

# Misty Falls



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For my editor at OUP, Jasmine Richards.  
Without your enthusiasm for the  
Benedict boys, they would never  
have been published.

*Thank you.*

# Chapter 1

'On the Misty scale of disasters, one to ten, where would you put it?' Summer asked me.

I stared miserably at my two best friends as they clustered together on the screen of the laptop. Summer looked sympathetic, Angel amused.

'It's an eleven,' I admitted.

'Surely not?' Summer twirled a lock of dark hair, dusting her cheek absent-mindedly as she reviewed my record. 'Misty, it can't be as bad as the time you told Jenny Watson that she was a lying cow with all the character appeal of a cow pat.'

'And Misty was righteous to do so,' said Angel firmly. 'Jenny had split you up from Tom, Summer, so you had to agree with her.' While giving the impression of being a fairylike waif, Angel had a surprisingly husky voice. It had shocked me when we met at our first savant summer camp together three years ago but, fortunately, she had forgiven me for declaring that before everyone and gone on to become a loyal friend.

Summer kept to her plan of making light of my most recent mishap. Being sweet-natured, she always wanted everyone to

feel better, which had made me even angrier that Jenny had picked on her. ‘OK, I agree that Jenny Watson is a no-good boyfriend-stealer but most of us don’t say this in front of an audience including her very influential school governor of a father at Speech Day. That has to be worse: Misty had to transfer to another school.’

‘I didn’t like that one anyway,’ I muttered. ‘They should have known better than to put me in front of a microphone.’ Jenny and her friends had mocked me unrelentingly after that incident and I was more than happy to leave.

‘So what could be worse than the Jenny Watson Misty moment?’

Time to confess. ‘Remember I told you I thought Sean in Year 13 was *so* hot?’

Angel bent closer to the screen. ‘We saw the prom photos and we agree. But you said you weren’t going to do anything. It’s not as if he’s a savant like you so he can’t be “the one”,’ she made quotation marks in the air, ‘and you said he was way out of your league in any case.’

I propped my forehead on my finger and thumb, elbow resting on the dressing table. ‘I know, I know. The ones I like always are out of my league.’

‘Don’t run yourself down, Misty. They would be lucky to be your boyfriend.’

I love my friends. ‘Thanks, Angel.’

‘So what happened?’ prompted Summer.

I sighed. I had to force myself to say the words aloud. ‘I went up to him yesterday to wish him a good summer—you know, that kind of thing.’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘And it just popped out.’

‘What popped out?’ Angel had a cheeky twinkle to her eye as her gaze dropped to my shirt.

‘Nothing like that. No wardrobe malfunctions. Geez, remind me why I’m your friend again?’

‘Because you think I’m great.’

Summer elbowed her to let me finish. ‘Go on. You need to tell us so you can get past it.’

‘OK, OK. I intended to say—coolly—“Hey, Sean, have a great holiday,” but out came “You have the most gorgeous bum”.’

Summer clapped her hands to her cheeks. ‘You didn’t!’

‘I’m afraid I did.’

‘And what did he say?’ asked Angel.

‘He said: “Thank you for sharing that with me”, laughed and went off to tell his mates.’

‘The rat.’ Angel was trying not to smirk. She really didn’t understand what it was like to live with my gift.

‘I spent the rest of the day having boys come up to me to ask if I thought their bums were attractive too.’

Angel dipped off the screen. She was probably rolling around on the floor in a fit of giggles.

‘You poor thing,’ said Summer. At least one of my friends knew how to react appropriately to social death.

‘I can’t face them again. I’ll have to move schools.’

Summer sighed. ‘Misty, you can’t do that. You’ve been to three schools in the last five years already because you were bullied for being different. You’ve got to stick it out for Sixth Form. And just think, you’ve the whole of the summer for them to forget about it. They won’t remember in September.’

‘You sure?’

‘Of course, I’m sure.’ There was a faint tingle of a lie to her words as if she wasn’t entirely convinced but I let it pass. ‘Sean will have left, won’t he, as he’s done his A-levels, so you won’t have to see him or most of his friends.’

I brightened up at that thought. ‘You’re right. I’m getting panicked about nothing.’

'You'll be in South Africa for a month so you'll have time to forget about it too. When you get back for camp, we can talk more.'

'Thanks, Summer. You can tell Angel to stop laughing now.'

Angel came back on screen. 'I wasn't laughing.'

I rolled my eyes. 'You can't get away with lying to me.'

'Sorry. I feel your pain.'

'Yeah, right.'

'And Sean does have a gorgeous bum.'

