

Excerpt: The Golden Platter

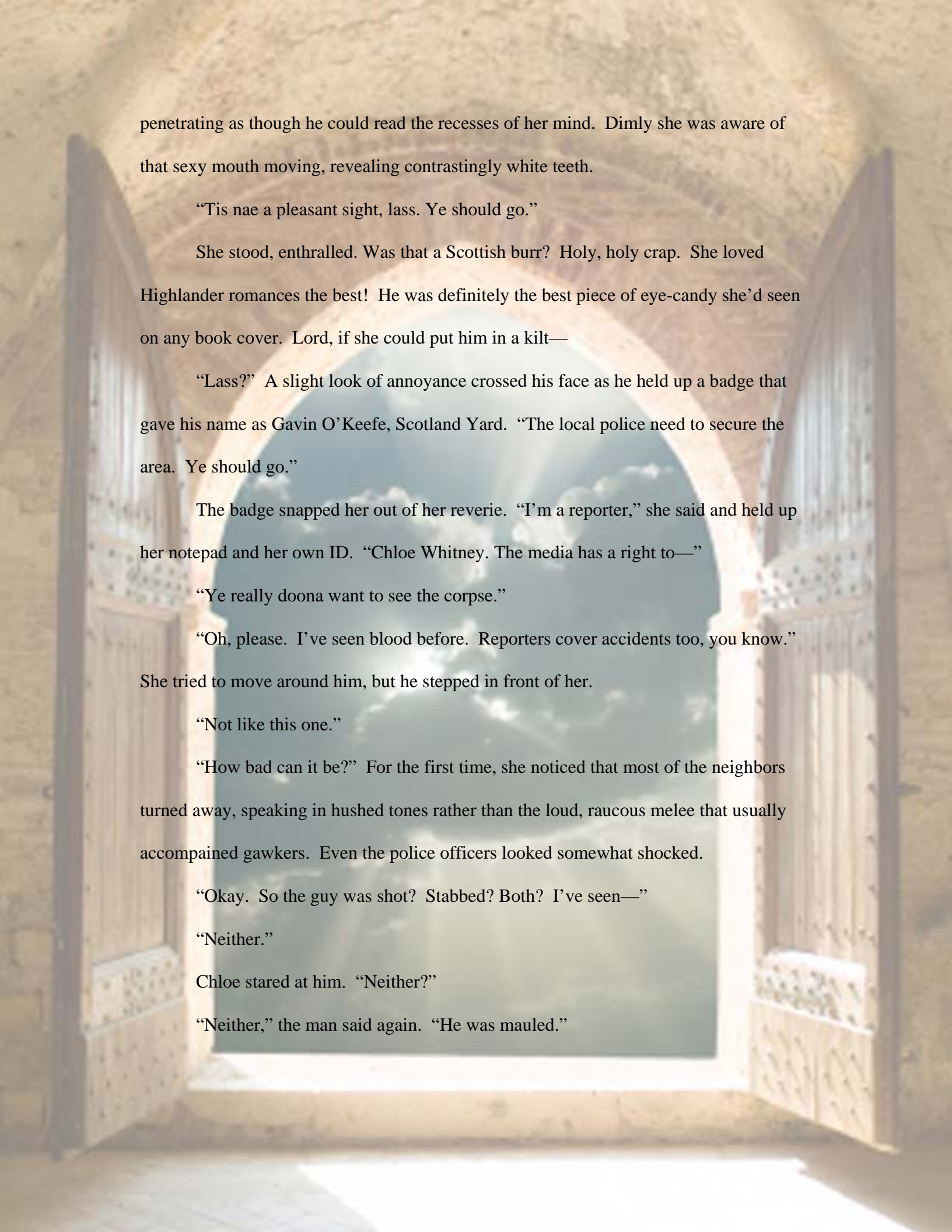
Chapter One

Chloe Whitney stuck a pencil through her orange, spiked hair, opened her old-fashioned notepad, and tried to maneuver her way through the crowd. It wasn't every night that a murder victim turned up lying on one of the streets of a very exclusive Dallas neighborhood. She'd had her police scanner on and, with luck, she could nab the story and get it to the newspaper before the rest of the media got there.

"No cell video," one of the police officers said in a tone that brooked no dissension. Some of the well-heeled neighbors reluctantly closed theirs. Chloe almost grinned. No one objected to someone actually writing notes on paper.

However, her view was blocked by a tall, broad-shouldered man. A *very* broad-shouldered man, she thought appreciatively, as his black muscle shirt outlined perfect deltoids and clung to well-sculpted biceps. His buns were nice and tight too, encased in black leather that fit like a second skin. His hair, nearly blue-black under the streetlamp, curled slightly on those very nice, broad shoulders.

As though he sensed her, the man turned around to gaze down at her and Chloe caught her breath. Holy crap. The guy belonged on the cover of a romance novel. Seriously. She ought to know—her passion was writing romance novels, although they certainly didn't allow her to quit her reporter's job. Chiseled features, strong jaw, wide, sensual mouth—but it was his eyes that held her mesmerized, They were like looking into the depths of a Highland loch on a dark, winter night and they were trained on her,



penetrating as though he could read the recesses of her mind. Dimly she was aware of that sexy mouth moving, revealing contrastingly white teeth.

“Tis nae a pleasant sight, lass. Ye should go.”

She stood, enthralled. Was that a Scottish burr? Holy, holy crap. She loved Highlander romances the best! He was definitely the best piece of eye-candy she’d seen on any book cover. Lord, if she could put him in a kilt—

“Lass?” A slight look of annoyance crossed his face as he held up a badge that gave his name as Gavin O’Keefe, Scotland Yard. “The local police need to secure the area. Ye should go.”

