

Midas Touch: Chapter 14

“The North had many advantages against the South. Namely, their industrial and economic power. They had . . .”

Karlee yawned as the lecture droned on. College was fun and all, but the freshman classes were pretty boring. Karl hadn't been much of a scholar, and Karlee wasn't one either. But, she needed to push through.

Jason leaned over. “I think the toupee is going to fall off if he moves his head too fast.”

Karlee stifled a giggle and pushed him gently. “Sush, you. I'm trying to pay attention.”

“Oh? I'm sure the yawns are signs that you're fully alert.”

Karlee stuck out her tongue. “I'll have you know, I am an excellent student.” A yawn escaped her a moment later. Both of them laughed quietly.

The bell rang and the students began packing their belongings before the professor finished the lecture. “Remember, the essay on the civil war is due next Friday,” the professor called as the students filed out.

Karlee stretched in relief. She noticed Jason took a glance at her. She knew he was attracted to her, but she wasn't ready for that. Yet.

As Karlee and Jason walked down the aisle, Karlee felt a sudden push and toppled over. Books and notes were scattered all over the place as a girl with red hair dropped to the ground next to her. Laughter erupted around them.

“Oh! I'm so sorry,” the girl said, her face matching the color of her hair.

“It's-it's fine,” Karlee said catching her breath. “Are you alright?”

“Yes. No. Not really. I'm super nervous. Today's my first day, and I'm frantic to catch up.”

“I didn't know they accepted people this late,” Jason said as he helped the two girls collect their things.

“I had an emergency surgery right before the semester began,” the girl explained. “I'm better now, but I feel so behind.”

“That's rough,” Karlee said. “I missed orientation, so I felt behind before I even started. Oh, is that for Calc 1?” She asked as she picked up a book.

“Yeah, I have it in an hour with Prof. Botts,” Leah replied.

“No way! I have that too!” Karlee said excitedly. “We should totally sit next to each other. There aren’t many girls in that class, and all the guys are creeps.”

“Hey, I’m in that class,” Jason protested.

“My point stands,” Karlee said with a wink. “If you’re not doing anything, why don’t we grab lunch?”

“That sounds great. I’m Leah, by the way.”

“I’m Karlee, and this is Jason.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jason said with a smile.

The three chatted as they made their way to the cafeteria.

Detective Jacques looked at three college students coming out of the lecture hall. Karlee, David’s sister. The more he looked into the case, the more confused he became. He already interviewed their parents. David disappeared after getting back from a camping trip with Karlee. He had left a note, but they didn’t have it anymore. They were quite vocal about giving details about David, but when Jacques asked about Karlee, they gave very brief answers.

He looked into Karlee a bit more but couldn’t find much. He noticed they didn’t have any family pictures of her on the wall and her social media account only began where she began college. He couldn’t find any school records or anything like that. He had called her over the phone, and she was eager to find out more information about David.

Jacques followed Karlee and her friends. They walked to the cafeteria and ordered some food. After they all sat down and mostly finished eating, Jacques joined them. The kids looked at them warily.

“Sorry to intrude, but are you Karlee Harris?” Jacques asked.

“Yes,” Karlee said slowly.

“Great. My name is Detective Jacques; we spoke over the phone earlier this month. I have a few more questions about your missing brother. Do you mind if we talk in private?”

“About David? Do you have any information about him?” Odd; her tone was more protective than curious. Much different than over the phone.

Karlee made no move to join him in a private conversation. Jacques sighed; fair enough for an attractive young woman to go alone with an older man. The information wasn't confidential.

"As I mentioned before, I found where he was staying a few weeks ago, but he was gone by the time I arrived. What I didn't mention was that he seems to be connected to many other disappearances. Eight as far as I've been able to find."

That got a reaction from the group. "Eight people went missing around David," Karlee asked, the color draining from her face. "Is he alright?"

"He seemed to be according to the neighbors I talked to a few weeks ago. Do you recognize any of these people?"

