

# Life Reader

## Extra Chapter

By K.M. Shea

“With the return of an administrative assistant to Saint Cloud, we hope to further synchronization with the library’s magic,” library director Isaac Eastgate said.

Raven adjusted the notes on her clipboard and avoided looking up.

“We intend to test and stabilize the library in the upcoming months, and we project that by as soon as next year there is a possibility that the library may be ready to begin preparations for reopening,” the director continued.

Raven made a few notes before she shifted in her chair and smoothed her skirt, frowning at the clothing article. She thought she would be able to dump all skirt wearing activities when she tossed aside the peppy persona of Rachel McCellen. Unfortunately when meeting with KQ city officials, the mayor, and the library board the dress code was strictly formal.

“All final decisions of the library’s status will remained undecided until we have a better grasp on the state of the library,” Director Eastgate said, his voice as warm as a glacier.

Raven finally took a chance and peeked up. The director stood in front of her, his hands resting on a podium as he loomed over his audience.

The mayor was front and center, her arms crossed as she studied Director Eastgate with narrowed eyes. A string of KQ city officials were with her: the city accountant, the city clerk, the city guiser—who was responsible for hiding all magical activity from the nonmagical residents of Bakertown, which was actually most of the city—the commander of the local guardian den, and a few others Raven did not recognize.

Behind the row of KQ officials was the library board—the city government that ruled over the library. While the KQ officials were suspicious the library board members were emotionless. Raven wasn’t sure she had seen any of the board members move, much less display emotion.

Behind the library board were some friendly faces: the main staff members of Saint Cloud. Mrs. Connors and Alison were there, as were (unfortunately so) Daire and Jeremiah. The twins were there as well—they had forced their way inside as an official invitation had not been extended to them. When they saw that Raven was looking at them Aron pantomimed choking Daire and Asher gave her a thumbs up.

“Aiding with the magic synchronization is my new administrative assistant, Raven Wishmore,” Director Eastgate said, yanking Raven’s attention back to him.

Raven inhaled deeply before she stood and warmly smiled at the generally unmoved audience.

The mayor whispered in the city accountant’s ear, the city guiser outright laughed, and the guardian commander scratched the side of his head as he thoughtfully studied Raven. Behind them the library board was still emotionless.

“Raven is a new but highly skilled archive keeper. She came to us heavily recommended by various KQ bureaus. **All of the Saint Cloud staff look forward to working with her,**” Director Eastgate said, his black hole eyes were fixated on Daire.

The page turner prefect scowled and looked away. Alison, who stood next to him, rolled her eyes and shook her head at him.

“Raven, would you like to say anything?” Director Eastgate asked.

Raven took a step forward and straightened her posture. "Thank you for this opportunity. I am honored by your selection, and I look forward to securing Saint Cloud Library."

Director Eastgate nodded once in approval. "Thank you," he said to the room before he walked away from the podium, taking Raven with.

"Eastgate," the mayor said.

Director Eastgate growled under his breath and returned to the podium. "Any questions?" he asked in a flat voice that clearly warned off inquiries.

"I've got one," the city guiser said. "Has Miss Wishmore even graduated from high school yet?"

"No," Director Eastgate acknowledged. "However, her intellect and skills have been proven. This is more than I can say for some of the city's employees," he said, pointedly staring at the city guiser.

The city guiser shook his head, still laughing.

"I have a question," the guardian commander said, rubbing his chin. "With the addition of this little lady to your staff do you intend to keep the extra guardian patrols going? Or is that a separate issue?"

Director Eastgate smiled, a terrifying gesture that made his black eyes glitter with unspoken promises. "No, you are correct, commander. With Raven Wishmore on our payroll I do not believe we will further require additional patrols, thank you."

"Question number two," the city guiser said. "Is this even legal? You're hiring a teenager into a full time position. Can she even stay late enough to close the library?"

"The Library League has given Raven special clearance for her position, and she has been hired on as a part time employee. Admittedly some state laws are being bent for Raven on account of her brilliance, but that is not a trait you would understand, Stanley," the director said.

Raven watched the exchange with growing dread. Although Director Eastgate was verbally abusing the city guiser, the magic masker seemed to grow more amused than angry.

"Do you really intend to open the open the library again, Isaac, or are you feeding us lines to pacify us?" the mayor asked. Her voice was deep and throaty, and she wore her iron gray hair and the wrinkles on her face more like a badge of honor than a sign of age.

"With all due respect, madam mayor. Do you really think I would tell you if I was attempting to pacify you?" Director Eastgate asked, arching a gold eyebrow.

His response made the city employees whisper among themselves, but the mayor leaned back in her chair, satisfied.

"One more question," the city guiser said. "How am I supposed to cover this up and explain it?" he said, pointing back and forth between Raven and the director with a pen. "KQ citizens will understand the necessity of Miss Wishmore's magic set, but the general population cannot be informed of that."

Director Eastgate shrugged. "I am only being paid to fulfill the demands of my job. You will have to stir up your few, lonely brain cells to accomplish **your** job. That is all the questions we have time for, thank you," Director Eastgate said before he walked away.

