

Shade of Gray

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After her mother, Carmelita Fox, disappears, Montoya decides to find her by any means necessary. On the way, she learns a good deal about thieving and a secret hidden since her birth.

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1 - Disappear

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She's dead, isn't she?" Montoya Fox asked, as she let Captain Towe of INTERPOL into her house.

"We don't know that yet. Inspector Fox is missing, that's all," Towe replied, placing his hand on Montoya's shoulder. With his free hand, he held something out. It was Carmelita's collar, a Fox family heirloom. "This was all we found."

Montoya gently took the collar from Captain Towe and turned away from him. She whispered, barely audible to the Captain, "I'm going to find her."

"Montoya, That's crazy! If you try that, you're on your own."

" I'll find help! I don't know how, but I'll find help." Montoya retaliated. Towe just shook his head and walked out the door, leaving the saddened teenager alone.

Montoya slumped down on her bed, crying. If she didn't find her mother, she'd be alone in this world. Her father had died months before she was born, and was never discussed by Carmelita, no matter how much Montoya pleaded. Montoya's sobs were only interrupted for a few moments when a package was dropped on her bed with a soft thud. The fifteen-year-old read the short letter attached to the box first:

Montoya- These items were left in my possession almost sixteen years ago. Study diligently and use what you learn wisely.

Montoya opened the box carefully, pulling out the contents one by one. The first was a cane, with a golden crook at the top. The next was a thick, ancient, leather bound book, with the words *Thevius Raccoonus* written at the top, and a picture of a raccoon beneath it. The next object was a belt buckle, exactly identical to the emblem on the book. The final items were a pair of navy blue gloves and a simple black eye mask.

Montoya put on the gloves, mask and buckle and took a look in the mirror. Her amber eyes were now framed in black, but other wise she looked the same as she did before. She had long, wild blue hair like her mother, and reddish-gray fur covered her body. Her tail was ringed, with the same color fur on her body and black. The fur around her mouth and on her belly was cream. Pointy, fox-like ears sat on the sides of her head rather than on top. She was definitely a hybrid, fox and raccoon. That was really all she knew about her father-that he was a raccoon.

The hybrid lay down on her bed and opened the *Thevius Raccoonus*. As she read, she began to think. She was half raccoon, and the Coopers were a line of great raccoon thieves. Could she be related to one of them? Why else would she have received the book, which she had read was only given to those

with the Cooper bloodline?