

IF SCAR MCCALL CAN'T KEEP
HER COOL, THINGS WILL TURN
WILD, AND DANGEROUS,
VERY QUICKLY

THIS IS NO ORDINARY
SCHOOLGIRL; AND NO
ORDINARY CAT BURGLAR

TAMSI COOKE'S
ACTION-PACKED FOLLOW-UP
TO 'THE SCARLET FILES:
CAT BURGLAR'

HIGH STAKES, HIGH DRAMA—
A THRILLING PAGE-TURNER

WILL SCAR EVER LEARN TO CONTROL
HER SHAPESHIFTING POWERS?

HEIST FILE

TARGET:

THE DAGGER OF EZTLI

CLIENT:

DESCENDANT OF THE DAGGER'S CREATOR

ORIGIN:

MEXICO

CENTURY:

SIXTEENTH

MATERIALS:

OBSIDIAN, TURQUOISE, JADE,
SHELL, AND ONYX

MARKINGS:

THE HANDLE SHOWS A WARRIOR KNEELING
IN PRAYER, WITH A SMALL BIRD IN
HIS OPEN MOUTH

CONDITION:

GOOD, SLIGHTLY CHIPPED BLADE

VALUE:

PRICELESS



GLOSSARY OF AZTEC TERMS

ACHCAUHTLI

Aztec name meaning leader

CHICAHUA

Aztec name meaning strong

EZTLI

Blood

NAHUALLI

Spirit animal born at the same time as you.
Sometimes you see it in dreams, in shadows,
or—if you are very lucky—you see it in the real
world. Said to have the same characteristics as you.

NAHUATL

The language of the Aztec people





To Dad and my sister Pia,
for always being there for me.

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THE SCARLET FILES

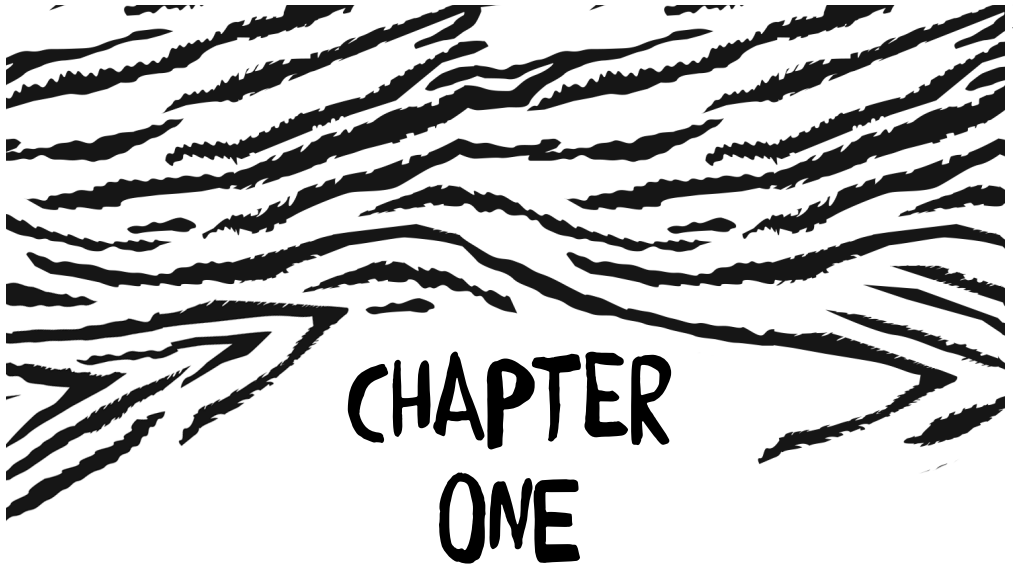
MISSION
GONE
WILD

TAMSIN COOKE

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CHAPTER ONE

My heart thrashes. Thin beams of red light zigzag across the room, blocking every path. My target, the dagger, lies on the other side.