Jacques placed all of the missing people flyers out on the table. The group looked through them and shook their heads. Jacques sighed. "That's too bad. Do you have any idea where he would be?"

"Do you think I would be here if I did?" Karlee asked. "No, I do not."

Anger? All signs were pointing to her making some sort of contact with him, but she clearly didn't want to talk about it. The boy opened his mouth to say something but closed it after a glance at Karlee. Interesting.

"I'm sorry for taking your time," Jacques said. He handed each of them his card. "If you find out anything, please give me a call."

The group thanked him and moved away. Jacques made his way back to his car and waited. It only took five minutes before his phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hello, is this that detective? I'm Jason, Karlee's friend."

"Ah, yes, of course. How can I help you?"

"Is Karlee's brother really caught up in a huge missing person case?"

"I believe so."

"You can't tell Karlee I told you this. She told me not to tell anyone, but this is too important. Two weeks ago, we found someone David had met since he disappeared and got his email. Karlee has stopped looking for him since then."

“His email? Do you by chance have it?”

“I do not. But, it was odd what the girl said they talked about. It was something about the hike they went on. They found something, and it’s somehow related to that story about Midas.”

“You mean, the King Midas who can change anything he touches into gold?” This conversation was not going in the direction he was expecting.

“Yes, except they talked about wine and women as well. I’m worried he fell into some sort of cult.”

“I see. Do you have the person’s name who you met?”

“Tes - Tessa, I believe. From Clearwater University in the Spanish department.”

“Thank you, Jason. This helps a lot to get to the bottom of this. Is there anything else?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“If you think of anything, please give me a call.”

Jacques smiled. Another breadcrumb.

“How you are adjusting, Eliza?” David asked as he escorted the young woman through the garden. “It’s been, what, three days since you joined us?”

“It’s been most wonderful,” Eliza replied. “Though, I cannot help but deem the other girls do not like me very much.”

“Part of that is your fault,” David said. “You keep on commanding them to do things for you. If you keep that up, they’re going to start feeding you Samantha’s cooking.”

Eliza shuddered. “They-they have done that to me already. Is it true you partook of her cooking when she first transformed?”

David nodded. “It was just her and me. I didn’t have the heart to tell her no.”

“I wish that would have been me.” Eliza gave David a big hug. “Then I would have had you all to myself.”

“Hey, none of that.” David started to tickle her. Eliza started giggling uncontrollably until she started to snort. Her face turned bright red as David laughed.

Eliza glared at David. "Meanie."

"Anyway," David said. "You start your internship at the state capital soon, right?"

Eliza smoothed her dress. "Yes, you are correct, sir meanie. They allow almost anyone to join if you go through the proper channels. Once I'm in, I should be able to maneuver to the right office."

"Thank you, Eliza. Really, thank you."

David's smile caused Eliza to blush. "Of-of course. Anything to protect you. I understand the importance of keeping an eye on what the government knows about us."

They linked arms once again and David escorted her to her room; she kissed him on the cheek with a blush and ran away.

David smiled; he enjoyed the time he spent with her, but she had gotten on everyone's nerves at one point or another. Everyone except Alex. Alex obeyed every command and was happy to be Eliza's maid of sorts. They often locked themselves into a closet and tried on new clothes.

Juliet decided to send Eliza with Alex to be her assistant. Alex had been training to be a waitress, but they decided it would be better for her to pair up with Eliza. She also adjusted Aubrey's and Ellie's training since Eliza was taking that position. Ellie loved movies, so Juliet pulled some strings to work in a film studio. Ellie was cast as an extra in an upcoming movie, and Aubrey assisted the costume designer.

David sighed as he walked through the mansion. It was getting quieter. Susan and Leah were gone to college and only would visit on the weekends. Aubrey, Ellie, and Cassidy had jobs. Eliza and Alex were leaving soon. Juliet, Nancy, and Florence were always busy. Debby always wanted to train. And Rachel always disappeared into a corner of the mansion with a book. David felt he was being left behind, like a figurehead with no substance.

