

A teenaged girl, an antique watch, and the power to stop the world for 60 seconds at a time. And Grace Raines uses it. Some trouble, some good. Villians want the watch and will do anything to get it. Grace must protect those she loves.

Tick...The Luminous Find

By Jonathan Eaton

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Tick

The Luminous Find



Jonathan Eaton

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Chapter 10

THE AROMA of incense was the first of Grace's senses to take hold, a stark improvement over diesel fumes and public transit. It was pleasant and calming, considering its disorderly contrast. Albeit, the shop presented a mystique array of varying spaces of darkness and dim lights. A large candle on a pedestal near the far wall flickered from a slightly hidden draft.

A display case of well-worn stained oak and thick, unwashed glass exhibited jars of various herbs and concoctions, each with a wrinkled peeling label with illegible faded writing. On Grace's immediate right, she was startled to see a few hideous taxidermized small animals and rodents, a few to the likes the girl had never known existed. It creeped her out, and for a moment, she was ready to hightail it out of there. Yet, something within her encouraged her to stay.

On the other side, a high-backed padded chair sat stoically, hauntingly. At its headrest, a large eerie eye emblem had been engraved and framed within the reddish crushed velvet upholstery.

Grace heard some rumbling around in the back of the shop but given the murkiness of the poor lighting and the flickering shadows of the candle, the willies that rose within her yielded no sight of anyone.

“Hello?” Grace called out in a quivering voice. No one answered.

The floor was aged wooden boards that lent to squeaks and creeks with each step. Grace scanned the cluttered merchandise and bizarre oddities. As she turned, she bumped into something. She gasped frightfully and raised her hand to catch whatever it may be. In her realization, she discovered it had been a tiny woman, not much over four feet tall. Grace wanted to believe it was only a manikin, but as the old woman smiled, it was proven to be an animated, actual person. The woman’s clothing was well-worn and old, reminiscent of a nomadic gypsy.

Startled, Grace put her hand to her heart. “Holy crap! You scared me, sneaking up on me like that.”

With a toothless smile and a slight glitter in her beady eyes, the old woman spoke softly with a foreign accent—German, perhaps. “You walked into me, dear.”

Grace calmed as they stared into each other’s eyes. The woman seemed familiar, and a warmth came over the girl.

“What is it you seek, my graceful one?” She took Grace’s right hand and gently squeezed it between her own.

The girl was puzzled and apprehensive. She was curious about the coincidence of the woman using her

name. "Is that *graceful* as a reference to my clumsiness or something else?" Grace asked with a cock of her head.

"Just a matter of observation, my dear. You have an elegant grace about you."

Grace paused but then volunteered her name. "My name is Grace."

The old woman smiled widely and nodded slowly. "Of course it is, my dear. It could be none other."

Although Grace thought the old woman was strange, a calming peace warmed her. The woman fell silent, patiently waiting for the girl to speak. *Where had she seen this old woman?*

Grace looked around, still feeling the warmth of the woman's hands. "I guess I'm looking for a special birthday gift. Jewelry, I think."

"You have thought," the woman said quietly. "So, what have you seen?"

Grace pulled her hand back slowly and gave the woman a strange look. "Do you always talk in weird Yoda phrases?"

"I know not of this, Yoda. I speak only of words you wish to hear."

"Whatever," Grace sighed and rolled her eyes. "Maybe a necklace or a bracelet or something?"

"And so shall you have, my dear." The hunched woman began to walk away in a slow shuffle, her knobby cane tapping the floor with each step.

“What’s your name, anyway?” Grace asked as she followed the woman to the darker side of the store. The woman didn’t answer.

Grace looked at the large, condensed inventory with awe. A shrunken-head collection, with grimaced, tortured expressions, dangled from a floor rack like innocuous keychains. She saw a crazy-looking cuckoo clock—very old. Strangely enough, the numbers were set in a counterclockwise direction. It didn’t seem to be working. Various items of furniture made of twisted sticks intertwined with ivy vines begged to be sat upon. However macabre and eerie, the intrigue remained.

