting than the last. The world he painted left her head reeling

with visions of the fabled land of Camelot. But, in contrast, her life at school was not so good. Talking about the amazing stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table made her an easy target for those who refused to believe in the enchanted land of Camelot. And for believing in such “fairy tales”, Amanda was teased and bullied to the point of being an outcast to everyone.

As a result, she would come home crying and sniffing. Why did they all hate her so much? But then, when the sun was about to set and Amanda got herself into bed, her father would come home, pull a chair up at her bedside and tell her the stories that always made her happy no matter what.

Amanda opens her eyes and realizes that she has been daydreaming.

In front of her, the Museum of Natural History is covered from towering pillar to towering pillar, wall to wall, in banners displaying welcome signs and images of the boulder. The banners are displayed, sprinkled here and there, as far as four blocks from the museum. The line for tickets stretches out the door, down the steps, and onto the sidewalk. Amanda can't really tell where the end of the line is, it becomes a mess as the orderly line turns into a confused and excited throng that fans out onto the sidewalk. Not knowing what to do, she slowly walks next to the line and walks up with it. The conversations around her talk about King Arthur's Boulder. Some people are skeptical of its origins, some are curious about it, but everyone is drawn to it like Amanda is.

Once Amanda gets through the door, she goes up to the front desk and pays the clerk for her ticket. The museum is packed wall to wall with families, reporters, photographers and security officers. Amanda slowly walks with the crowd, once again keeping her head down. Crowds make her feel uneasy and having to wait in one to see the subject of her art project is torture. Her heart pounds and her breath becomes heavier each time she breathes in. The people around her seem like giants whenever she dares to look up, she feels so small and defenseless.

Eventually, after what feels like hours of waiting, she somehow makes it to the front doors. She is next to go inside and see the talk of the town. The doors open and she walks in with some people from the crowd. The rows of amphitheater seating go from high to low, down into a pit, with the boulder being at the bottom. Amanda walks down the stairs while simultaneously staring at the boulder that spins on a moving platform. The front row is open and she finds a seat, her bag drops to her feet and she takes out a sketch pad and a brand new set of sketching pencils.

“Okay,” she says to herself as she places everything in neat order. “I have to get the shape down, then hopefully have enough time to draw in as many details as I can.”

While Amanda gets herself ready and prepares for her final project, an unwelcome voice calls out to her. “Well, look who it is!” the voice says mockingly. “Hey, Fire Head.” Amanda doesn't look over to see who it is, she already knows as soon as she hears her nickname from school. “Are you ignoring me?” the voice says as its owner, a young woman of about Amanda's age, sits right next to her. “Look at me when I'm talking to you, Fire Head!”

To avoid people staring at her, Amanda looks over at Emily, her childhood bully, now a college bully. But she doesn't say anything, she just glares. Fire Head has been a hated nickname ever since the accident—mainly because her brown hair, which she loved, grew back in an unnaturally bright red color afterward.

Amanda and Emily take the same art major and see each other almost every day. And it doesn't help that Emily once took Amanda's sketch book, saw all her drawings of knights and wizards, and began tormenting her. Now, Amanda always tries her best to avoid Emily whenever she can. In fact, she tries to avoid everyone while she's here at college. Emily is the major reason Amanda wants to leave. Her constant barrage of insults and teasing seems endless. To make matters worse, whenever Emily starts something, everyone else joins in. No one wants to be on bad terms with the evil queen.

“Why are you at my sketch spot?”

“Your sketch spot? In class, I said I was going to do a sketch of that right there, King Arthur's Boulder. And you said you were going to do your sketch at the Empire State Building. Why are you here?”

“Well, I changed my mind when I learned you were doing this stupid rock. You need to go so I can do this sketch.” Emily waves her hand and demands that Amanda leave. Just as Amanda is about to leave, the doors close and the lights dim.