I smiled as I ended the call. 'Ain't that the truth, girl.'

The flight to Cape Town climbed towards the top of the display screen. Boarding gate was now listed. I had already said goodbye to my parents and my three sisters and two brothers a few minutes earlier—the little ones were too much of a handful to wait until I went through to departures. My Aunt Crystal had stayed with me to check I made the plane.

'You'd best go through.' Crystal bent down and kissed my cheek, her mop of curly dark-blond hair tickling my face as it swung to envelop me. 'Give my love to Opal, Milo, and the little ones, won't you?'

'Will do.'

Crystal squeezed my hands. 'I'm so envious, Misty. You'll be there to see Uriel track down his woman.'

I squeezed hers back. 'It'll be epic.' I couldn't wait to get away and put the embarrassing last few days at school behind me. We looked over to the two brothers, Uriel Benedict, my fellow traveller, and his younger brother, Xav, Crystal's fiancé. They were standing close together, Xav displaying none of his usual teasing as he murmured encouragement. As two insanely good-looking guys, they attracted more than their fair share of admiring glances from the girls queuing at the check-in desks.

It had to be a relief for my amazing aunt that she matched Xav in the looks department, with her catwalk height and unusual features, dark brows and film-star mouth.

Crystal shook her head, an amused glint in her eyes. 'Why do they both act as if Uriel is going off to war?'

She was right: Uriel was running his hands through his golden-brown hair in a nervous gesture I'd not seen before as he was usually so calm and self-contained. Blessed with classic bone structure, he reminded me of St Michael, the warrior angel as depicted in a stained-glass window I'd seen in Italy, all competence and athletic goodness, dispatching dragons with one hand and justice with the other. He wasn't quite as tall as Xav but almost, so the pair of them stood out a head above the milling crowds pushing trolleys around the brotherly pep-talk on the concourse of Terminal Five.

'They're too macho to admit it, but it looks like Uriel is terrified and Xav is worried for him.'

Crystal laughed. 'You're right. Poor little scaredy big guys.'

'Have to say, it's a big deal heading off to meet your future partner. You did tell him enough to take him to her door?'

Putting her arm around my shoulder, Crystal steered me towards the security check. 'As much as I could without holding his hand all the way to the first face-to-face. My gift tells me she's in Cape Town. I can't get too exact from such a distance but I see white buildings—crowds of people. Opal is fairly sure that means one of the hospitals and she even has a shrewd idea which of the savants in that part of town might be the match. She's arranging a get-together so they can meet.'

I hadn't realized that preparations were so far advanced. 'Is she tipping off her target?'

'No, just in case she raises hopes that then get dashed. If she's wrong, I'll fly out next month and see if I can get a closer bead on Uri's girl.'

Of course, Crystal would come to the rescue if necessary. She would do anything for family and now Xav's six brothers were all included in the term. Crystal was only a couple of years older than me, making her more like a sister than an aunt, but she took her responsibilities seriously. My mum, Crystal's oldest sister, always said the baby in the family had been given the heaviest burden with her gift.

I brushed her arm. 'But you can't fly out for every soulfinder you locate or it would break the bank.' That was also something my mum said. Crystal had been busy since her gift was discovered in the autumn, helping family and friends find their savant counterpart. It was not a simple process: she could give a direction and a sense of place but people had the annoying habit of hiding out in big cities full of potential matches or they moved about, following a pattern that made perfect sense to them, no doubt, but to a soulseeker like Crystal was infuriating.

'You sound just like Topaz.' Crystal frowned slightly, thinking hard. 'I wish I could afford it but I don't believe it'll be necessary this time. The direction I've sensed has stayed pointing to South Africa. Uri would've gone sooner if he hadn't been locked into a work commitment but luckily she stayed put.'

I wondered what could be more important to Uriel than meeting his soulfinder but with a gap of twelve years between him and me it didn't seem my place to ask. I was still at school and he already had a doctorate from Denver University in the United States.

'It's a total bummer,' admitted Crystal, 'that I can't now go with him as Xav and I have to be in the US next week so we can hunt for a place to live in New York. He has to start at uni soon.' She pulled a face. 'And we're saving up to help Victor and Will. I've got a feeling Victor's one is going to be a really expensive hunt.' She looked a little harassed for a moment,

lining up all the tasks she had to do before the beginning of the university year. Then her face cleared. 'So it's down to you, Misty, to look after my brother-in-law-to-be.'

I was thrilled she thought me up to the job. She was one of the few in my family who didn't treat me like a screw-up. Mum and Dad had spent much of the last decade clearing up the messes I made at home and school with my blunt talk; it was a pleasant change to be trusted. 'No pressure then.'

