

MAGIC
IN THE SHADOWS



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Revised October 1, 2022 (edits and illustrations)

ISBN Paperback 978-1-989937-09-9

ISBN Hardcover 978-1-989937-10-5

ISBN E-Book 978-1-989937-11-2

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FLECK BOOK SERIES

Magic in the Shadows
Magic in the Mystic Circle
Magic in the Shale

This is a Young Adult Fantasy Novel.

This novel includes a teen mother
and some sexually suggestive content.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I started life as Carrie Landry and changed my name to Carrie Cotton when I was married in 2013.

I completed my Masters in Business Administration (MBA) in Executive Management with a specialty in Leadership. The combined topics of redemption and leadership intrigue me.

Most of my writing occurs in the sanctuary of my sun-room near the ocean in a beautiful seaside city. I sincerely hope you enjoy this escape into Fleck's struggles and revelations. I am wildly optimistic that you will find some snip of insight or amusement in this scribbling.

However, if you find yourself reading this novel and not enjoying it, then please stop reading – after all, suffering is optional. If you enjoy this novel, then I draw your attention to *Fleck II – Magic in the Mystic Circle* and *Fleck III – Magic in the Shale*.

ABOUT THE MAIN CHARACTER FLECK

Fleck by nature and talent is a spectator rather than a participant. She aptly interprets the role of a leader as a burden – an obligation to serve the needs of others. Fleck prefers a quiet life as a silent observer, watching from the shadows, rather than an eventful life under the ever-prying eyes of her attentive subjects. Regrettably, a docile life is not Fleck's fate.

Dear Reader:

I just want to explain why it's not my fault. My name is Fleck. I admit I'm a bit of a misfit. I pretend to fit in. My family, my friends, the people in my town, we're all pretenders. Pretending isn't the same as lying; it's more like wishful thinking - like being blind in one eye and willfully stupid in the other.

My trouble started quietly. In the beginning, I didn't know that trees could pull up their roots and walk around, or that a cloud could become a dear friend. Also, I didn't understand how one single action could redirect my life. If I could go back and do it differently, I would - if only I could.

I used to resent the whispered word redemption. But that was before I understood the persuasive nature of redemption and its power to release. My friend, Maple, is a thinker. My brother Quinn is worse, he's a doer. I'm mostly a watcher. The troubles in my life can be traced back to thinkers and doers.

I will tell you faithfully what happened. I won't try to hide details to help you agree with me. In the end, I hope you'll see, and understand, that it wasn't my fault.

Sincerely,

Fleck

MAGIC
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CARRIE COTTON

THE COIN

NOT THAT IT mattered. I shouldn't care, but there was something about her that made me curious enough to stop and watch. I lay flat on my belly on the hot tiles of the roof, looking over the crest down into the alley behind a row of common shops. The lady wore a purple cloak with the hood pulled up.

She looked secretive, like she thought she was hiding. I could tell, by the gap between her shadow and her feet, that she was levitating slightly above the muck and garbage littering the alley. She was a misfit for sure. Nobody mentioned misfits in public anymore. My mother said it was crass to talk about them.

According to her, we as a *society* were in *transition* from the age of myths to the age of *reasoning*. She always said it like that, emphasizing *society*, *transition* and *reasoning*. Like they mattered. Suppose emphasizing each

word does matter. Because I remember the words, just exactly the way she said them.

I have a bit of a familiarity with shadows. It's a type of talent. Like being a diviner who can find the best place to dig for water by using a string or a branch, or like having perfect musical pitch. It's sort of like being able to understand math, never getting lost in the woods, or like being nice to people you don't like. Just because sitting in shadows is an odd talent, that doesn't make it magic. That's what I thought way back at the beginning, before the awakenings.

I have learned, over time and experience, that talent and magic can be synonymous, particularly if the talent is out of the ordinary – extraordinary. When I was younger my mother constantly warned me that I'd best stop looking for things that just weren't there.