Nancy stepped next to him and matched his stride. "Good morning, David. How was your walk with Eliza?"

"Hey, Nancy. It was great. She is fun to be around once you get used to her."

Nancy raised an eyebrow. "Maybe to you, but not to the rest of us. Especially me. I'll be glad once she's gone with Alex. Anyway, next on your schedule is training with Debby."

David couldn't suppress a groan.

Nancy chuckled. "I take it you aren't keen on ripping apart your body."

“You could say that again. But, it’s more than that. I feel like I’m stuck in a rut. I want to do something. Something important.”

“I’d argue that you’re the most important person here,” Nancy replied.

“I’m important, yes. But, I feel like I’m going with the flow. I want to help someone who needs it and not some rich jerk.”

Nancy tapped her pen to her lips. “Give me a second.” She took out her phone and started texting. After a moment, Nancy smiled. “That should work.”

David sat on a stool as Juliet fussed over him. She was putting a heavy layer of makeup over his face. Apparently, Juliet had a passion for cosmetics. She said something along the lines of perception is power. He made a mental note to add that to the list. Nancy and Eliza were nearby talking excitedly to one another; of course, they’ll get along with something like this.

“Are you going to tell me what we’re doing yet?” David asked.

Juliet smiled. “Where’s the fun in that?”

“I mean, this doesn’t help my issue,” David pouted. “I’m still doing what you’re saying.”

“We need to be safe, but I think you’ll like this one. We won’t be scamming some elitist snobs this time.”

“Hey,” Eliza said. “I resent that, you prissy. I was one of those snobs.”

“Exactly,” Juliet replied. “We won’t even need to take care of the people you touch this time. And there we go. Take a look in the mirror.”

Juliet made some final touches to David’s face, and he turned around. He gaped. His face looked like a girl’s. The makeup softened his features, highlighted his eyes, and made his lips fuller. However, it was only his face.

“Wow,” David said. “I thought you were just doing a simple disguise, but I’m going out as a girl? I guess it’s fitting considering what I can do.”

“We need to make sure you don’t get recognized,” Nancy said stepping up to analyze Juliet’s handiwork. She nodded; this was her project. “Next is the wig. Eliza.”

“On it,” Eliza said cheerily; she did a circle around David as well. “Oh my, you look so cute, David. Hmm, based on your complexion, I’d say dark red hair. We do want you to stand out.”

She picked out a wig and put it on David. Once again, David appeared more girly. “You girls know your stuff.” David’s voice killed the feminine illusion.

“Thank you,” Eliza beamed. “You might want to stay quiet though until we work on your voice. Next is the clothes.”

The three girls once again fussed over David as they put on the clothes Eliza picked out. It was fairly simple: a black turtleneck vest with detached sleeves and a long red skirt. The majority of the effort went into changing his figure to more feminine. They put a stuffed bra on him and padded his hips. They also shaved and waxed his arms and armpits and put contacts in his eyes to change the eye color. When they were done, David couldn’t recognize himself in the mirror.

“It’s a good thing you have a slim figure,” Nancy observed.

“This does not help my self-esteem,” David said.

“I think you are very handsome,” Eliza said.

“You’re only saying that because of the curse,” David said. “I’m painfully aware I’m boringly average. So, now will you tell me where we’re going?”

Nancy handed him a medical mask. “A woman’s hospital. We need to see if your touch can cure illnesses.”

Olivia groaned and shuffled from the bathroom. She was expecting hair loss from chemotherapy, but the nausea was horrendous. She almost didn’t think it was worth it, especially since the treatment didn’t seem to work. The doctors were saying she had maybe had six months at most. She had come to terms with it and had said goodbye to her family and friends. She couldn’t stand their pity anymore. So much damn pity it hurt. Only 20 years old, and she had terminal cancer.

