

THE WATCHMAKER'S GIFT

CHAPTER 1

It was 1959. *Sleeping Beauty* was showing in theaters across the country. In one such theatre; near Anaheim, California, sat an artist, slouched low in his seat near the very back, as not to be seen—a shadow amongst others. Maddened. Furious. Enraged. The jealous artist sat, staring at the big screen before him with fists clenched, teeth grinding and legs twisted up like a pretzel—critiquing each and every creative element, in each and every scene. The more the audience applauded the movie, the more furious he became. *I was the chosen one. Full-length animated movies were my idea. I was the one who should have succeeded. This should have been me, not him. No, no, no. Not him,* he thought to himself.

This was not just any artist, not by any means. This was a man who had once worked side by side with a young artist named Walt Disney. This was an artist who had worked just as hard and just as long as Walt. A young, confident man who had grown as a budding artist alongside Walt. Had had meaningful and creative conversations with Walt. He'd brainstormed with Walt about the future of art, animation, its impact on society and the power of imagination. He had worked with Walt at the Disney Animation Studios as a lead character animator. And at one point, had even been considered for the position of creative director over all Disney films. But the position was eliminated. Walt thought it best to spread the creative responsibility amongst many; as in *the nine old men*, in order to develop the best product possible. But this decision did not sit well with the talented artist whose name never made it onto a Disney movie credits list. He felt slighted. Passed over. Humiliated. And now, here he sat, alone, a failure, a nobody—his mind filled with hateful, vengeful and evil thoughts as he watched a movie that could *very easily* have been his creation.

Then, *she* appeared; green skinned, piercing eyes, cloaked in black with staff in hand and armed with a personality which commanded attention. The dark fairy. Maleficent. She fit his mood—strong, dark, intimidating. She was a true leader of undesirables. She made sense. This was to be his motivation. All the years of anger, all the years of jealousy—the built up hatred inside him finally had a purpose, a goal—a dark and devious goal. Take Disney's very own villainous creation, or better yet, creations, and use them to bring Walt's creative empire to its knees.

Marching down the rainy sidewalks of Burbank—head down and continuously mumbling mad gibberish to himself, the shell of a man made his way back to an old dilapidated hotel

complex with a red neon no vacancy sign that read: NO V AN. He barged through the front door, striding into the lobby in wet shoes that squished with every step. He turned right, then made his way to the elevator doors, completely ignoring the front desk staff in the process, as he left a trail of water behind.

"Quite the odd fella, don't you think Elsie,?" one of the desk clerks said to the other.

"Oh yes. That man hasn't spoken a word to me since I started working here. And that was over a month ago," she replied.

"Yeah, well I've been here almost two years and the only time I ever recall him speaking to *anyone*, including me, was the day he checked in. And even then, he didn't make eye contact with me. He's a real piece of work, that's for sure. I mean, what kind of person wants to make an old rundown hotel like this their permanent residence anyway?"

"I agree, Ed. I agree," the woman said, while staring over the rim of the reading glasses resting upon her nose, continuing to study the eccentric artist in drenched clothes who stood by the elevator doors.

Feeling unwanted eyes upon his back, he eagerly tapped the up button with his boney right hand index finger. Slowly, the arrow above the door started to move counter clockwise towards the first floor. The rickety old elevator clanked and thunked its way down to its caller, louder and louder, until it came to rest with a sudden THUNK. The doors opened and he stepped inside. With fifteen buttons to choose from, the brooding artist hit number nine, then nine again, and one more time. If this were a properly functioning elevator, the button would illuminate, but not in this case. Money for repairs did not exist in hotels such as this. Soap, shampoo and even towels were considered luxury items. The doors awkwardly closed and the elevator ascended, floor two, three, four...and finally, nine. The doors clanked open, exposing a dimly lit hallway. Only two lights out of eight were working, one of which, flickered on and off. The floor was covered with a thin coat of what used to be blue carpeting; it was flanked by water-stained walls—covered with sixty year old floral-patterned wallpaper that once may have been white, but now was dirty yellow with streaks of brown and peeling everywhere. The first door to the left, facing the elevator, was his destination. Apartment nine thirteen. With a shaky wet hand he reached deep into the front right pocket of his rain drenched trousers, the water from his long dark bangs dripped down his forehead, over his crooked nose, across his lips, and off the end of his chin, before finally hitting the junky old carpeting which sat between his oversaturated shoes and the door to his room. Pulling out a single key, his shaky hand repeatedly aimed for the key hole—once, twice, a third time—a difficult thing to do for anyone in

such dark accommodations. Finally, the key and lock became one, his hand turned, the lock clicked and he bumped open the old battered door with his right forearm. Anxiously rushing inside, he slammed and locked the door behind him, taking off his coat and casting it to the floor. He immediately headed for the drawing table in the back corner of the room near the window and turned on the dusty old table lamp. Instantly flooded with a fluorescent yellow-cast light, the table revealed layers of sketches, notes and diagrams—and more sketches notes and diagrams, piled high in an unorganized fashion. Alongside the table was a trash receptacle, overflowing onto the floor with countless crumbled balls of paper containing hopes, dreams and ideas—all of which, had been crushed by the realities of the harsh world. But that was all in the past now. *No more*, he thought to himself, *no more*. The drenched artist mounted his stool, and in one full swoop, pushed all the spent piles of paper covering the table to the floor. Grabbing a pencil and a clean sheet of paper, he began to plot his scheme.

"Name, hmmm," he mumbled to himself while scratching his head. *Evil. Evil is to be key*, he thought. *Villains against Walt? No. United Villains of Evil? No. The Evil Doers? Nope, not scary enough*. For nearly two hours, the crazed artist obsessed over the perfect name for his diabolical organization—writing and scratching out names, again and again. It had to carry purpose. It had to be dark. It had to strike fear in the hearts of ALL Disney lovers who heard it. Something memorable, something simple...something, undoubtedly sinister.

He stared out the window at the rain; messaging his temples, thinking...thinking. The soft glow of the lonely street light on the corner whispered for his attention. And then, it went dark. *Wait, that's it*. He had it. *Yes! It's perfect. Frightfully perfect. It shall be called, The Dark Order*.

Deep into the night, the dejected artist scribbled down his thoughts, filling sheet upon sheet of paper, until all the thoughts in his head had been emptied out. His plan of attack; to build a secret army, a dark collective group that will possess the ability to destroy, crush, and abolish all the joy, all the happiness, all the goodwill Walt and his company had worked so hard to build and spread throughout the world. Indeed, this was to be the beginning of the end for all things Disney!