

~CHAPTER 1~

Eighty-one year old Flossie Silver poked the front page of *Magic Moments Monthly* with her bony finger and held it up for her daughter Godiva and brother-in-law Sterling to see.

"Just look at this!"

The headline, "Sheik's Assistant Sizzles in Macabre Mishap," jumped off the page. Right next to the horrific story was a photograph of a smiling magician accompanied by a beautiful Asian girl wearing a skimpy harem costume.

Sterling Silver put down his fork and leaned across the kitchen table to reach for the newspaper. "Let me see that."

The elderly man adjusted his reading glasses and studied the image of Sheik Ali Kazaam, elegantly dressed in cape and turban. He shook his head and handed the paper back to Flossie. She passed it over to her daughter, then turned back to Sterling.

"Oy vey, did you read the part about how his poor assistant, Pearl Woo, was accidentally electrocuted during a rehearsal? It happened at the Chateau Magique in Vancouver. Didn't we do our act there one time?"

Sterling nodded solemnly and speared a slice of bright green avocado.

The two retired vaudeville magicians ate breakfast in Godiva Olivia DuBois' large airy kitchen every day at nine o'clock. It had become a morning ritual. Many years before, after Godiva's millionaire husband dropped dead in Las Vegas, her uncle Sterling moved into the gardener's cottage on her Beverly Hills estate. Not long after that, her mother Flossie sold the pink stucco bungalow where Godiva and her twin sister Goldie grew up, and moved into the little guest house behind the mansion.

Godiva's recent career as a syndicated advice columnist kept her very busy, so she enjoyed spending a little time with her mother and uncle on mornings when she woke up early enough. But that morning the discussion about a beautiful young woman dying during a magic act was anything but enjoyable.

She looked up from the last bite of her omelet and stared at the newspaper. "What did you say, Mom? Electrocuted? How could that happen during a magic act?"

"Well, it says Sheik Ali Kazaam uses lots of electrical gadgets in his act. Oh, my poor Harry wouldn't have liked that!" The old woman's eyes got a little misty when she mentioned her late husband, one of the three great Harrys of the bygone era of magic.

Sterling grabbed the tabloid newspaper out of his niece's hand and scanned the story again. "Humph! It's just a bunch of flimflam these days. Young upstarts adulterating good magic with electric gizmos and geegaws. Terrible things like this wouldn't happen if they stuck to good old fashioned sabers and smoke cookies."

“Anybody wants more *huevos rancheros*?” Godiva’s cook Martina slipped between them and poured fresh coffee in all the cups. “Maybe you, Senor Sterling? You work up good appetite when you grumble like bear.”

Sterling smiled at the chubby Mexican woman and shook his head. “No thanks, sweetheart, three helpings was enough for me.”

“*Dios mio*! She is very pretty, no?” Martina looked over Sterling’s shoulder at the newspaper picture and made the sign of the cross over her white apron.

“Yes, she *was* very pretty. I’ve got to hand it to the Sheik, though. What a great costume. I love the turban.”

“Your uncle,” Flossie said. “A poor girl dies and all he notices is the *schmaltzy* turban her boss is wearing.”

Godiva pushed her chair away, got up and brushed the crumbs off her mauve St. Laurent pantsuit. “Well, Mom—Unk, I’m sorry to rush off, but it’s time to write another *Ask G.O.D.* column. I’ve got a deadline to meet and Angel is waiting for me to sort through a new basket of letters from the lovelorn. My public is calling.”

She wiggled her fingers in a gesture of goodbye and hurried out of the kitchen, through the marble foyer, and down the hall to the office in her mahogany paneled library.