I take a deep breath. *Come on! I can do this!*

Fists clenched, I step over the first beam, my body dipped low to miss the one above. Dropping to the floor, I roll sideways under the next two sensors. Climbing to my feet, I leap over another. My trainers crash to the ground but I don't have time to worry. Lifting my foot, my shoelace dangles millimetres from the light. Swooping it higher, somehow I miss the sensor. Deeper into the grid, I squat low, stretch high and soon the dagger's within my sight. Two beams to go. With every muscle tight and tense, I duck under the laser. It flickers.

WOOOHAAA. The alarm screeches.





Noooooooooo!

The main light turns on.

‘I really thought you were going to do it this time,’ says Dad, switching off the alarm.

Silence fills the room. I was so close.

‘I don’t suppose you’ll let me try again?’ I say, finally.

Dad shakes his head. ‘It’s past midnight. We’re driving to Scotland in a few hours. I need some sleep. You need some sleep.’

‘Does this mean I can’t . . .’ The words fall away.

‘You know you can’t come in the house with me,’ says Dad, softly. He leans against the doorway. ‘I need you as lookout. If I trip the alarm tomorrow, someone has to warn me the police are coming. But that was a good go. You got far.’

Not far enough!

‘How many other thirteen-year-old girls could achieve that?’ he says.

I shrug. Dad set up the tripwire system in our lounge last week. We’ve been practising ever since. Not that he needs to. He achieved it first go.

‘Isn’t there any way you can cut the power on the grid so there’s no alarm?’ I say. That’s our normal trick.

‘I would if I could, but the alarm is linked to the nearest police station. If the link is broken, the police have to check it out.’

‘The Dagger of Eztli is valuable then, isn’t it?’

‘Priceless. We can’t afford mistakes.’

I look away. When he says mistakes—he means me.





‘Scar, you know I was lookout for your mum when I first joined her out on the job.’

My breath hitches. I can’t believe it’s been over three years since she died. And I can’t believe Dad’s talking about her. He hardly ever does.

‘Lookout is an important job,’ he says. ‘You have to be reliable, trustworthy. You can’t move from your spot.’

‘Fine, I’ll do it!’ I say, a little harsher than I intended.

An extra crease appears in his forehead. ‘Our client is paying us a lot of money for that dagger.’

I take a deep breath and ask, ‘It’s definitely his then?’

Dad stares at me in surprise. ‘Are you doubting my checks?’

I try to keep my face blank. He hasn’t always been so thorough in the past.

‘I’ve found evidence that one of his ancestors made it. He has a clear legitimate claim,’ continues Dad.

‘Then why doesn’t he go to the police? Why us?’

‘You’re being very curious all of a sudden,’ says Dad, his eyes narrowing. ‘But if you must know, he doesn’t trust them.’

‘Why?’

‘That’s none of our business.’ He heaves a large sigh and rubs his forehead. ‘I think we’re both very tired. Let’s go to bed.’

‘You go. I need a drink first. I’ll be up in a minute.’

Dad nods. ‘Well, don’t be too long and don’t have a hot chocolate. It’s too late for that.’ He walks past me and pats my shoulder. Our version of the bedtime hug.





Helping myself to a glass of milk, I lean against the kitchen counter. I hear Dad getting ready for bed upstairs, when my eyes dart towards the lounge. What if I had one more go? But then I think about tripping the alarm. Dad would kill me. Or worse—he'd ban me from the heist altogether.

My jaws clench. Dad has no idea what I'm capable of. Maybe if Mum was here, I'd be able to talk to her.

I need to see Ethan. He's the only one who knows my secrets.

Slipping through the backdoor, I breathe in the cold air and tiptoe round the side of the house. I run as quietly as possible along our cul-de-sac until I reach the tall oak tree in number four's garden. My fingers grasp the familiar branches. In no time at all, I'm three quarters to the top, creeping along the bough leading to an open window. I jump into Ethan's room. Considering how often he stays with his gran, I thought he'd try to redecorate. But it's still covered in flowers. Even in the darkness, I make them out.

'Ethan,' I whisper. 'Ethan,' I whisper again, louder and sharper.

