
THE LAST HOURS

BOOK ONE

Chain of Gold

CASSANDRA CLARE

Margaret K. McElderry Books

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

MARGARET K. McELDERRY BOOKS

An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020

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Interior design by Mike Rosamilia

Jacket design by Nick Sciacca

The text for this book was set in Dolly.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Edition

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Clare, Cassandra, author.

Title: Chain of gold / Cassandra Clare.

Description: First edition. | New York : Margaret K. McElderry Books, [2020] |

Series: The last hours ; book 1 | Audience: Ages 14 up. | Audience: Grades 10–12. |

Summary: Cordelia Carstairs, a Shadowhunter trained to battle demons, travels with her brother to London where they reconnect with childhood friends but soon must face devastating demon attacks in the quarantined city.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019032235 (print) | LCCN 2019032236 (eBook) |

ISBN 9781481431873 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781481431897 (eBook)

Subjects: CYAC: Supernatural—Fiction. | Demonology—Fiction. | Magic—Fiction. | Brothers and sisters—Fiction. | Friendship—Fiction. | London (England)—History—20th century—Fiction. | Great Britain—History—Edward VII, 1901–1910—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.C5265 Ch 2020 (print) | LCC PZ7.C5265 (eBook) | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019032235>

LC eBook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019032236>

For Clary (the real one)

Chain of Gold

PART ONE



That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.

—Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

DAYS PAST: 1897

Lucie Herondale was ten years old when she first met the boy in the forest.

Growing up in London, Lucie had never imagined a place like Brocelind. The forest surrounded Herondale Manor on all sides, its trees bent together at the tops like cautious whisperers: dark green in the summer, burnished gold in the fall. The carpeting of moss underfoot was so green and soft that her father told her it was a pillow for faeries at night, and that the white stars of the flowers that grew only in the hidden country of Idris made bracelets and rings for their delicate hands.

James, of course, told her that faeries didn't have pillows, they slept underground and they stole away naughty little girls in their sleep. Lucie stepped on his foot, which meant that Papa swept her up and carried her back to the house before a fight could erupt. James came from the ancient and noble line of Herondale, but that didn't mean he was above pulling his little sister's plaits if the need arose.

Late one night the brightness of the moon woke Lucie. It was pouring into her room like milk, laying white bars of light over her bed and across the polished wood floor.

She slipped out of bed and climbed through the window, dropping lightly to the flower bed underneath. It was a summer night and she was warm in her nightdress.

The edge of the forest, just past the stables where their horses were kept, seemed to glow. She flitted toward it like a small ghost. Her slippered feet barely disturbed the moss as she slid in between the trees.

She amused herself at first by making chains of flowers and hanging them from branches. After that she pretended she was Snow White fleeing from the huntsman. She would run through the tangled trees and then turn dramatically and gasp, putting the back of her hand to her forehead. “You will never slay *me*,” she said. “For I am of royal blood and will one day be queen and twice as powerful as my stepmother. And I shall cut off her head.”

It was possible, she thought later, that she had not remembered the story of Snow White entirely correctly.

Still, it was very enjoyable, and it was on her fourth or fifth sprint through the woods that she realized she was lost. She could no longer see the familiar shape of Herondale Manor through the trees.

She spun around in a panic. The forest no longer seemed magical. Instead the trees loomed above like threatening ghosts. She thought she could hear the chatter of unearthly voices through the rustle of leaves. The clouds had come out and covered the moon. She was alone in the dark.

Lucie was brave, but she was only ten. She gave a little sob and began to run in what she thought was the right direction. But the forest only grew darker, the thorns more tangled. One caught at her nightdress and ripped a long tear in the fabric. She stumbled—

And fell. It felt like Alice’s fall into Wonderland, though it was much shorter than that. She tumbled head over heels and hit a layer of hard-packed dirt.

With a whimper, she sat up. She was lying at the bottom of a cir-

cular hole that had been dug into the earth. The sides were smooth and rose several feet above the reach of her arms.

