Frozen Soul – The Incubus Ring

*“So avoid using the word ‘very’ because it’s lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don’t use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys - to woo women - and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do. It also won’t do in your essays.”
―****N.H. Kleinbaum****,****Dead Poets Society***

October 31, 2006 – Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C.

It was Halloween. Sure, the kids hadn’t gone trick-or-treating yet, and the parties hadn’t started. It was, after all, just a couple minutes past midnight, and had just stopped being October 30th. And here I was, alone, standing on the top of a light pole watching a building that had long ago been sealed off for the night.

Such was the glamorous life of a master thief and assassin.

I wasn’t standing outside the Smithsonian on a whim, of course. There was a job, naturally. A client wanted a certain artifact removed from the museum, without anyone knowing it was gone. He wanted it badly enough that he was willing to pay handsomely for my services. Ever since that ‘incident’ in Russia, I’d been working on my rep as a thief, and I had to admit I was doing well for myself. I could command a substantial fee, for my services, and I had enough money at the moment to buy a small island and live there in comfort the rest of my life. I wouldn’t do that, of course. Retirement is boring. All the movies say so, and Hollywood never lies, right?

Ahem.

Anyways, I needed to get into one of the most famous museums in the world, grab the piece the collector wanted, and get out. I’d already scoped the latest updates to their security over the last couple days. I’d managed to get in and out without raising suspicion, but that was recon, without touching anything. This was the real deal.

Running over the plan in my mind, I decided that getting in and out undetected, especially with the piece, would be near impossible to do. I had a plan to neutralize any response to alarms, and keep the cameras off me, but the security was too tight to not trip something, and my taking the cameras down would be immediately obvious. If nothing seemed missing, they would do a detailed inventory, starting with the high value pieces. The copy I intended to switch in would be discovered, so that couldn’t happen.

The solution, then? Give the cops something else to focus their attention on. I’d purchased a simple virus, and managed to upload it into the network yesterday. When I sent the code, every alarm in the building would go off simultaneously. The only clue as to what I took would be the missing objects, which wouldn’t include the piece the client wanted. I rated the plan a solid 7 out of 10.

Slipping into the mist form I typically used for infiltrations, I was easily able to get past the alarms on the doors and windows. I’d be the first to tell you that I wasn’t an expert on all the different types of security there was available, especially when super-science was involved, but my mist form was basically a cheat code. As far as I was aware, while in this form, I was basically indistinguishable from the water vapor in the air naturally. Even infrared would only show me as a slightly colder space of air, depending on how far I spread myself out. The Smithsonian was many things, but it wasn’t airtight. Once I was into the vents, I had the run of the building, at least until I became physical again.

I didn’t linger by the big T-Rex skeleton, like I had on the previous nights when I was testing whether the security could detect my mist form, but passed through the ventilation to the security office. One guard on duty, excellent. Silent as death, I reformed myself behind the guard, and slapped a patch on the back of his neck. It contained a fast-acting tranquilizer along with some DMSO to make it absorb through the skin. I could have killed him, but it was a point of pride to me to not kill mooks who weren’t trying to kill me when I was stealing.

Oh, it wasn’t an ethical thing, but more practical. Needless death makes all the wrong kind of headlines. You prove you are fully capable of unleashing death and destruction, and choose not to? That keeps you from becoming the top of some super-group’s ‘to do’ list. Less hassle, and you tend to get more jobs that require a certain level of discretion that way. Those jobs always paid more than the ‘kill them all and let God sort it out’ ones.

The guard would be out for about an hour. I had to move. Reaching over to the still unlocked monitor, I typed in the command to activate the virus I’d implanted, starting the timer. Ten minutes until all hell broke loose. Before leaving the security room, I removed the hard drives recording the cameras, and froze them, before shattering them with my heel. Then I was mist once more.

I was in place by my main target thirty seconds before the alarms were supposed to go off. The plan was simple. Use the chaos of the alarms going off to open the case, switch the piece with the replica, and close it, before going to my secondary objectives. Part one worked like a charm. Alarms rang out, security doors dropped down, there was shouting on the comms, and I made the switch and turned to mist again before anyone came to check this room.

Moving through the vents again, I bypassed the guards and security doors between me and my secondary targets. It was in the Egyptian wing of the museum, a display of some ancient jewelry. A little birdie told me that one of the magic types had taken a peek, and said that some of the pieces were enchanted. Old magic was always a big seller. It was also powerful, and a useful tool to have at your side, if you didn’t mind that sometimes it was cursed.

Needing to make this look good for anyone who examined the scene, I froze the glass covering the display, and shattered it. Several rings, a pair of bracers, and a golden ankh were all looking up at me, and they all went into my bag, just as I heard footsteps and shouting guards, coming to check this room.