Raven hurried after her boss, tucking her clipboard against her chest.

"Mingle in the room for a while. I suspect the mayor will want to meet you, but you may blow off Stanley. That useless city guiser is always looking for trouble," Director Eastgate said as he studied the crowd. "If the prefect approaches you, you may employee Montamous one and two to forcibly remove him from the room," Director Eastgate said before he left Raven and joined the expressionless library board members.

“Miss Wishmore.”

Raven was grateful she was wearing simple flats when she stopped and twisted around in one smooth movement.

It was the mayor.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am mayor Lark Steele, I am pleased to meet you,” she said, firmly and stiffly shaking Raven’s hand.

“Thank you,” Raven said, stifling her desire to shake out her hand when the mayor finally released it.

“I looked at some of the qualifications Eastgate listed in his report about you. According to the report it says your library affiliation magic is highly rated,” Mayor Steele said.

“I tested above average in affinity to library magics, yes,” Raven smiled.

Mayor Steele held out her hand and the city accountant placed a file in it. The mayor flapped it open and studied the papers. “Above average would be an understatement, Miss Wishmore. It says here you are literately *off the charts* in terms of measurability.”

Raven hesitated before she nodded. “Yes.”

“You believe your ability to manipulate Saint Cloud will help you tame the building?” Mayor Steele said.

“I’m sorry, tame?” Raven innocently asked.

“I’ve heard the reports, Miss Wishmore. Books are flying off shelves, decorations have become animated, the inner passage ways are starting to rumble, and more magical wildlife is returning to the library. When I say tame, I mean tame,” the mayor flatly said.

Raven glanced at a wall of the meeting room. “My affiliation magic will stabilize the library, and help it reinvent its magic based systems. My position will be to help the library, I suppose one could say I will help it settle down, but I do not intend to break its magic.”

Mayor Steele studied Raven with narrowed eyes before she turned to look at Eastgate. She looked back at Raven and nodded. “I see. It was good to meet you, Miss Wishmore. I look forward to seeing you work,” she said before she left as abruptly as she arrived, the city accountant trailing after her like a trained dog.

“You probably think you’ve won now,” a stiff voice to Raven’s right said.

Raven sighed. “There was never anything to win, Daire,” she said as she turned to face the page turner prefect.

Daire Eastgate narrowed his eyes at Raven. “Then why are you back? What, you didn’t ruin enough things the first time you marched through here?”

Raven tapped her nails on her clipboard. “As difficult as it may be to imagine, Daire, my world does not revolve around you.”

“I’m not buying it. Everyone might hail you as a hero and the library’s savior, but you almost were the ruin of it. You hesitate and don’t use your magic at appropriate times, and we suffer because of it. You aren’t going to fix things, you’re only going to make them worse,” Daire said.

“You know Daire, I think you’re growing paranoid in your old age,” Aron Montamous said, popping out from behind the tall prefect.

“Yeah, and in the sake of keeping things interested we’re going to encourage your paranoia,” Asher Montamous said as he leaned against Daire’s other side, brandishing a packet of papers in the air. “You see this?”

Daire scowled. “What—,” he started, but the twins interrupted him.

“These are official papers that have been *borrowed* from Director Eastgate. They detail the new library hierarchy since Raven’s position has been added,” Aron said as Asher ruffled through the papers.

“Why look, it’s the library staff roster,” Asher said.

“Here you are, just ahead of the rest of us page turners. Not a bad deal for an 18-year-old, right?” Aron said, patting Daire on the back.

“Oh, but what’s this? Where is Raven in the library hierarchy?” Asher cried in false anxiety.

“Here she is, *right below the director*,” Aron said, pointing to Raven’s name.

“Oh yes, Raven Wishmore: Administrative Assistant. Hmm. She’s only 16-years-old and she’s already in upper management,” Asher said, scratching the back of his neck.

“Oh wow. If anyone wants to speak to Director Eastgate they’ll have to talk to *Raven* first,” Aron said. “After all, she is his assistant.”

“This would **really suck** for you if you had made a habit of yelling at Raven, running her out of the library, and being a general jerk to her,” Asher supposed.

“Are you two finished?” Daire growled, shaking the twins off him.

“Almost,” Aron said as he and Asher moved to stand with Raven. “Your sense of style is misguided. You dress like you’re 30, not 18. Okay, now we’re done.”

Daire glared at the trio before he stormed away, banging the doors of the meeting room open as he stormed out.

“You guys really enjoyed that didn’t you?” Raven asked, reaching for the packet Asher still clutched.

“Every second of it.” Aron said.

“Work is going to be so *sweet* for the next year. It’s almost a shame he and Jeremiah are graduating this summer,” Asher said, releasing the papers.

“It will be the end of a dictatorship. A little one anyway, the big tyrant will still be in office, but at least we have Raven to plead our case,” Aron said, resting an elbow on Raven’s shoulder.

“We have a second page turner in training now?” Raven asked, studying the staff roster.

Asher knocked Aron’s elbow off Raven and casually tossed his arm over her shoulders. “What?”

