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## Dedication

For Bethany, my amazing editor.

## Prologue

The city was full of life. From high above he could see it, smell it. He wanted that life, ached with the desire for it. From this elevated height the wind tasted of salt, of the sea. He narrowed his eyes, peering through Lights, Camera...Monsters the haze of light that blanketed Lights, Camera...Monsters the city to see the dark sea beyond.

He fanned his wings, letting the salt-flavored breeze ruffle the jagged edges.

Beside him two other pairs of wings spread, great arches of dark and light against the indigo sky.

“Will they help us?” his companion asked.

He did not have answers, only hopes, ones he was tired of voicing. Without aid their people would be forced to war or will themselves into death. This city, the possibilities it held, the humans who thrived here, were one of their last hopes.

“Let’s fly,” was his reply.

One by one they leapt from the rooftop, wings snapping like sails of the finest ship as they soared above the sprawling city of light and dreams.

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## Chapter One

“Good morning,” the dapper young man at the reception desk chirped.

“Good morning, Kurt.” Lena held out her arm, Kurt snapped a stack of mail into her hand, took her nearly empty paper coffee cup and replaced it with a full mug of piping hot mocha. Lena never even slowed down.

Bumping open her office door with a hip, Lena skirted her glass desk and settled into her chair. Within an hour she’d gone through her mail, checked the industry blogs and compiled a media book for their last project, an indie film that had done well at Tribeca.

It was barely eight a.m.

Sipping the dregs of her mocha, Lena cleared off her desk and picked up a notebook. She had an eight thirty a.m. meeting with the whole office. Swiveling in her chair, Lena examined the blown up and framed cover of *The Hollywood Reporter* that hung Lights, Camera...Monsters on the wall.

In the photo, Lena Lights, Camera...Monsters and her four best friends, each wearing a bright jewel-toned color, stared out at the camera. Lena stood in the center wearing royal blue and holding a sign that said “Calypso Productions”. The title beneath the picture read, “Hollywood’s New Elite”. In smaller Lights, Camera...Monsters script it said, “Five friends, each with a talent of their own, open a production house reminiscent of old Hollywood’s powerhouse studios”.

Smiling, Lena rose to her feet, brushing her fingers against the frame of the poster before heading out of the office into the conference room.

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“What’s next?”

“New client.” Jane said, checking her agenda.

“I thought we agreed we weren’t taking on new clients,” Akta griped. Feet on the table, she leaned back, testing the bounds of her ergonomic, executive chair.

“Some of us don’t have cushy savings to fall back on and need the extra work,” Margo snarked. Akta stuck her tongue out at Margo.

Lena, their default leader, though some of the other A-types in the room might have disputed that leadership, reined the group in.

Their weekly meetings were both enjoyable and frustrating. Going into business with her four best friends from college had been a risky decision, but it paid off. They were following their dream, making and producing original and innovative movies and TV shows. However, the years of Lights, Camera...Monsters familiarity meant that behind closed doors their maturity level with one another had a tendency to deteriorate. Lena tapped her pen against the high gloss conference table and tried to remind her friends they were professionals.

“We’re always open to new projects, and these gentlemen got through Kurt, so they must be good.”

Kurt, their receptionist, stuck his head around the door and frowned at them. “I’m not bringing these guys in until you look professional. Cali, adjust your boobs, Akta, fluff your Lights, Camera...Monsters hair. Trust me, these guys are worth it.”

He pulled the conference room door closed. Lena, eyebrows arched, looked at Jane, who

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sat across the table from her. With a shrug Jane pulled out a tube of lip gloss and applied it blind. Akta reached over and snatched a thick script from Mercedes, aka Cali. Flipping the script shut, Akta tossed it onto the table where it landed with a meaty thud.

“What is that? *War and Peace*?”

“It’s *The Lights, Camera...Monsters Octopus*,” when the others stared blankly at her, Cali added, “Frank Norris?”

“Sorry, Cali, no idea,” Akta said cheerfully.

“Illiterate plebeians.”

“You’re such a charmer.”

Cali leaned forward in her chair, reached *Lights, Camera...Monsters* into her fitted, corset-style pinstriped top and *Lights, Camera...Monsters* repositioned her boobs. Akta leaned forward in the same manner and scrubbed her fingers through her hair, before flipping up. Once Cali had cleavage enough to kill a man and Akta’s soft cloud of dark hair floated around her head and shoulders, *Lights, Camera...Monsters* Lena hit the intercom button in the console on the conference table.

“Kurt, show them in please.”

Around the table the women straightened, the easy mannerisms of years of friendship *Lights, Camera...Monsters* melting away to reveal glass-sharp businesswomen.

The conference room door opened. Kurt stepped inside, holding the door wide for their

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prospective clients. One by one the three divinely gorgeous men walked in.

Lena kept a cool professional smile, even as her blood hummed.