She gave me a hug. 'No pressure. Enjoy your holiday.'

'It's going to be interesting, I know that much already.' I tried to lighten her mood. 'And I can't change your mind about telling me where my soulfinder is?'

She raised her eyes to the ceiling at my familiar pleading, hands on hips. 'No—and you know that I'm not lying so don't bother to argue. No soulfinders before you're eighteen. You tell your little brothers and sisters the same thing. Gale's already been nagging me. You all need to have a normal life until you join the rest of us in that stuff.'

'Aw, spoilsport!' I mock-pouted but I knew she was serious. She'd explained before that her gift of finding our counterparts came with a cost. Life could be cruel and not all matches would be successful. She firmly believed that the people she linked should be mature enough to cope with any disappointments or disasters. All of us savants, like Summer, Angel and I, are born with special mental powers, but we have to face up to the negatives about our gift as well as the benefits. Look at me: I'm a poster girl for the downside. I have a problem with the truth. Thanks to my savant gift, I can't get away from it. Best friend with dodgy taste appears before me in new purchase to ask my opinion. She circles with a pleased smile just waiting for me to bolster her self-esteem. I line up my white lie: *Hey, don't you look great!* but, oops, out pops *Sorry, but you look fat in that!* It is as though I have Google translate in my brain: feed in a fib and

it gets straightened out into the unvarnished truth. Worse still, if I lose control, it can be infectious; people end up telling the truth around me, even when they don't intend to do so.

My friends have to be very understanding.

Savants come in all shapes and sizes. Nearly all of us are telepathic and can move things with our mind. On top of that, some get awesome gifts. Uriel can sense the events of the past attached to place, object, or person. My mum can see through solid objects when she concentrates. It makes being a teenager in her house particularly difficult, trust me. Her brother, my uncle Peter, can change the weather. Even Gran can make you fall asleep, which means she is much in demand as a babysitter.

But best of all is Crystal, as her ability allows her to locate our savant counterpart, our soulfinder, and so she can solve the central problem of our lives. You see, when one of us savants is conceived, somewhere on the globe the person who is to be our other half in a very real sense also starts life. They have half our gifts and together we can be even more than we can be apart. So, roughly nine months later, two people destined to be drawn to each other are born. But have you seen how big the world is? Talk about needle-in-haystack! That's why Crystal is so special: she can send you right to the doorstep of your destiny. What she can't guarantee is the reception. Your soulfinder might fall headlong in love with you but it is also possible their emotions will be violently against you, depending on how their experience has shaped them. Savants have a huge capacity for feeling for their soulfinder but whether they are filled by love or hate is beyond Crystal's control. When I was little, I concentrated more on the fairy-tale potential of the prince in my gran's tales of soulfinders, but now I realized that those tales contained an equal number of trolls and witches so, for all my testing of Crystal's red line, I was in no rush to meet mine.

For the hundredth time, Uriel checked his boarding pass

and ticket were in his carry-on bag. He knew that this gamble was what was in store for him at the other end of the plane journey. At twenty-eight, he was more than ready to meet his soulfinder. No doubt he was praying it would prove to be as successful a match as those of his own parents and his four brothers who had found their girls. Among the Benedicts, only Uriel, Will, and Victor remained unattached.

I could see Crystal was biting her lip as she watched Uriel. I gave her a hug, which was harder than it sounds as she is almost six feet and I'm an ordinary five foot four.

'Not your fault if it goes wrong,' I whispered as I pulled her ear level with my mouth, 'but you can claim the credit if it turns out well.'

She chuckled as I hoped. 'Good philosophy.' She straightened up and gave an impressive whistle. 'Hey, cupcake, let your brother go or he'll miss his plane!'

Xav looked across at us, his eyes alive with laughter. Next to the fair St Michael Uriel, Xav was more a dark-haired Lucifer, or, changing mythologies, Loki with a wicked twinkle. 'OK, Beauty, message received loud and clear.'

Uriel picked up his carry-on bag and squared his shoulders for what came next. 'Got everything, Misty? Passport? Boarding pass?'

I opened my mouth to make a joke but Crystal nudged me before I could protest at his mother-hen act. 'It's doing him good to worry about someone else. Takes his mind off it.'

I smiled at Uriel sweetly. 'Yep. All present and correct.'

Xav gave me a hug (my heart went pitter-pat as he was so swoon-worthy) and shepherded me to the barrier with a brotherly hand on the shoulder. What was it about these Benedict boys that made them want to order us around? I rolled my eyes at Crystal but she just grinned. I guess she'd come to like that side in her man.