She tried digging her hands into the dirt that rose on every side of her and climbing up it the way she might shinny up a tree. But the earth was soft and crumbled away in her fingers. After the fifth time she'd tumbled from the side of the pit, she spied something white gleaming from the sheer side of the dirt wall. Hoping it was a root she could climb up, she bounded toward it and reached to grasp it. . . .

Soil fell away from it. It wasn't a root at all but a white bone, and not an animal's . . .

"Don't scream," said a voice above her. "It'll bring them."

She threw her head back and stared. Leaning down over the side of the pit was a boy. Older than her brother, James—maybe even sixteen years old. He had a lovely melancholy face and straight black hair without a hint of curl. The ends of his hair almost touched the collar of his shirt.

"Bring who?" Lucie put her fists on her hips.

"The faeries," he said. "This is one of their pit traps. They usually use them to catch animals, but they'd be very pleased to find a little girl instead."

Lucie gasped. "You mean they'd eat me?"

He laughed. "Unlikely, though you could find yourself serving faerie gentry in the Land Under the Hill for the rest of your life. Never to see your family again."

He wiggled his eyebrows at her.

"Don't try to scare me," she said.

"I assure you, I speak only the perfect truth," he said. "Even the imperfect truth is beneath me."

"Don't be silly, either," she said. "I am Lucie Herondale. My father is Will Herondale and a very important person. If you rescue me, you will be rewarded."

"A Herondale?" he said. "Just my luck." He sighed and wriggled closer to the edge of the pit, reaching his arm down. A scar gleamed on the back of his right hand—a bad one, as if he had burned himself. "Up you go."

She grasped his wrist with both her hands and he hauled her up with surprising strength. A moment later they were both standing. Lucie could see more of him now. He was older than she'd thought, and formally dressed in white and black. The moon was out again and she could see that his eyes were the color of the green moss on the forest floor.

"Thank you," she said, rather primly. She brushed at her night-dress. It was quite ruined with dirt.

"Come along, now," he said, his voice gentle. "Don't be frightened. What shall we talk about? Do you like stories?"

"I love stories," said Lucie. "When I grow up, I am going to be a famous writer."

"That sounds wonderful," said the boy. There was something wistful about his tone.

They walked together through the paths under the trees. He seemed to know where he was going, as if the forest was very familiar to him. He must be a changeling, Lucie thought wisely. He knew a great deal about faeries, but was clearly not one of them: he had warned her about being stolen away by the Fair Folk, which must be what had happened to him. She would not mention it and make him feel awkward; it must be dreadful to be a changeling, and to be taken far away from your family. Instead she engaged him in a discussion about princesses in fairy tales, and which one was the best. It hardly seemed any time at all before they were back in the garden of Herondale Manor.

"I imagine this princess can make her own way back into the castle from here," he said with a bow.

"Oh, yes," said Lucie, eyeing her window. "Do you think they'll know I was gone?"

He laughed and turned to go. She called after him when he reached the gates.

“What’s your name?” she said. “I told you mine. What’s yours?”

He hesitated for a moment. He was all white and black in the night, like an illustration from one of her books. He swept a bow, low and graceful, the kind knights had once made.

“You will never slay *me*,” he said. “For I am of royal blood and will one day be twice as powerful as the queen. And I shall cut off her head.”

Lucie gave an outraged gasp. Had he been listening to her, in the woods, playing her game? How dare he make fun of her! She raised a fist, meaning to shake it at him, but he had already vanished into the night, leaving only the sound of his laughter behind.

It would be six years before she saw him again.

I

BETTER ANGELS

The shadows of our own desires stand between us and our better angels, and thus their brightness is eclipsed.

—Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*

James Herondale was in the middle of fighting a demon when he was suddenly pulled into Hell.

It wasn't the first time it had happened, and it wouldn't be the last. Moments earlier he had been kneeling at the edge of a slanted roof in central London, a slim throwing knife in each hand, thinking about how disgusting the detritus that collected in the city was. In addition to dirt, empty gin bottles, and animal bones, there was definitely a dead bird wedged into the rain gutter just below his left knee.