Olivia lay back in her bed. She hated her bed, where she spent ninety percent of her day. The other ten percent was in the bathroom or surgery. She wasn’t living, only waiting to die.

A knock sounded at the door and a nurse walked in before she could answer. No privacy for the sick. “Olivia,” the nurse said with a smile plastered on her face. Olivia couldn’t imagine how hard it was for them to constantly gain patients only for them to die soon after. “A mystic is offering you her services if you’d like her to come inside.”

Olivia sighed. Religious groups constantly were offering their thoughts and prayers to the unwell. She was sick of them. However . . .

“Mystic? That’s new.”

The nurse nodded. “They claim not to be a religious group, but they call themselves the Order of the Flame or something like that. They say they can burn out the impurities.”

Olivia laughed. “Will they actually burn me?”

The nurse smiled. “They assured me they wouldn’t. It’s apparently a very simple ritual, but it does involve a candle. What do you say?”

Olivia usually turned down these religious folks, but the mystic part intrigued her. “Sure, let them in.”

The nurse opened the door and called the visitors inside. Two people stepped in. The first one was a woman in her early twenties with dark skin and bleached blonde hair. She wore sunglasses and a suit. She looked like a stereotypical bodyguard. The second was a girl in her late teens. She had dark red hair and auburn eyes. She wore a mask, a turtleneck vest, detached sleeves, and a thick red skirt. And she looked incredibly uncomfortable. Overall, this pair was not what she was expecting.

The bodyguard spoke up with a smile. “Thank you for letting us come in. Olivia, was it?”

Olivia nodded. “So, you’re a mystic? How does this work?”

“Not me, her,” the bodyguard answered nodding to her companion. “We won’t take much of your time.”

Without a word, the redhead stepped forward with a candle in her hands. She lit the candle, waved it around a few times, and then touched Olivia on the forehead. Olivia shivered uncontrollably as she felt something flow through her. The redhead stepped back after she blew out the candle.

Olivia stared at them. “That-that was it?” The mystic only smiled in response.

Energy flowed through Olivia. It was like she took a shot of an energy drink. She couldn’t sit still. She jumped up to her feet as the nurse gasped. She felt great! Her scalp began to itch. She rubbed it and felt short hair under her fingers. She dashed to the mirror in the bathroom. She had hair. And it was growing! Tears began to well up. What was happening to her?

Olivia watched as her dark hair grew down to her shoulders and her body filled out, adding volume to her chest, butt, and body. She looked healthy. She looked HEALTHY!

“Am I better?” Olivia dropped to her knees in front of the mystic with barely controlled emotions. “Am I really better?”

The mystic grabbed her hand and lifted her to her feet. Her mask covered her mouth but her eyes sparkled with joy.

“How?” Tears were streaming down the nurse’s cheeks. It was like the weight of hundreds of people who had died under her care had come back to crush her.

“Nurse, could you please check her?” the bodyguard said. “It’s not guaranteed she’s completely cured.”

“R-right,” the nurse stammered. She opened the door and called for the doctor to come. Then, with trembling hands, she checked Olivia’s vitals. “Everything looks good, but the doctor needs to run more tests.”

“Erika, Olivia, is everything alright?” a man said entering the room. The bodyguard immediately stood between him and the mystic. The doctor looked at her with a raised eyebrow, but he gaped as his eyes fell on Olivia and her full head of hair. Both Olivia and the nurse broke out into a fresh set of tears and smiles.

“Doctor, could you check if I’m better?” Olivia asked.

“I think I could do that,” the doctor replied. He began his tests; occasionally, he muttered under his breath how something like this wasn’t possible. After half an hour of testing, he said, “As far as I can tell, you are completely clean. More than that, you’re about as healthy as anyone can be. What in the world happened?”

Olivia smiled with pure joy and pointed at the mystic. “She did something.”