'Arrghh!' squeals Ethan, like a strangled guinea pig. Leaping out of bed, he snatches something long and thin off the floor and waves it wildly in my direction.

'It's me—Scar,' I hiss, jumping out of reach.

He lowers his arms. I can see what it is now. A cricket bat.

'Are you trying to give me a heart attack?' he says.





‘I thought you were expecting me,’ I lie. ‘Your window’s open.’

‘My window’s always open. Gran keeps the heating on.’

‘Why do you have a cricket bat by your bed anyway?’ I ask.

He throws it onto his crumpled duvet. ‘In case someone like you turns up.’

I don’t say anything but I know the real reason. It’s in case someone we previously stole from turns up.

Ethan switches on his bedside lamp and checks his watch. His face fills with horror. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘I couldn’t sleep.’

‘So . . . you thought you’d stop me from sleeping too?’

I hesitate. ‘I failed the grid again.’

‘Oh Scar, I’m sorry.’ Suddenly Ethan’s standing in front of me, his arms outstretched as if he’s about to . . . wrap them around me?

I leap backwards. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Giving you a hug.’

‘Why . . . why would you do that?’

‘To make you feel better.’

‘Don’t you know me at all?’

Ethan grins and drops his arms. ‘You’re right. Physical contact was possibly the worst thing I could have tried. It’s just I thought you were sad.’

‘I’m not sad. I’m angry! Last summer I hot-wired a





car, rescued Dad from kidnappers, and he doesn't even remember.' I shake my head. Not that it's his fault since I wiped his memory with ancient Aztec dust. 'Why did I give him that Aztec powder? If I hadn't, I might be the one in the house and Dad would be lookout.'

'If you hadn't, your dad would know about the Aztec bracelet and your transformations.'

Ethan's words silence me. He means the ancient bracelet a client paid my dad to steal. I put it on my wrist and my life hasn't been the same since. It got sucked straight into my bloodstream and since then I've been able to transform into wild animals. A jaguar and an eagle so far.

I sit on the edge of Ethan's desk, putting my feet on his chair. 'It's a bit mad though, isn't it? We're after another Aztec artefact—this time a dagger.'

'Your dad must have a great reputation in Mexico.' Ethan yawns and glances at his bed.

'The hero of Mexico—returning treasures to their rightful owners.' I pause. 'Do you think the Dagger of Eztli has superpowers too?'

'I looked it up. It was a sacrificial dagger for humans and animals.'

'Not animals!'

He snorts. 'Humans are all right to sacrifice then?'

'Not really,' I say. 'But animals?'

'I read it was ceremonial. Not actually used.' Ethan yawns again. 'Have you had another dream about the bracelet?'

I shake my head. There's only been one dream. I was





Achcauhtli, the highest of all Aztec priests. Standing in a temple with four others, we melted gold and spilled our blood, giving our Nahuallis—our spirit animals—to the bracelet. Aztecs believed every person had an animal twin born at the same time as them, giving them guidance.

Ethan rubs his eyes. ‘Maybe if you left my house and went back to sleep, you’d have another dream.’

‘Why do I want another drea—? Oh. I get the hint.’

Ethan smiles sheepishly. ‘I’m just really tired.’

‘Yeah, OK.’

I climb onto the windowsill and reach for the nearest branch when Ethan says, ‘Scar.’

Still crouching, I twist around.

‘I hacked into your dad’s laptop again and rechecked his facts.’ Ethan is an amazing hacker. He can get into any computer without being seen. He’s the whole reason I can keep tabs on Dad. ‘That dagger belongs to Delgado. One of his ancestors made it. He’s been searching for it for years,’ he says.

‘So?’

‘So—it’s a worthwhile heist. So being a lookout is worthwhile too.’

‘But I won’t be needed.’

‘You might. And if you do as your dad says, who knows what he’ll let you do next?’

With Ethan’s words spinning round my head, I scale down the tree. By the time I hit the ground I’m decided.

I *am* going to be the best lookout there has ever been. I’ll show Dad what I can do.

