

CHAPTER SAMPLER

ZEVI TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT



Some gifts are
not returnable.

CAROL MATAS

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orca currents

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To my grandchildren, with all my love

Chapter One

I'm famous.

This is how it happened.

A five-year-old girl went missing in North Vancouver, and that night I had a dream—I dreamed exactly where she was. Clear as day. I told my parents, and they went with me to the police. Mom explained to the detective that I have this gift.

The detective was nice. I mean, she didn't laugh out loud. Instead she checked. I had seen the little girl shivering inside a shed, and I could also see the street the shed was on. It was beside a big old factory that had a huge G marked on the front. The detective found her exactly where I said. Turned out the kid had wandered into the shed and got locked in. It was just a few blocks from where she lived in North Van.

Mom called it a gift when she explained it to the detective. That's not what I would call it. I can sometimes see the future. I can sometimes dream what will happen, or hear people's thoughts, or even talk to dead people. Some gift! Unlike other gifts, this one is not returnable.

When I was little I thought everyone saw the world the same way. It was only when I got older that I started to realize I was different. My best friend, Nir, used to tease me. He'd say I knew what he was thinking when we played soccer and that's why I was always a step ahead. I told him I *could* hear what he

was thinking. Yup, that freaked him out. He pretty much made me tell my parents, who were worried I was sick. But the psychiatrist they took me to said I wasn't. I was just "sensitive."

Anyway, back to my instant fame. Some reporter managed to track me down as the person who had helped the police. I still don't know how the reporter did it, but suddenly there were cameras at our door. Then there were more and more reporters, until finally the story went viral.

I'm just finishing seventh grade, and I really don't need this going into my last year of middle school. I was planning to star in the school play next year. I was planning to audition for films in Vancouver. But who wants an actor who's had his face all over the internet and all over TV news—for being psychic? This is bad!

Okay, so I haven't had a normal childhood. I've managed, though, often by ignoring my psychic abilities whenever possible. My older sister, Jessie,

Jes for short, is always trying to figure out some scientific explanation for my powers. She's a math wiz and has more science medals than she can fit in her room. And she badly wants to know what my powers mean.

Is it because of quantum physics? Some scientists say there is no past, no future—only now. Jes wonders if I could be tapping into some sort of collective unconscious. Like a group mind. But that wouldn't explain my talking to and hearing dead people, would it? That has Jes stumped for sure.

Still, outside of my family, my best friend, Nir, and Jes's best friend, Meira, who is Nir's older sister, no one else knew anything about this.

Until now.

Chapter Two

“What’s it like being famous?”

I stare at—what’s her name? Lily? Or maybe it’s Luna? She must be the fiftieth person today to ask me that. She’s one of the popular kids, and she has never, ever noticed me before.

The hallway is finally empty, except for the two of us. I’ve been mobbed out here, answering questions every class change.

“Zevi, who’s going to win the Stanley Cup?”

“Zevi, should I go out with Jon or Jordan or whoever?”

“What about the latest Jays trade?”

Then there are the others. “Zevi, you’re a total freak. Zevi...”

And to make it even more annoying, half of them can’t pronounce my name right. “Zeevee” is one I hear a lot. “Zev,” I correct them, “and then add the long ee.” They don’t really listen, though. They aren’t interested in me, just in the answers I can give them. Which I mostly can’t—or won’t!

Nir barrels down the hallway and saves me, as usual. He’s so tall for thirteen, he looks like a high schooler. I’m almost as tall as Nir, so the two of us stand out in the hallways. Coach Briggs is always glaring at me because I chose Drama Club over basketball, unlike Nir. Coach takes that as a personal insult.

“Zevi! Come on! We’re late for class.” Nir grabs me by the arm and puts some distance between us and whoever that girl is.

I can hear her disbelief as we start down the hall. “Um, *hello!*” I guess no one just walks away from her when she is talking, like, ever!

“So have you heard?” Nir asks me.

“What?”

“Guess who’s coming here to film a movie.”

“Who?” I ask.

“Guess!”

“Who?”

“Robert Lemon!” Nir says.