“Everyone, please take your seats,” an automated voice says through the loudspeakers. “The exhibition will begin shortly.” It is too dark for Amanda to see, the only light in the room is the giant spotlight that shines over the boulder. So, Amanda quickly sits back down, much to Emily's disliking.

“Welcome, ladies and gentlemen!” a more enthusiastic voice shouts through the loudspeakers. A light illuminates one of the stairs where a man wearing a headset and a T-shirt with an image of the boulder printed right in the middle. The announcer walks down the steps while talking. “It is my pleasure to tell you all the amazing history of this boulder!” His voice echoes through the quiet room as he walks off the last step and quickly hops onto the rotating platform that the engraved boulder is on. “This amazing beauty of history, the Camelot Monolith, tells the story of King Arthur and of the wizard, Merlin. Well, at least what's left of the boulder does.” The announcer points out the faded etchings and deterioration which give the engraved boulder a misshapen look. Some of the stories could still be read, but most are faded away, leaving only random words where the story once was. “Now, as you can see, King Arthur's Boulder is a relic, an artifact of the nearly forgotten past. It is believed to be more than fifteen hundred years old! But isn't it a marvel?”

Amanda shifts left and right in her seat as her eyes scan the boulder from every possible angle, her hand slowly drawing the outline of her sketch. Her eyes are locked onto the boulder and nothing else while Emily occasionally peers over at Amanda's sketch and heaves an aggravated sigh.

The announcer's voice soon fades out of Amanda's ears. She stares at the boulder and sketches every little detail she can. Shading the shadows and bolding every line. The sides of her ruler are covered in pencil lines and two of her sketching pencils have already been sharpened down to the eraser. But when she raises her head again to look at the boulder, her eyes lock onto a book sticking out of the stone. Amanda freezes, her eyes can't look away from the mysterious book and the strange feeling it gives her. Only half of the book sticks out of the boulder, but the part she can see makes the book look out of place. It doesn't look old, nor does it look worn. The rich brown leather seems brand new and the bright yellow writing on the spine of the book shines as bright as the sun. It's almost like it was accidentally put there. There's no way the book belongs with such an old boulder.

“Miss?” she can hear a faint voice call out. “Miss, are you with us?” The voice gets louder and louder until Amanda snaps out of the trance-like state she is in. The announcer looks down at her from the rotating platform which stops when he is right in front of her. “I see that your eyes have spotted the little oddity in the stone,” the announcer says, putting on a pair of yellow rubber gloves. “This old ragged book was found in the boulder and no one is allowed to make any contact with the book because of this.” The announcer carefully places his finger on the book. At first, nothing happens and the audience is confused. Then, suddenly, the glove turns green and moldy and a moment later the once-yellow glove is engulfed in black fungus. It isn't long before the entire glove deteriorates before everyone, becoming a pile of black mold on the floor. The audience applauds, though some express their disgust over what has just happened. The announcer says it might be some type of contact mold or fungus. But not to worry, they already know how to clean it up.

Amanda looks at the announcer, confused. “But what about the golden emblem on the cover?” she asks, pointing to the half of the Golden Dragon emblem that she can see there. Emily and a few other audience members look at her, confused. From what they can see, there is no emblem on the cover, just

tears and rips.

But the announcer doesn't seem confused. He simply asks Amanda, "What exactly do you see, young lady?"

The announcer looks down at Amanda, his eyes squinting and staring right through her. The audience falls silent, their eyes all look at Amanda, quietly waiting. Amanda's breathing becomes faster and heavier as their eyes stare her down. When Amanda can't answer right away, the whispers begin. She knows the audience is whispering about her, it's undeniable. Soon Amanda's breathing turns into even shorter, quicker, heavier breaths until she realizes that she is about to hyperventilate.

As the announcer is about to ask another question, Amanda grabs her sketch pad and her backpack, and jumps up from her seat, her sketch pencils and pencil case falling to the ground. The announcer tries to stop her from leaving, but Amanda bolts up the stairs and through the doors.

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