

## Khimaira

*"A memory of yesterday's pleasures, a fear of tomorrow's dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine ear, a light in mine eye, an anything, a nothing, a fancy, a chimera in my brain, troubles me in my prayer." - John Donne, 1626*

It is modern day America. Norris lounges sideways in an arm chair, admiring the ancient Greek pyxis that rests in one of his white gloved hands. Sunlight pours through the full-sized windows behind his desk to illuminates image of Pegasus, a chimera, and the demi-god Bellerophon. It is quiet and Norris is content, surrounded by antiquities from every age and origin.

His personal aide, Amber enters the room and takes the pyxis from her employer, setting it on a crowded shelf. Norris scolds her for not wearing gloves and claims that it is dangerous to handle artifacts unprotected. She assumes that he is worried about the artifact itself and offers an apology. She pulls on a pair of gloves before revealing a new acquisition to him.

Across town rookie beat cop Aaron Madrid people watches as he waits for his drink in a bustling café. When his name is called he moves forward, only to be cut off seasoned and worn Detective Dunwich. Madrid waits patiently as his name is called repeatedly. Dunwich gives him a look of disdain when he finally clears out of the way. There is a familiarity between the two, but Madrid's respect for Dunwich is offset by the august detective's disregard for the rookie.

Later that night the office is lit only by a desk lamp as Amber scrawls a time and date on Norris' personal stationary then lays the note atop a stack of files. Before she leaves, she approaches the shelf holding the pyxis to straighten an Athenian kyphosis. Her hand brushes the pyxis and it falls from the shelf and shatters on the tile floor.

The next morning Dunwich and Madrid stand over Amber's splayed body. If it were not for the skin of her face missing, her death might have been passed as sudden and inexplicable heart failure. Norris sits behind his desk, irritation plain on his features, his attention held by the Pyxis. It sits on the shelf in perfect condition. His fingers tap on the surface of his desk as Dunwich wearily interrogates him, scrawling his answer on a notepad. Madrid moves to the doorway to better watch Norris sharply.

A small aide slips past Madrid. She alerts Norris to a meeting that has started without him. He excuses himself, though his interrogation is clearly not over. Madrid voices his dissent with the detective's allowance of Norris' departure. Dunwich shrugs, uncommitted.

Madrid's attention turns to the pyxis and he walks across the room to gaze at it more closely. Crime Scene Investigation personnel begin to pour into the room and Madrid is excused. As he leaves the room, he throws an uneasy glance back at the Pyxis.

Madrid works the beat. He patrols the streets late into the night. It is near the end of his shift when a call comes in over the radio, there has been another suspicious death. He picks up the receiver to confirm that he is en route, but drops it when he looks into his rearview mirror. Amber's pale, eyeless face stares back at him for an instant before a viper strikes through it, the mirror shattering.

*At the murder scene* Dunwich stands over another faceless body. CSI personnel move through the small apartment. Many of them appear upset. Dunwich, in the eye of the storm, speaks to a coroner. He reveals that the victim is a member of the CSI team that had been at the scene of Amber's murder that morning. It appears as though the deceased's face, both in this case and the previous one, have been removed via multiple slicing motions by a short blade.

An uneasy Madrid enters through the back door, weaving through the kitchen into the living room. When he catches sight of the body he begins to feel sick, though the previous scene did not have a similar effect on him. He pushes his way outside and expels his day's coffee.

*Meanwhile...* Norris paces his office, agitated. The new aide watches from Amber's desk, where she has taken up temporary residence. He seems to be talking to himself, motioning wildly at the room around him. The aide picks up the phone, but continues to watch him as she dials.

*Back at the murder scene* Dunwich brushes past Madrid as he recovers from his bout of digestive upset. He motions for the rookie to follow him, but doesn't answer any of the questions Madrid manages to ask before the detective slams a car door in his face.

Madrid and Dunwich return to Norris' office. Madrid, overcome by a sense of uneasiness, hesitates before entering the elevator. The rookie and detective ride the elevator up many flights. Neither says a word. It is only while Madrid exits the elevator that the eyeless face of the murdered crime scene investigator appears in a reflective plate. He catches it out of the corner of his eye, but tries to convince himself that it was only a flash of his own reflection.

Dunwich speaks with the aide as Madrid walks around Norris' office. Everything in the office is displaced, creating a sense of chaos. Dunwich walks into the room, followed by the aide. He picks up the pyxis, which rests on top of the paper Amber had left, and sets it aside. Below the date and time Amber had written down, there is now an address scrolled.

Madrid and Dunwich climb into the patrol car and, with sirens on, rush to the address.

*At a museum* Norris paces, speaking animatedly to a colleague. He is agitated, but very little of what he says makes sense as he talks about a pyxis and a chimera.

*In the patrol car* traffic slows Madrid and Dunwich's route, even with the sirens running. Dunwich berates Madrid for the hold up.

He is yelling at Madrid when the eyeless face of the second victim appears in the broken rear view mirror. Madrid notices it just as the viper strikes through the shards, this time extending out of the mirror. It strikes at Dunwich, but twists at the last moment. Rather than biting him, it wraps around his neck and begins to strangle as Madrid weaves in traffic. From the mirror, the face's mouth gapes as a roar fills the vehicle. They collide with the entrance of the museum.

*Deeper in the museum* Norris freezes. For a moment, pure fear twists his features, and then a blank expression clears away the emotion. He turns and begins to walk to the front of the building. From his pocket, he reveals a switchblade.

*In the patrol car* Madrid comes to. He is disoriented from the blow of his head to the steering wheel. When he turns to Dunwich, he sees that the detective is deceased, a look of horror painted on his face. When he looks through the broken windshield, he sees Norris approaching. A shadow slides along the wall behind him. He watches in horror as it comes closer. Though it shifts across different surfaces, it closely resembles the shape of the chimera on the Pyxis, with the notable exception of a missing lion muzzle.

Madrid jumps out of the car. He charges Norris. A quick struggle ensues, in which Norris tells him that he must remove Dunwich's face so that "Khimaira" may claim it. Norris manages to wound Madrid during the scuffle, leaving him bleeding on the floor. His vision flickers as he watches Norris remove Dunwich from the car and begin removing his face. He mutters repeatedly that he told Amber to wear gloves when she handled the artifacts and that the chimera can only choose victims through the touch of bare skin.

Madrid, after hearing this, shoots Norris in the back of the head. Rushing back to Norris' office in his patrol car, he pulls on a pair of crime scene gloves and steals the pyxis. In the last scene, he buries the Pyxis in a plot of land behind the café he crossed paths with Dunwich in. As he drives away, he passes a sign that announcing a new rear parking lot being poured the next day.

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