They finally arrived at a large glass floor case filled with a cornucopia of jewelry—some in piles within small boxes, others on small stands. Yet as Grace scanned the dimly lit collection of hodgepodge adornments, the old woman hobbled and shuffled her way to the back side of the cabinet.

Grace shook her head, not seeing anything of value.

“Epagá.”

Grace looked up at the woman. “Excuse me?”

“Epagá. My name. Epagá.”

Grace repeated it, but the pronunciation was off.

Epagá just smiled. “Eee...” Grace mimicked her. “pah...jha, Epagá.” The woman smiled and patted the girl’s hands.

“Well, Eee...pa...jha. I don’t see anything here that...”

Epaga held up her hand, stopping Grace’s disappointment. “Merely looking often clouds our eyes. Truly seeing bestows great clarity.”

“Are you sure you aren’t friends with Yoda?”

Epaga recognized the sarcasm, didn’t try to understand it, and continued. “Close your eyes, dear Grace. Now, see the object of your desire. Let it come to you. See and feel the joy of the one you have bestowed it upon. Now you see. You truly see. All creation and desire come from within.”

A moment later, Grace’s expression softened. All her facial muscles seemed to relax. A peaceful calm washed over her as she visualized the unique piece of jewelry proudly and lovingly adorning her mother’s smooth neck. She slowly opened her eyes to see Epaga smiling, appreciating Grace’s experience.

“Now, look into the case, dear,” Epaga spoke softly. “And remember, just as we only hear, so often not listen, we sometimes look but do not see.”

Grace had appraised the contents of the glass cabinet with disappointment, yet still saw only a collection of junk and heaps of tangled, lackluster, lifeless scrap. She looked up for guidance, yet to her bewilderment, Epaga was gone. Not ten seconds before, the old woman stood behind the case, and without a peep, she had vanished.

Grace slowly turned to see Epaga on the other side of the shop, behind another glass case very similar to the one she now stood behind.

“Here, Grace.” Epaga, from afar, exhibited her toothless smile as she waved her arthritic hand to beckon the girl to her.

Grace meandered through the mystique mélange in a state of confusion until she arrived at the glass case. She gave Epaga an intensely puzzled look. The old woman only smiled back. Grace bowed her head, waning optimism, to take in the collection within the glass. As soon as her eyes focused, they fell immediately on a tarnished gold necklace that sat alone among the other dull trinkets. The chain was interlaced with fascinating gemstones and attached to a large, deep red oval garnet amulet adorned with a decorative gold lacing of intricate vines and leaves.

“That’s beautiful!” Grace was in a state of awe.

Epaga reached into the case, and her feeble fingers clutched the necklace. Setting it on the glass counter, she spread it to lend a better look. Grace’s eyes never left the piece, nor did the elation on her face. She touched the garnet gently with one finger as if it were the most precious gem in the world. A solitary drop of liquid fell on the glass counter as her fingers traced the chain. Grace’s eyes had welled up as she examined the item.

"It's the exact necklace I saw my mom wearing in my mind. How....?"

"Grace, my dear," Epaga responded as she placed her feeble hand on one of Grace's. "Of course, it is, as it always is. Creation comes from within. Everything is in your mind. Everything is only a thought."

Grace paused momentarily as she wiped her eyes with her other hand. "This is really freaky. But I'm pretty sure I can't afford something like this."

"Something like this?" Epaga squeezed the girl's hand. "There is nothing else like this." Epaga inhaled deeply, then exhaled slowly. "Is your lack of afford due to your unworthiness, or the fear of the bestowed not finding joy from your gift? Or perhaps there's something else you prefer?"

"What is it with you always talking in, like, mysterious sentences?"

"You came to me, child. I am only here to help you attain that which you choose to possess."

"How much is it?" Grace looked all around the jewelry case. "And why don't you have prices on anything in here?"

"You have given yourself such undue suffering by your limited vision and assumptions. Indeed, there is no price attached to this piece." They both remained quiet for a moment as Grace studied the intricacies of the

beautiful necklace. "Truly, such a gift as this, a financial compromise, cannot be found."

