

Damian spent his entire childhood exploring the shelves of his grandfather's bookshop in Central London. He dreamed of taking after it one day and continuing the legacy. Today is the day...the grand re-opening. He excitedly hurries to the bookshop where he finds Diana impatiently waiting at the front steps.

"Take your time won't ya? What took you so long? You know today is the big day!" she exclaims.

Damian stops and peers intently next to Diana's feet. There, lies a small brown box sealed with a jute twine ribbon. Engraved on it is Damian's full name and nothing else. He shoots her a quizzical look, "Who's this from?"

"I don't know, but come on, it can wait. People will start arriving soon!"

Damian briskly picks up the box and opens the door to the bookshop to prepare for the opening. Minutes later, crowds of customers start to swarm in like a rabble of butterflies. There is chatter among the customers, old friends catching up, and new friends being made. The bookshop has always held a certain allure, a mystical quality that drew people in from far and wide. It's busy for sure, but the hustle and bustle bring a life to the shop that Damian had only dreamed of. He observes joyfully from afar, as his dream of following in his grandfather's footsteps unfolds before his eyes. His gaze sinks through one of the bookshelves to the strange brown box on the opposite side. He shuffles through the crowd and picks it up, loosening the ribbon. There is a leather-bound book with an odd gemstone at the center. Etched in gold ink is an inscription in handwriting as familiar as his own.

*Protect this book with your life*

Emilie Rubayita

.“What’s that Damian?” asks Diana.

Damian raises his index finger to his lips and points at the book. “This can’t be.”

“What is it?”

Eyes wide, he draws the book closer to get a better look. There, on the page, was an illustration of him sitting on a stool, looking down at an open book. It was the present moment.

Diana raises her voice. “Did you hear me?”

He frantically flips through the pages. “It’s from my grandfather.”

There, in another illustration, was him falling into a swirling black portal, as if a tornado had opened up below his feet. He felt a gust of wind, and suddenly, the world around him began to spin. He felt himself falling, tumbling through the air, and then...nothing. Darkness engulfed him, and he felt as though he was floating in an endless void. But then, slowly, shapes began to take form around him. Buildings, streets, people. It was as though he was watching a movie, and he was the only one in the audience. As he watched, he saw glimpses of the future. And then, just as suddenly as it had begun, it was over. He found himself back on the stool, the book still in his hands.

Diana blinked at him, astonished. “You’re scaring me. What does it say?”

He was dumbfounded. He looked at her, regarding her as if she might have the answers.

“We must protect this book. It’s valuable to a lot of people.”

Diana moves closer to take a look for herself.

“You’re going to need someone to watch your back.” she says, a smile spreading across her face,

“Partners?”

“Hell yeah, partners!”

As the night closed in, they locked up the bookshop and set out through the empty streets of London, the book tucked safely in Diana's backpack. Damian couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement building within him. The book was a powerful tool, and he knew that he had the ability to shape the future in a way that would make his grandfather proud. But as they walked, he couldn't shake the feeling that they were being watched. Every shadow, every rustling leaf, seemed to hold some hidden danger. But he knew that even in the face of danger and uncertainty, he had a partner that he could count on, and a legacy that was worth fighting for.