I've never had to look for things that *aren't there*. They just popped up plain as daylight. I'd learned to pretend to not see them. For instance, I was pretending not to notice that the woman in the purple cloak was a misfit. Even at a distance I could see her nerves were on edge as she stood, all alone, in the alley.

“Who do you think she is?” Quinn was sprawled on the rooftop bedside me. He sounded over-anxious but he'd always sounded that way, even as a baby. He was ten, the youngest of my brothers and the most high-strung. I'm seventeen and the only girl in our family. I liked Quinn best of all my brothers. Aside from myself, he was the biggest and best snoop I knew. Sometimes

he didn't understand the full of what he saw, but he was always eager to tell me what he'd spied out. He was handy that way.

Quinn answered his own question, "Misfit, maybe?"

I shrugged and nodded. It was okay to talk about misfits with him because he was a hopeless believer. Also, he'd usually keep his mouth shut, if I told him to. When he made a mistake and mentioned something, most people forgave him because they thought he was cute, in a young innocent sort of way. But he wasn't stupid, only young.

"Do you notice anything about her?" I tried to sound casual. I wanted to see if he noticed that she didn't cast a normal shadow. In the past, he'd proved to be surprisingly observant for a kid.

"She's pretty." He tossed me a sideways grin. "I like her."

Quinn was a handsome skinny boy, almost wiry. He had brown hair, friendly eyes and smiled most of the time. When he was serious, or thinking, he'd scrunch up his nose, pinch eyes together and nod to himself.

Some people said we were the same. But he was nothing like me. To start he wore plaid pants on purpose. Also, he had a stupid tweed cap! No one else in our town wore a tweed cap. I'd never even seen one before he came home with it perched on his head. Quinn didn't really make much of an effort to avoid trouble. I hoped he'd learn quickly and without too much bruising or misfortune.

“Who’s that?” He knew enough to keep his voice low and his head down as he peeked over the crest of the roof.

“Spook Bones thinks he’s hiding in the shadows,” I said. I could see his skinny pasty face plain as day. The tiles on the roof were hot under my fingers, and they smelled. I was tired of clinging to the chimney stones. “She must be really stupid.” I flexed the fingers of my right hand. I could hear the sound of her voice, but not her words.

“Why?” Quinn pulled himself up the crest of the roof for a better look. “Cuz she’s talking to Spook Bones and he’s a mean thief?”

I wanted to say, *because Spook Bones is a pervert and, according to Maple, they don’t call him bones because he’s skinny*. Maple’s mother was the town strumpet for hire. Some people said things about Maple, but I pretended not to understand what they meant because she’s my friend. These weren’t the sorts of things I could explain to my little brother, so I didn’t say anything at all.

There was the exchange – a coin purse for a little bottle of burgundy-red liquid lizard sap and a bundle of dried silver-grey Stargazer Lily sweat. Back then I’d gleaned a little knowledge about potions by sitting in shadows and watching people make serums. Quinn saw the swap.

“What’s that?”

“Expensive.”

“What is it?” He pressed his head closer to mine with big eyes intent on having a real answer.

“Serenity in a bottle.”

“What’s that for?” He rested his chin on the roof tiles.

“She likely has a lot of work to do.” As I understood it, a mixture of equal parts water, liquid lizard sap and Stargazer Lilly sweat make a restorative tonic. “It helps to sooth nerves, ease muscle tension and improve focus.”

Scanning the alley, I found the trouble I knew would be lurking there.

“He shouldn’t be doing that.” Quinn sounded nervous. “What an idiot.”

I looked down to see Spook Bones counting his coins as the lady in the purple cloak levitated down the alleyway. Bones was still counting his coins when she turned the corner. What an idiot indeed. Big Mountain Man Mik could hear the clinking of coins at fifty paces. There he was now, stepping out of the shadows. I liked Mount Mik better than I liked Bones.

Yes, Mik was a town bully, but not cruel like Bones. There was no point watching this bit of nasty in the alley below. I already knew it would end better for Mik than for Bones.

“Better get your hat.” I plucked Quinn’s cap from his head and tossed it over my shoulder. It bounced once on the roof and landed in the street behind us. Quinn scurried down the hot tiles on his belly after it.