“*Really?*”

“Really. The movie’s called *Darkness Falls*, and they’re only filming some of it here, the rest in LA. But Robert Lemon will be here for, like, two weeks. It’s his first lead in a drama, not an action movie. It’s set in the future, and he plays a guy who discovers

that his older brother murdered their father. Then the older brother takes over the family empire, leaving the younger brother with lots of problems. Sounds like a great part!" Nir says eagerly. "And wait—there's more!"

"What?" I ask.

"They're auditioning for extras. I'm going to send in my picture. You should too. I mean, maybe we could even be in a scene with him."

"You and the rest of the city," I say. "Anyway, you hate acting. Why would you do it?"

"Because it's Robert Lemon, obviously," Nir says. "And you know he's Jewish," he adds.

"Yeah," I answer, rolling my eyes. Every Jewish kid, including me and Nir, knows that Robert Lemon is Jewish.

We finally get to class. Ms. Foster gives us both a look for being late.

We sit down, and I open my math book. I think about what Nir just told me. I've been an extra in two movies and one TV episode. It's mainly standing

around and then more standing around. I find it interesting, though, because I get to watch the actors and try to learn from them. And learning from Robert Lemon would be amazing.

But suddenly I see a black cloud all around me. I've seen that before. Over the years I've learned that whenever I see it, bad things almost always happen.

"Zevi, is anything wrong?" Ms. Foster asks me.

I look up. "No, why?"

Nir whispers, "You kinda groaned out loud."

I check the room. Everyone is staring at me.

"I just saw a vision of my math mark," I say.

Ms. Foster smiles. The kids laugh.

And Nir whispers, "Zevi? What's up?"

I shake my head. I'll tell him later.

I'm in a movie. It must take place in the present or the future because the set is sleek—white walls, white furniture, white media console, like an Ikea

showroom. In front of me is a person dressed all in black—black cap tilted over their eyes, black trench coat, black-and-white high-tops. They're holding a black weapon that looks like a phaser from Star Trek.

At the far end of the room is Robert Lemon. His hands are up in front of his face, and he's saying, "No, no," in a whisper. But the figure dressed in black shows no mercy and says, "It has to be."

The person shoots. As the laser hits Robert Lemon, it scatters into countless bits of light. In slow motion Robert Lemon grabs his chest and dramatically sinks to the floor. His last words are "Zevi, I should have listened to you..."

"Cut!"

Nir is sticking a pen in my back. I sit up. I fell asleep in class. I hope I'm not drooling. I glance around. It looks like no one but Nir noticed.

I turn to him. “Something’s up with this movie,” I whisper.

“Uh-oh,” he says. When I say “up,” Nir knows right away what I mean.

“Should we stay away?” he asks.

I don’t know. I feel like beating my head on my desk, which I guess won’t help. It’s not as if I get text messages telling me what will happen. I get feelings or images or pictures. Sometimes I have dreams like this one. Mostly I don’t even know how to understand them.

Will Robert Lemon be shot by a weird person in a black coat? From past visions I’ve learned that things often don’t play out exactly the way I “see” them. It can be so frustrating. That dream about the missing child wasn’t the norm for me. Usually it’s more like this—just feelings and vague hints.

“Don’t worry,” Nir says. “We’ll figure it out.”

I hope he’s right.

Our next class is English with Mr. Crossly.

“Zevi,” he says, as soon as we are all seated, “do you feel any different now that you’re famous? Let’s use this as a teachable moment!”

My heart sinks. I don’t want to be a teachable moment! Why do so many teachers use that phrase? The last thing I want right now is to be the center of attention!

“I don’t want to go into it,” I mutter.

“Oh,” Mr. Crossly says, and he seems surprised. “But fame is a huge part of our culture. Some want to be famous, some don’t have a choice. But we are all surrounded by it.”

I want to be a famous actor, I almost say out loud. *What’s wrong with that?* I am thinking about what I can say, when Nir saves me again.

“Speaking of fame,” he says, “has everyone heard that Robert Lemon is coming to town?”

The whole class bursts into chatter. Mr. Crossly gives up. I thank Nir with a thumbs-up.

And hope this day doesn’t get any worse.