The doctor turned to the mystic, his professional expression fading to confusion and hope. He stepped towards her, but the bodyguard blocked his way.

“Please,” he said. “How did you do it?”

“Step back,” the bodyguard said. “She can’t touch others unless prepared. We cannot explain the ways of the Flame.”

“Ways of the Flame? What does that mean? Can you do it again?”

The bodyguard looked like she was about to say no, but the mystic put her hand on her bodyguard's shoulder and gave a curt nod.

The bodyguard didn't like that, but she replied, "Her power can only work on people within certain criteria. Women in their late teens up to their mid-twenties. 15 to 25."

The doctor only hesitated for a moment before asking, "How many can you do?"

The bodyguard glanced at the mystic and sighed. "Let's do one at a time."

The doctor and nurse dashed out of the room in a flurry, leaving Olivia alone in the room with the mystic and bodyguard.

Olivia felt a feeling of awe as she gazed at her savior. She mustered her courage and asked, "Can I watch?"

The mystic locked gazes with her; Olivia felt her heart thump heavily in her chest as they shared a connection. Finally, the mystic nodded.

The nurse came and escorted them to the next patient: a girl around 17 years old. Like Olivia had once been, she was bald and wasting away in bed; she could barely open her eyes. Olivia wanted to run and hug the girl saying everything would be alright, that the mystic would solve everything.

They closed the door; a reverent mood settled across the room as the mystic did her strange ritual with the candle. The moment she touched the sick girl, her complexion got better, and her hair grew out. The girl sat up in bed with a look of confusion on her face.

Olivia couldn't hold herself back any longer; she hugged the girl tightly, whispering, "It's alright. You're all better." Olivia felt the girl tense and then cling to her like a lifeline as she broke into tears.

After that, the mystic went swiftly from room to room, staying completely silent; she left tears and gratitude in her wake. She would share a moment of joy with the cured before leaving for the next room. Olivia watched it all. Each miracle filled her soul with joy and exaltation. She had never been religious, but she would follow this mystic to hell and back if she asked.

News spread throughout the hospital that someone was healing the sick. In each room the mystic cured, the crowd around her grew. The bodyguard looked overwhelmed, but the mystic refused to dismiss them. When Olivia asked her if she could help, the bodyguard repeated that the mystic couldn't touch anyone who hadn't been cured unless she had prepared. Olivia didn't question the logic; she gathered the girls who had been cured and formed a barrier around her.

They only faced two issues. First, people tried to film the healing or take pictures of the mystic, but one word from the bodyguard sent the crowd into a frenzy. Any phone or camera seen was swiftly disposed of. Second, the women who fell outside of the age range fell to their knees as the mystic walked by, begging to be healed. Olivia watched the mystic's pained eyes every time they passed someone by. She wore her compassion on her sleeve, which made Olivia love her more. A few times, Olivia knew she bent the rules to heal those just outside of the age range.

Two hours passed by in a wondrous blur. But as soon as it started, it ended. People began coming in from the outside and begging her to come to another hospital or home to heal their loved ones. The mob began to push in and the healed barely contained the mystic from being touched. The bodyguard and the healed girls escorted the mystic into the garage basement where they had a van waiting for them.

As the mystic climbed into the van, Olivia had the urge to join her. But the bodyguard stopped her. "Thank you for your help," the bodyguard said with a smile. "But, not yet."

Then, the mystic was gone.

Olivia felt angry. If those people hadn't been so selfish, the mystic could have gotten to more people. However, she couldn't fault them. If she knew she could get cured with a simple ritual, she would have done anything to get it.

The healed girls gravitated toward one another after the crowd had left and the doctors ran their tests. Olivia felt a bond of sisterhood with these strangers that she had never felt before. Seventeen girls, all of them young and beautiful. They couldn't keep the smiles from their faces as they embraced each other. They resolved to stay in contact.

Olivia wondered when she'd be able to meet the Flame Mystic again.