Just after I had waved a final time to Crystal and Xav, the first Misty moment of the trip struck.

‘Miss, I’m afraid you can’t take liquids over a hundred millilitres in your hand luggage.’

I looked up at the security guard who had unzipped my bag. There at the top were all the bottles I had intended to transfer to my suitcase but forgotten in the excitement of the morning.

‘Oh, sorry. I am such a scatterbrain.’

I could feel Uriel beside me frown. He must have been thinking that I was a total baby not to know about the restrictions.

‘You’ll have to leave them here.’ The guard took them out one by one.

I watched sadly as my curl-taming lotion, favourite shampoo and conditioner were consigned to a bin. He looked closely at the suntan lotion before deciding that too infringed the rules and chucked it in the rubbish.

‘There you are. Ready to fly.’ The guard passed over my now much lighter bag.

Uriel glanced at his watch. ‘I’m afraid we’ll have to run, Misty. No time to replace your things at the shops.’

‘It’s OK. My fault.’

‘Yes, it was.’ Uriel looked disconcerted. He had been intending to say something kind and consoling but instead had blurted out the truth. My grip on my gift had to have slipped. Again.

‘That was me,’ I muttered, cheeks burning. ‘My control is a bit iffy.’

He gave a funny-sounding laugh. ‘Yes, Xav warned me about that. I’ll have to take care around you, won’t I?’

Behind us I could hear a woman confessing, to her own great surprise, that she was attempting to smuggle drugs through security. Policemen were descending. Uriel arched a brow. I nodded.

‘Maybe I should leave you here. They wouldn’t need a scanner.’ Uriel took my bag and added it to his. The loudspeaker announced that our plane was boarding. Uriel handed me the tickets to hold. ‘Come on. I don’t want to be late for my future.’

On the flight, I watched crummy films while Uriel worked quietly away on his laptop. We had excellent at seat service thanks to his all-round hunkiness; the cabin attendants couldn’t do enough for him and I was the happy recipient of the overflow of their goodwill.

I nudged him after we had yet another refill. ‘It’s not fair, you know.’

He looked up from his screen. ‘What’s not fair?’

‘You good-looking people. You don’t realize what it is like to be the rest of us.’

He opened his mouth, then paused, trying to sense if my gift was under wraps or roaming free.

‘It’s OK. You can lie if you want. It’s in here.’ I tapped my head.

‘I wasn’t going to lie exactly.’

‘But . . . ?’

‘I was going to say that I didn’t notice, but I do. And it’s stupid.’ A little huff fluttered his golden-brown fringe. ‘I don’t see myself like that. It’s what’s inside that counts.’

‘Yeah, but us moths are attracted to flame and you and your brothers are like candles.’

He grinned. ‘Was that an example of your inability to lie?’

‘I suppose, yes. I’m blunter than most people as I can’t be any other way. I tell it how it is.’

‘Then let me say that no one in your family is exactly homely.’

‘Homely? Is that like American for butt ugly?’

His eyes twinkled. 'A better translation would be plain. Crystal is stunning.'

'Yes, she is.'

'Diamond is beautiful.' Diamond, the next sister up in age from Crystal, had married the oldest Benedict brother, Trace. She was the epitome of elegance, sleek and coordinated.

'I know.'

'And you are very cute too.' He winked.

I checked my lie detector but nothing he said had set my teeth on edge, the usual sign of a fib. Uriel thought I was cute? Aw! I honestly believed myself to be a bit of a mess in the looks department. I had inherited the same wildly frizzy hair as Crystal but several shades paler. Without my hair lotion I would be wandering round Cape Town looking like an alpaca in need of a shearing. I had pale skin and freckles, weird long blonde eyelashes and eyes that had settled on an unremarkable grey. I should not press him for any more compliments as he would have reached the end of the road of his honest opinions.

'So what are you working on?' I asked in a none-too-subtle change of subject.

Brought back to his task, his smile dimmed. 'Please don't read the screen.'

'Sorry.'

He could tell from my tone that I was feeling shut out. 'It's nothing to do with the trip and it's not that I don't want to tell you; it's more that I can't.'

'I don't get it.'

He sighed. 'You know I work in forensics?'

'Yes, Crystal mentioned it. You're doing post-doctoral studies, she said.'

'I undertake investigations for the American authorities into crimes that seem to have some link to the savant community. Victor brings me in when he needs me.'

Victor, Uriel's younger brother, worked for the FBI.