The men took seats Lights, Camera...Monsters across the table from the women, and Kurt poured them each a glass of water, giving Lena a chance to inspect them.

The first was your classic California surfer god. His tan was pure Mother Nature, not fake and bake, Lights, Camera...Monsters and his Lights, Camera...Monsters highlights appeared to be from the same source. Gold with pure white streaks, his hair curled and waved around his face. It was surfer length—just below his ears, but not long enough for sci-fi geek. His tight green T-shirt showed strong shoulders and delectable biceps.

The second was archetypal indie British rock guy. Chestnut hair was styled to frame his face in a close-cut cap. Next to the surfer his physique was slender, but by no means skinny. He was sporting layers: T-shirt, button-down and jacket, all stylish.

The last one to enter took a seat in the center, between the other two. While Lena admired the first two for their distinct beauty and style, it was an academic admiration, but this one—he spoke to her.

Caramel skin, a gift of birth, fitted over high cheekbones and a square jaw. His deep-set eyes were dark brown, with straight black brows above. His hair was black and high gloss, draping over one eye. His white on white embroidered button-down was shabby chic, with a purposefully wrinkled look. The color set off his skin.

Lena forced a breath in and out, pulling her attention away from him as Kurt poured the last of the water and skirted out the way. As he pulled the door closed, Kurt sent them all a significant glance. There was a brief pause, then Lena saw the intercom light blink on. She flipped it off, imagined Kurt's cursing at having been denied eavesdropping rights and smiled at their prospective clients. She had to force herself to include all three in the smile, rather than just the exotic eye candy.

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“Gentlemen, welcome to Calypso Productions. I’m Lena, creative director and one of the producers.”

Lena glanced at Jane, who picked up the cue. “I’m Jane, our writer.”

“Hello, gentlemen, my name is Margo, and I’m the other producer and manager of Calypso.”

“Mercedes, I direct.”

“And last but never least, I’m Akta, art director, and Lights, Camera...Monsters actor.”

Lena waited for a reaction to Akta’s introduction. Of the five of them, Akta was the only one with immediate recognition. Her starring role in an award winning indie production had landed her on the acting map, her ethnicity making the accomplishment all the more outstanding. Her decision to shun blockbuster roles in favor of continuing to work on more artistic pieces had raised Lights, Camera...Monsters a few eyebrows in Hollywood, but gained her, and Calypso, a lot of respect.

Usually clients were the most excited to meet her. They enjoyed the idea of having a built in actress at the production company.

These three paid Akta no more attention than they had any of the others. Akta blinked twice in surprise, though her smile never faltered. There was an awkward moment of silence before the gentlemen introduced themselves.

“I’m Michael,” said the surfer.

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“Henry,” added the indie rocker.

Dark and dangerous looked right at Lena as he introduced himself. “My name is Luke.”

The room fell into a second awkward silence, but Lena hardly noticed. Gaze locked with Luke’s, it was like tunnel vision, the rest of the world blurry and out of focus. There was no arrogant L.A. smirk, or hard-ass barracuda New York grin on his face. His beautifully full lips were unsmiling, but not Lights, Camera...Monsters unhappy. The intensity of his gaze didn’t feel threatening, but he still seemed dangerous in the way only a truly beautiful man can be.

“So, what can we help you with?” Margo demanded. Lena had let the silence stretch too long, and Margo jumped into the Lights, Camera...Monsters void with her less than gentle question.

Luke broke the eye contact with Lena, turning his Lights, Camera...Monsters focus to Margo. “We are looking for a company to help us tell a story.” His voice was low and rich, with the slightest touch of an accent.

“How would you like to tell this story?” Jane asked.

“That’s what we need you to tell us. We have a story, but we don’t know which...”

“Medium?” Akta offered.

“Yes, what medium,” he smiled at Akta, “would be best.”

“Then can you tell us something about your Lights, Camera...Monsters story?” Margo

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asked, a hint of annoyance working its way into her voice.

Lights, Camera...Monsters

“Certainly,” Henry added. Because of her first impression, Lena expected him to speak with an accent, but, besides precise pronunciation, his voice was unremarkable. “We want you to tell our story.”

Jane Lights, Camera...Monsters barely repressed a moan, Cali reached for the abandoned script and Margo slumped in her chair.

Lena sighed but kept her smile. She was already chalking this up as a lost cause. Almost everyone in the world thought their story was interesting enough to be a movie and 99% of them were wrong. There were places, companies, who would make Lights, Camera...Monsters any script that came across the table if the client were paying them to do it. Calypso was not that kind of company. They created and produced stories beyond the ordinary.

These boys probably had some heartwarming story of lifelong friendship they thought would make a great movie or TV series. Maybe it would, but Calypso wouldn't Lights, Camera...Monsters produce it.

“Well, Lights, Camera...Monsters gentlemen, as much as we would like to help you, we don't produce stories for payment.”

“That's not what we want. We don't have any money.” Henry replied.

## Lights Camera Monsters

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