The badge snapped her out of her reverie. “I’m a reporter,” she said and held up her notepad and her own ID. “Chloe Whitney. The media has a right to—”

“Ye really doona want to see the corpse.”

“Oh, please. I’ve seen blood before. Reporters cover accidents too, you know.” She tried to move around him, but he stepped in front of her.

“Not like this one.”

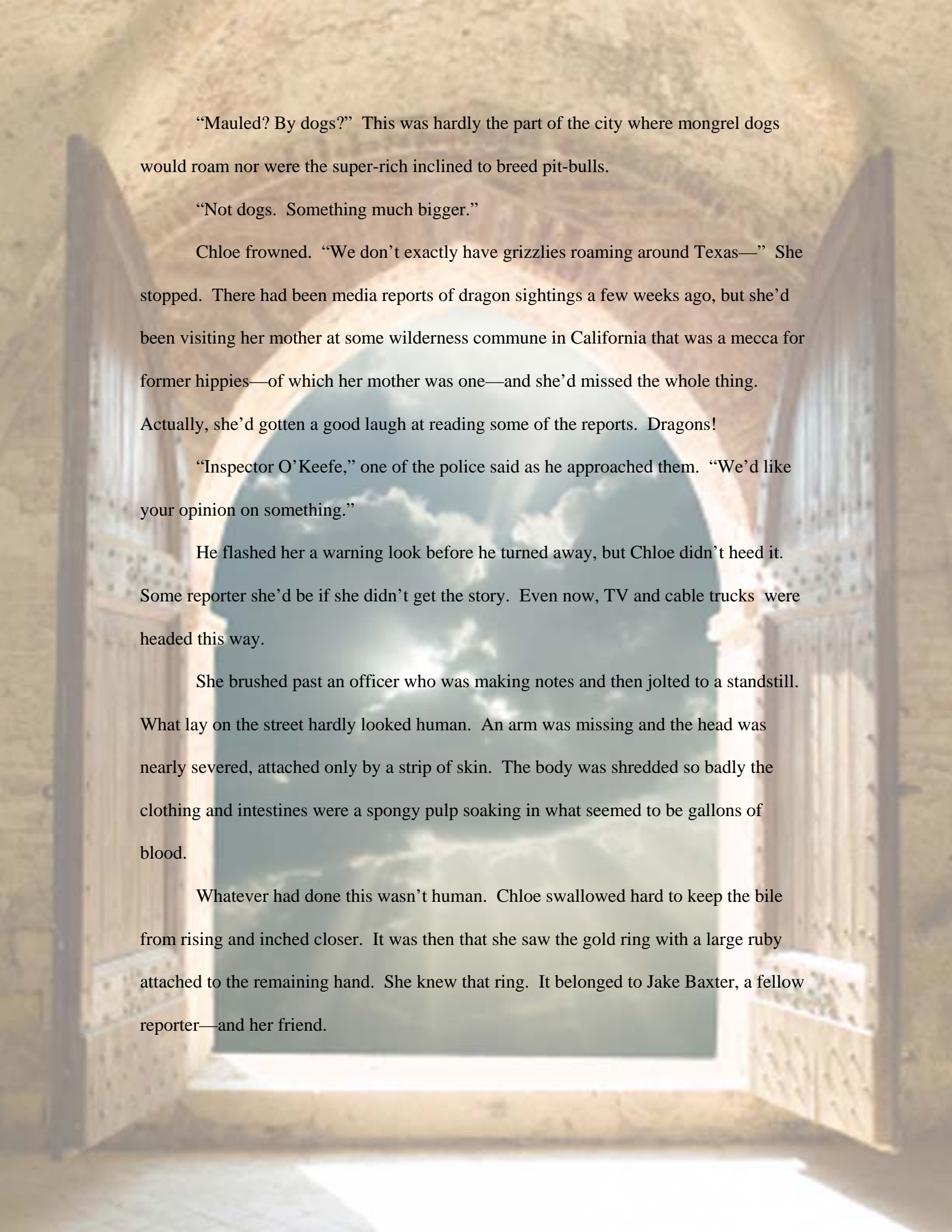
“How bad can it be?” For the first time, she noticed that most of the neighbors turned away, speaking in hushed tones rather than the loud, raucous melee that usually accompanied gawkers. Even the police officers looked somewhat shocked.

“Okay. So the guy was shot? Stabbed? Both? I’ve seen—”

“Neither.”

Chloe stared at him. “Neither?”

“Neither,” the man said again. “He was mauled.”



“Mauled? By dogs?” This was hardly the part of the city where mongrel dogs would roam nor were the super-rich inclined to breed pit-bulls.

“Not dogs. Something much bigger.”

Chloe frowned. “We don’t exactly have grizzlies roaming around Texas—” She stopped. There had been media reports of dragon sightings a few weeks ago, but she’d been visiting her mother at some wilderness commune in California that was a mecca for former hippies—of which her mother was one—and she’d missed the whole thing. Actually, she’d gotten a good laugh at reading some of the reports. Dragons!

“Inspector O’Keefe,” one of the police said as he approached them. “We’d like your opinion on something.”

He flashed her a warning look before he turned away, but Chloe didn’t heed it. Some reporter she’d be if she didn’t get the story. Even now, TV and cable trucks were headed this way.

She brushed past an officer who was making notes and then jolted to a standstill. What lay on the street hardly looked human. An arm was missing and the head was nearly severed, attached only by a strip of skin. The body was shredded so badly the clothing and intestines were a spongy pulp soaking in what seemed to be gallons of blood.

Whatever had done this wasn’t human. Chloe swallowed hard to keep the bile from rising and inched closer. It was then that she saw the gold ring with a large ruby attached to the remaining hand. She knew that ring. It belonged to Jake Baxter, a fellow reporter—and her friend.