How glamorous the life of a Shadowhunter was, indeed. It *sounded* good, he thought, gazing down at the empty alley below him: a narrow space choked with rubbish, lit dimly by the half-moon overhead. A special race of warriors, descended from an angel, gifted with powers that allowed them to wield weapons of shining *adamas* and to bear the black Marks of holy runes on their bodies—runes that made them stronger, faster, more deadly than

any mundane human; runes that made them burn brightly in the dark. No one ever mentioned things like accidentally kneeling on a dead bird while waiting for a demon to turn up.

A yell echoed down the alley. A sound James knew well: Matthew Fairchild's voice. He launched himself off the roof without a moment's hesitation. Matthew Fairchild was his *parabatai*—his blood brother and warrior partner. James was sworn to protect him, not that it mattered: he would have given his life for Matthew's, vows or not.

Movement flashed at the end of the alley, where it curved behind a narrow row of houses. James spun as a demon emerged from the shadows, roaring. It had a ribbed gray body, a curving, sharp beak lined with hooked teeth, and splayed paw-like feet from which ragged claws protruded. A *Deumas demon*, James thought grimly. He definitely remembered reading about Deumas demons in one of the old books his uncle Jem had given him. They were meant to be notable in some way. Extremely vicious, perhaps, or unusually dangerous? That would be typical, wouldn't it—all these months of not running across any infernal activity at all, and he and his friends happened on one of the most dangerous demons out there.

Speaking of which—where *were* his friends?

The Deumas roared again and lurched toward James, drool spilling from its mouth in long strings of greenish slime.

James swung his arm back, ready to throw his first knife. The demon's eyes fixed on him for a moment. They were coruscating, green and black, filled with a hate that turned suddenly into something else.

Something like recognition. But demons, at least the lesser kind, didn't recognize people. They were vicious animals driven by pure greed and hatred. As James hesitated in surprise, the ground under him seemed to lurch. He had only a moment to think, *Oh no, not now*, before the world went gray and silent. The buildings

around him had turned to ragged shadow, the sky a black cave speared with white lightning.

He closed his right hand around his knife—not the handle, but the blade. The jolt of pain was like a slap to the face, snapping him out of a stupor. The world came rushing back at him in all its noise and color. He barely had time to register that the Deumas was in midair, claws extended toward him, when a swirl of cords whipped through the sky, entangling the demon's leg and yanking it backward.

Thomas! James thought, and indeed, his massively tall friend had appeared behind the Deumas, armed with his *bolas*. Behind him was Christopher, armed with a bow, and Matthew, a seraph blade blazing in his hand.

The Deumas hit the ground with another roar, just as James let both his knives fly. One plunged into the demon's throat, the other into its forehead. Its eyes rolled back, it spasmed, and James suddenly remembered what it was he'd read about Deumas demons.

"Matthew—" he began, just as the creature burst apart, showering Thomas, Christopher, and Matthew in ichor and burnt bits of what could only be described as goo.

Messy, James recalled belatedly. Deumas demons were notably messy. Most demons vanished when they died. Not Deumas demons.

They exploded.

"How—wha—?" Christopher stuttered, at a clear loss for words. Slime dripped off his pointed nose and gold-rimmed spectacles. "But how . . . ?"

"Do you mean how is it possible that we finally tracked down the last demon in London and it was also the most disgusting?" James was surprised by how normal his voice sounded: he was already shaking off the shock of his glimpse into the shadow realm. At least his clothes were untouched: the demon seemed to have exploded mostly over the other end of the alley. "Ours is not to question why, Christopher."

James had a feeling his friends were gazing at him resentfully. Thomas rolled his eyes. He was scrubbing at himself with a handkerchief that was also half-burnt and covered in ichor, so it was doing little good.