Raven pointed to the two names listed below the employed page turners. “William is back, along with Violet Rockette.”

“Oh yeah. So Director Eastgate pushed William’s internship back until this semester. He’s ponying up with the other kid we had signed up for this training stretch, the Violet girl,” Aron said, snapping his fingers.

“Mrs. Connors paraded them through the library yesterday. You missed it since you were in a meeting. I hope these meetings aren’t going to be a bad habit of yours,” Asher said, eyeing Raven.

“Both Violet and William were here?” Raven asked.

“Yeah, not like you could tell though. They were dead silent and scared stiff. I think the girl might have more pluck than William, but Daire will do his best to stamp that out of her as quickly as possible. That’s kinda his thing,” Aron said.

“I see,” Raven said.

“Miss Wishmore.”

Raven looked up to see the city guiser approaching her, a sparkling smile on his lips, his gait rolling and almost liquid.

“Allow me to—herck,” the city guiser choked Director Eastgate grabbed him by the back of his suit coat and yanked him back three steps.

“Stanley, how good of you to attend our library information meeting. Uninvited,” Director Eastgate said, his voice was the icy roar of the arctic wind.

“Hah-hah, Eastgate you old fox. I knew you meant to invite me, you just forgot to,” the city guiser said.

“Clearly that is why I barred you from this meeting. It is just as well the guardians will no longer be patrolling the library, their work is subpar if they allowed you inside,” Director Eastgate said.

The city guiser attempted to lurch forward. “As I was saying, Miss Wishmore—,”

“This is Stanley Whalberg, city guiser and known loafer. You will not see him often,” Director Eastgate said.

For the first time since Raven saw him, the city guiser frowned. “Yeah, Stanley Whalberg, but I go by the name Lee.”

“What a shame. Stanley suits you so much better, Stanley,” the director said.

Raven and the twins watched the interchange, taking small steps backwards.

“If the director didn’t scare the crap out of me, I would ask him if we could apprentice with him,” Asher whispered to Raven.

Stanley Whalberg rolled his eyes before he addressed Raven again. “It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Miss Wishmore. I’ve heard so much about you.”

“If you stalk my administrative assistant I will take legal action, Stanley,” Director Eastgate said as he looked at the far side of the room.

“Put a sock in it Eastgate,” Stanley Whalberg said before smiling at Raven. “I am intrigued by your new position in the library.”

“Oh?” Raven uneasily said.

“Yes. Your background and the familiarity you have with the staff are unusual,” Stanley Whalberg said, gesturing to Raven and the twins.

Under Director’s judging eyes, Asher guiltily slid his arm off Raven’s shoulders. While all the library staff members knew Raven Wishmore was once known as Rachel McCellen, no one outside the library was supposed to know. The director had delivered an incredibly effective minute long speech, warning staff members to keep this fact a secret from the city.

“Asher and Aron have been extremely welcoming,” Raven said.

“I see. But how does that—,” Stanley Whalberg said before he was cut off by the short but formidable Mrs. Connors.

“Stanley Whalberg, you still have a fine of \$3.35 on your card. Did you ever find that book you claimed you returned before we shut down circulation activities?” Mrs. Connors asked, dressed in the day’s color—pink.

“Ah, no ma’am,” Stanley said, losing steam.

“Then why haven’t you come in to pay your overdue fine? You aren’t feeling *guilty*, are you Stanley? I see your wife every other week—she enjoys our subscription to *House Magical*. She particularly likes it when it has information on organization and cleaning short cuts,” Mrs. Connors said, folding her flabby arms in front of her chest.

“Ah, she does like a clean house,” Stanley sheepishly laughed.

Raven was so absorbed by the sight of the short reference library plowing over one of the city's top officials that she almost missed her cue. Director Eastgate was discreetly flapping his hand in a sign for her to leave.

Raven grabbed Asher by his shirt sleeve and dragged him away, figuring his twin would trail after.

"Do we have to go?" Asher complained, pitching his voice so only Raven and his brother would hear.

"Yeah, do we have to?" Aron said in an almost perfect imitation of Asher.

Raven didn't stop moving until they safely exited the meeting room and entered the lower floor of Saint Cloud. She took a breath as she looked out over the computers. "My first official city meeting is finished."

"Yep, you did great," Asher said.

"Magnificent," Aron added. "Being a black dog spy has done wonders for your career. What?" he innocently asked when Raven gave him a look.

"Very funny, Aron," Raven dryly said.

"So. It seems like a lot is going to change now," Asher said, staring at the library computers.

"Yeah, you aren't our classmate now," Aron said.

"And you're our boss. Sort of."

"Yes, but the people haven't changed. Daire still hates me and Royce still turns green whenever I enter the room. I'm still hiding, sort of. Now I'm just trying to keep people from equating me with Rachel instead of hiding my name though," Raven paused and shook her head. "But being an administrative assistant? Here? I didn't think I would ever come back to Saint Cloud."

"Do you think you're up to the challenge?" Asher asked.

Raven tightened her grip on her clipboard. "I guess we'll find out."