'Oh, I see. So it's like a state secret or something?'

'More like it's too grim for you to see. Post-mortems aren't exactly vacation reading.' He closed down that document and called up a map. There were red dots scattered over the globe, clustered in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and several countries in Europe. 'I can tell you, though, that I'm looking into some connected deaths.' He angled the screen for me to see. 'Twelve we know of so far—a serial killer who preys on the savant community. We're searching for a way to stop there being another victim. My job is to tug the thread loose that will trap our murderer.' He rubbed his hands over his face. 'I'm a little obsessed with it—haven't been able to put it aside since the first murder last year.'

My truth power was perhaps encouraging him to confess more than he normally would, or maybe he just needed to offload, but it gave me an insight into what the last few months had been like for him.

'Twelve—that's terrible!' I suddenly wished I wasn't so far from the ones I loved. I'd have to text them on arrival to take special care.

Uriel's expression was really grim. 'Each one an unspeakable loss for the family involved. I can't bear the idea that there will be more.'

'And that's what's kept you from flying off to South Africa?'

He gave a hollow laugh. 'Yeah. I wanted to solve the case so it didn't tarnish this moment. Victor finally told me it was time to take a break. He thinks I'll see things more clearly once I get the soulfinder business over with.'

I lifted an eyebrow. 'Business?'

He shook his head at his own clumsy phrasing. 'I hope not. Pleasure: I hope it is going to be a hundred per cent pleasure.'

'Don't worry, I'll be there to help.' I crossed my fingers that

he hadn't heard too much about my Misty moments or he'd be even more worried.

He snapped his computer screen closed. 'Thank you. Now, you've reminded me that this isn't supposed to be work. I should arrive with something other than murder on my brain, agreed?'

I nodded.

'Game of cards?' He pulled a pack out of his pocket. 'What do you want to play?'

'Go Fish?'

His smile was wry. 'How appropriate.'

My Auntie Opal was waiting in arrivals with my three cousins, Willow, Hazel and the toddler, Brand. Willow and Hazel had crayoned a banner for us, an amazing drawing of a lion roaring a welcome. Both had inherited a savant gift for capturing images in all sorts of forms—for Willow it was drawing, for Hazel sculpture in any material—paper, clay, cardboard, wood. What they saw they could reproduce with amazing accuracy and artistic flair. I doubt anyone on the concourse suspected that the excitable five- and seven-year-olds were responsible for making the banner unaided. I had last seen them at Diamond and Trace's wedding in Venice in December where they had run wild with my younger sisters, Gale, Peace, and Felicity only pausing to pretend to be angelic bridesmaids for an hour. Not that anyone in the family was fooled.

'Misty! Misty!' shouted Willow as if I couldn't see the party waiting for us.

I waved, only to be taken aback by a lion's roar that came, no, surely not, from Brand? The huge noise from a tiny boy caught many by surprise. I saw the hordes of taxi drivers looking nervously around in case a wild creature was prowling the

concourse. My aunt went into a flurry of distraction activity and handed Brand a drink to prevent a repeat.

‘Sorry about that. His gift has begun to show,’ she said as she kissed me and then hugged Uriel.

‘What kind of gift is that?’ I asked, eyeing with suspicion the squirming bundle of black-haired toddler. ‘Does he turn into a lion or something?’

‘Not as bad as that.’ Opal started with the pushchair for the car park, expecting us all to follow. She always acted like mother duck, no matter the age of her ducklings. ‘He’s a natural mimic. It might even be a gift for animal languages, we’re not quite sure.’

I sensed there was more to tell. ‘But?’

‘He seems to have long conversations with our dog.’ She wrinkled her brow. ‘In fact, I’m not sure if Brand doesn’t think he is a puppy, as he likes playing fetch for hours.’

‘It’s nice that he likes playing with the dog,’ said Uriel kindly, catching the bottle the little boy had dropped as he bobbed up and down in his seat.

‘No, I meant Brand likes us to throw *him* a stick; the dog doesn’t get a look in. And he gnaws things, trouser legs mostly.’

I laughed as Willow and Hazel giggled. Uriel handed him back his bottle and Brand gave a bright yip, which suggested he was following more of the conversation than a two-year-old could usually be expected to understand. He promptly dropped his drink again.

Uriel snatched it up before it hit the tarmac. ‘I think I’m being taken for a ride. He’s playing bottle-fetch.’

‘Welcome to my family,’ I said to Uriel. ‘We are all certifiable.’

He offered his hands to the girls to hold for crossing the road. ‘Makes me feel right at home.’