"Well, I'm not sure what that means, but you are saying it's not for sale?"

"The value of happiness is not a device one can buy, but something that one can be given."

"Are you messing with me, Enasha?"

The old woman cackled. "Epaga." She corrected her. "Do you feel the warmth in giving this necklace to someone you truly love?"

Grace nodded slowly.

"So, if I told you \$10 or \$10,000, would it change that feeling?"

"The feeling? No. Whether I buy it, yes, that would make a big difference."

"Have you \$10,000 or \$10?"

"Duh," Grace snickered. "I can afford 10 bucks, but clearly, that thing is worth a lot more than that."

"True, it is worth even more than all the money in the world, or it is worth nothing at all. But the worth only has value and meaning to you and to whom it is bestowed. That worth cannot be bought."

"So...," Grace was borderline confused but somehow understood what Epaga said.

"Today," Epaga said in a whisper as if there were others who might hear, "this old, worn-out necklace is \$10."

“God, why didn’t you just say that to begin with?”
Grace sighed heavily.

Epaga giggled. “I suppose I had a little more to say.”
She smiled at Grace.

Grace got into her backpack and retrieved her wallet and cell phone. Epaga found a small wooden box with a dark yellow velvet-lined interior. She carefully folded the necklace into the soft box and slid it to Grace.

“Ten dollars?” Grace asked, not sure if the woman was being honest. “Really?”

Epaga nodded.

“It must be my lucky day!”

“Indeed, child. We make our own luck, dear. You thought about it, felt it in your heart, saw it in your mind, and now you have it. That’s how life truly works.”

Grace handed her a \$10 bill. “May I have a receipt?”
Grace asked as if she wanted to demonstrate that she was a responsible shopper.

“No. You won’t need a receipt, dear. You won’t be bringing it back.”

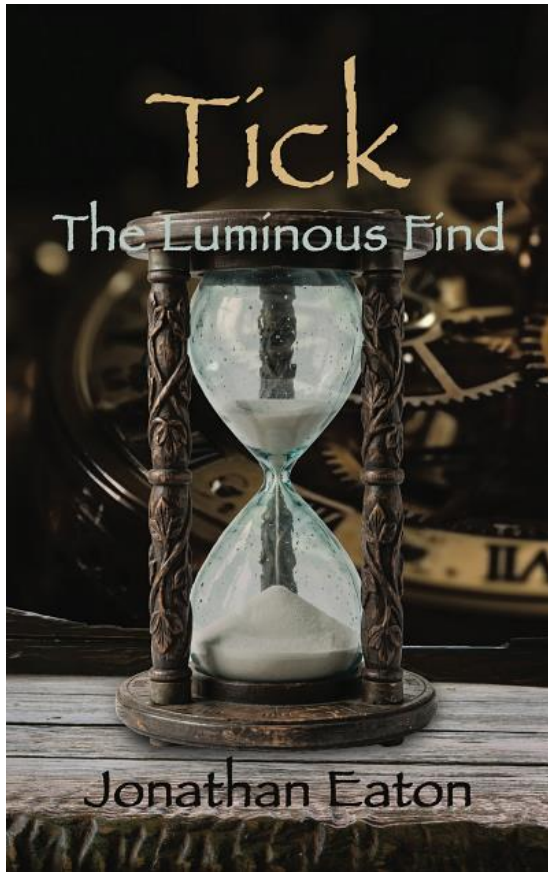
Grace thanked her and hit the speed dial to Twyla.

“I’m sorry, dear. Those things don’t work in here.”
No bars, no service.

Grace raised her eyebrows as if it was just one more weird thing about that place. She went to the door and opened it. The tiny bells rang.

“Have a joyous day,” Epaga called out.

Grace stepped outside, and it finally hit her. She remembered that she had first met Epagea at the bus stop. She turned quickly to go back in, but the door was locked, and a *closed* sign hung motionless in the door window. Darkness loomed from within.



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