

The Crystal Ball

by Alison Clifford

Ellyn stared into the crystal ball for a long time, but all she could see was the mist.

“Doesn’t seem to be working,” she said.

“Are you sure you’re doing it right?”

Ellyn scowled at the bald man leaning over the table. “Do you want to have a go yourself then?”

He sat back, his cheeks glowing. “No. Sorry.”

She nodded and turned her attention back to the crystal ball. It persisted in showing a thick, swirling mist. No images appeared, there was nothing to be learned.

“Have you tried waving your hands over it?”

Ellyn rolled her eyes. “What do you think this is? A movie? Be quiet and let me focus.”

The bald man muttered something about time wasting, riling Ellyn even further. She took a deep breath, closed her eyes and focused on her inner mind. Once she’d relaxed and cleared her mind of clutter, she opened her eyes again, staring deep into the ball. The mist continued to swirl as it had before. Maybe this was what she was supposed to be seeing? A feeling of unease began to ache in her bones and spread through her stomach. Something wasn’t right. She kept her eyes on the crystal ball, but the swirling mist remained. If nothing happened, then she would have to give the man his money back. Not something she could afford to do.

She let her shoulders drop as she stared, and as she relaxed for that instant, a face formed. The eyes and mouth were wide open as if the owner were screaming at her. The image lasted only for a split second, disappearing so quickly Ellyn thought she must have been mistaken.

“You’re frowning. Did you see something?” the man asked her, leaning forward again. The disquiet she had felt swelled into fear. Something was seriously wrong. She glanced at the man’s face. His eyes were narrowed in suspicion.

“No,” she lied. “I’m sorry, I’m getting nothing.” She counted out the coins the man had given her. “Here’s your money back.”

He glared at her for a moment, then pocketed the money she’d laid on the table.

“You’re useless,” he said, then turned to leave the tent. As he reached the flap covering the door, it lifted and two men entered the tent.

“Ah, found you,” the taller of the intruders said. The bald man took a step back, but was grabbed by the other two. “Jaxon Mallet, I arrest you for the murder of Alyce Mallet...”

Ellyn stared open mouthed as the bald man was handcuffed and led away. A movement on the table caught her eye and she looked down at the crystal ball. The face had reappeared, but it was no longer screaming. It was laughing.