I pulled a smoke pellet from my belt. It wasn’t anything special, just a mundane special effects tool that had been in use for centuries, in one form or another. But the flash and smoke it would release would be enough to cover my turning to mist. Very, very few people knew that secret. And other than one person, they were all dead. I shattered the pellet at my feet, just as the guards managed to get a good look at me, and was gone.

November 1, 2006 – Battery Park, New York City, New York

Once again, I was alone, at night, in costume, waiting. Well, this time I was waiting on my contact with the client so I could get paid. Honestly, I wasn’t feeling this whole ‘meeting alone in a public place’ thing. It read like a trap. It had been a couple years since I’d had to make an example of someone, and so far Dr. Ubuntu hadn’t looked like he was going to be stupid enough to double-cross me. But you never know.

At 1:00 AM exactly, my contact stepped into a circle of light under one of the few (working) streetlights. It was Tigress, Dr. Ubuntu’s sidekick, or lackey, or sexpet, or whatever their relationship was. As I looked at her, one of the rings I’d picked up at the Smithsonian began warm up. It wasn’t painful, or even unpleasant, but a subtle twinge.

Magic items are unpredictable. Some have easily identifiable traits. Some are practically eager to show you what they can do. Some hide their function until the time is right, and not even their creators know everything they’re capable of. This ring was one of those. I’d touched it accidentally in my lair, once I’d changed out of my costume, and I could feel its energy. It seemed like it tested me, and found me acceptable. At the time, I didn’t know what it did, but had the feeling that it wouldn’t harm me, at least not intentionally. Old magic sometimes has its own ideas about what is harmful or helpful to the person it is attached to.

Now I knew. Whoever enchanted this ring stripped the power of an incubus and stored it within the ring. With it on my hand, and a woman nearby, I learned the truth about the ring. The first part was a glamour that would increase my natural charisma, making me more desirable, or more intimidating, if I chose. The second part was more insidious. With a kiss upon a woman’s skin, I could enthrall them for a time. If I kissed them on the lips, with the intent to do so, I could make them my slave until I set them free.

I put the thought out of my head as I approached Tigress. She was from South Africa, I knew, and had rich chocolate skin, and the kind of perfect figure that most supers seemed to share. I would enjoy getting my hands on that lovely butt of hers, for instance. But this was a business meeting. Not pleasure. Especially since she didn’t seem to have anything except her weapons, and certainly no briefcase full of money, as she should.

Tigress nodded to me, and said, “You have it, then?”

I nodded in return. “I’m noting a distinct lack of the money the Doctor owes me.”

The woman laughed, and said, “Why pay for it when he can just have me take it from you?” And with that, she attacked.

Tigress was a ‘feral’ type super, not sure what kind, meaning she had animalistic powers. This included increased speed, strength, stamina, senses, the whole package. In a fair fight, I’d be in trouble. But I try to avoid fair fights. A wall of ice sprang up, just in time to intercept her initial strike. The wall was only an inch thick, and I could already see the spiderweb cracks on it from the impact. Without a second thought, I spread a mist to negate her vision, and let my mist form join it, before she could slip around the ice wall to attack.

“What? Where did you go? You cowardly rat! Come on out and fight!” Feral types didn’t like it when you played mind games with them. Oh, the cat-types might enjoy inflicting such games on people, since they had a stalking mindset, but they really didn’t appreciate being turned into prey.

Now, what to do with this Tigress? I would have to act quickly, before someone noticed the fight and decided to call in the local hero types. That would be… inconvenient for my revenge on Dr. Ubuntu for this treachery. I could just kill her, but then how would I know whether it was just her, or if this was on the Doctor’s orders?

The thought of the ring came to me again. Well, well. It looks like someone just volunteered to be the first test subject. I slid back into solid form behind her, and grabbed Tigress by the throat, icy claws digging into the soft flesh of her neck. Maybe she could regenerate from having her throat torn out. Maybe she couldn’t. I bet she didn’t wish to try either way, as she stiffened. She was surprised, but looking for an opening to counter.

With one hand, I pulled down my mask, and whispered into her ear. “Oh Tigress, I’m going to enjoy breaking every one of your holes before I kill you.” And then I kissed her shoulder, testing the information of the ring.

Instantly, the woman shuddered, like she was incredibly turned on, and said, in that sultry voice women use when they need it, bad, “You don’t have to kill me, do you? After all, I was only doing what Master told me to!”

I moved my other hand now, icy claws forming on it as I shredded the skimpy excuse for a costume she wore. It was little better than a bikini at the best of times, and now it was completely useless. “Oh, I’m afraid I do. But for now, I need to enjoy that porn star body of yours. Try not to scream too much, yes?” And with that, we became mist, and I looked for a quiet rooftop where I could enjoy my conquest before finishing her.

All the while, the ring gave me a feeling as though it was most pleased with my actions.