He was like a little kitten with a string when it came to that stupid cap.

I heard the muffled sound of Mik's fist on Bone's flesh but didn't bother to look. Instead, I slid down the smooth roof tiles after Quinn. I held onto the edge, dangling for a moment, then let go, landing gracefully on my feet. When I turned to look for Quinn, I came face to face with the lady in the purple cloak. It was a bit of a shock.

If she'd looked strange in the alley, she looked even stranger up close. Her hood was down, her skin shimmered, and her dark ringlets seemed to float, except for where they were tucked behind her pointed ears. She was a misfit for sure. She studied me then she studied my shadow on the ground, then she studied me again.

When she looked deep into my eyes, I knew she saw the flecks above my pupils. If it weren't for her grim stare, I think she would've been the most lovely woman I'd ever seen. She had a hint of that severe look beautiful women sometimes get, when they've had a long difficult life. Looking into her unblinking green eyes was like looking into a sparkling meadow stream of clear water running over moss-covered stones.

I felt the sensation of the world melting away, followed by the soft echoes of my own voice. I didn't notice that she'd broken eye contact and stepped away, until I saw the back of her purple cloak disappear into a coach. I hadn't even heard the clattering of the coach lurching to a stop. A sparkle glinted, arcing through

the air from the coach window. Quinn was on it before it landed.

A coin? Sure, our clothes could be a little cleaner, but we weren't beggars. I was wearing my older brother's hand-me-down pants. They were a little scruffy. I like them because they had large pockets I could store stuff in. Some farm girls, from school, wore pants when they were working in the fields, but not in town. Sometimes town-folk frowned at me, but I just ignored them.

"Wow." Quinn turned the coin over in his fingers, careful to keep it somewhat hidden from view as the coach rolled away on squeaky wheels.

"Give."

I held out my hand for the coin. The last thing I needed was for him to take a liking to it. Quinn held it long enough to make me angry, then handed it over.

The coin was smooth on top with a bevelled edge. I chanced a quick glance. The engraving was of an elk crowned in a wreath of flowers in a pink-gold sheen. I'd pilfered my share of foreign coins, but I'd never seen one like it.

"She's from Vallabosa Castle," Quinn instructed from my side. I pocketed the coin and was relieved when he didn't protest. He typically claimed ownership of anything he put his fingers on.

"You sure?"

"I don't recognize that coach. She's not from here and she's fancy. Where else could she be from?" He was looking at my pocket, but he didn't ask for the coin.

“No one lives in the castle.”

“There’s those weird servants and gardeners.”

“She doesn’t look like a cleaner or a gardener to me.”

He sent a warning glare. He didn’t like it when I talked down to him. Being the youngest of my brothers he got enough of that. “What are you going to do with the coin?”

“It’s a coin,” I shrugged. “I’ll spend it.”

“What kind? How much do you think it’s worth?” He glanced at my pocket again. “It’s kinda heavy for a little coin.”

The coin wasn’t exactly little, but it did feel heavier than it should for its size. “Good quality gold,” I suggested.

“Gold ain’t blue.” He frowned at me.

I ushered him into the mouth of the alley just off the street. I never venture more than a pace into an alley around there, and then only if trying to hide from someone. I pulled the coin from my pocket. It fit comfortably in the palm of my hand. I turned it over and showed it to him. It had a pink-gold hue. When he took the coin in his hand it turned a soft blue tone.

“Enchanted,” he whispered, fumbling and almost dropping it. Forming a fist around it, he stared up at me, his eyes bulging in his head. It felt like trouble and that made me jittery.

“Dump it.” My voice came out more alarmed than I’d intended.

“No!” Quinn wrinkled his brow and glared at me.

His grip on the coin was so tight his knuckles turned white.

“Give it.”

“You’re not going to toss it are you?”

“Give,” I commanded and watched his grip reluctantly loosen as he passed me the coin. I tucked the coin in my pocket and ushered him into the street.