Matthew's seraph blade had begun to sputter. Seraph blades, infused with the energy of angels, were often a Shadowhunter's most trusted weapon and best defense against demons, but it was still possible to drown one in enough ichor. "This is an outrage," Matthew said, tossing the extinguished blade aside. "Do you know how much I spent on this waistcoat?"

"No one told you to go out patrolling for demons dressed like an extra from *The Importance of Being Earnest*," said James, tossing him a clean handkerchief. As he did, he felt his hand sting. There was a bloody cut across his palm from the blade of the knife. He closed his hand into a fist to prevent his companions from seeing it.

"I don't think he's dressed like an extra," said Thomas, who had turned his attention to cleaning off Christopher.

"Thank you," said Matthew with a slight bow.

"I think he's dressed like a main character." Thomas grinned. He had one of the kindest faces James had ever known, and gentle hazel eyes. None of which meant he didn't enjoy mocking his friends.

Matthew mopped at his dull gold hair with James's handkerchief. "This is the first time in a year that we've patrolled and actually found a demon, so I'd supposed that my waistcoat would probably survive the evening. It's not as if any of you are wearing gear either."

It was true that Shadowhunters usually hunted in gear, a sort of flexible armor made of a tough, leatherlike black material resistant to ichor, blades, and the like, but a lack of reliable demonic presence on the streets had made them all a bit lax about rules.

"Stop scrubbing at me, Thomas," said Christopher, windmilling his arms. "We should go back to the Devil and clean up there."

There was a murmur of assent among the group. As they picked their sticky way back to the main street, James considered the fact that Matthew was right. James's father, Will, had often told him about the patrols he used to do with his *parabatai*, Jem Carstairs—now James's uncle Jem—back when they had battled demons nearly every night.

James and other young Shadowhunters still faithfully patrolled the streets of London, seeking out demons that might harm the mundane population, but in the last few years demon appearances had been few and far between. It was a good thing—of course it was a good thing—but still. It was decidedly odd. Demon activity was still normal as far as the rest of the world was concerned, so what made London special?

There were plenty of mundanes out and about on the streets of the city, though the hour was late. None glanced at the bedraggled group of Shadowhunters as they made their way down Fleet Street; their glamour runes made them invisible to all eyes not gifted with the Sight.

It was always strange to be surrounded by a humanity that did not see you, James thought. Fleet Street was home to the newspaper offices and law courts of London, and everywhere were brightly lit pubs, with print workers and barristers and law clerks, who kept late hours, drinking into the dawn light. The Strand nearby had spilled the contents of its music halls and theaters, and well-dressed groups of young people, laughing and boisterous, chased the last omnibuses of the night.

The bobbies were out working their beats too, and those denizens of London unfortunate enough to have no homes to go to crouched muttering around cellar vents that sent up drifts of warm air—even in August the nights could be damp and chilly. As they passed a group of such huddled figures, one looked up, and James caught a glimpse of the pale skin and glittering eyes of a vampire.

He looked away. Downworlders weren't his business unless they were breaking Clave Law. And he was tired, despite his energy Marks: it always drained him to be dragged into that other world of gray light and black ragged shadows. It was something that had been happening to him for years: a remnant, he knew, of his mother's warlock blood.

Warlocks were the offspring of humans and demons: capable of using magic but not of bearing runes or using *adamas*, the clear crystalline metal from which steles and seraph blades were carved. They were one of the four branches of Downworlders, along with vampires, werewolves, and the fey. James's mother, Tessa Herondale, was such a warlock, but her mother had been not just human but a Shadowhunter. Tessa herself had once possessed the power to shapeshift and take on the appearance of anyone, living or dead: a power no other warlock had. She was unusual in one other way as well: warlocks could not have children. Tessa was an exception. Everyone had wondered what this would mean for James and his sister, Lucie, the first-ever known grandchildren of a demon and a human being.

For many years, it appeared to have meant nothing. Both James and Lucie could bear Marks and seemed to have the abilities of any other Shadowhunter. They could both see ghosts—like the Institute's chatty phantom-in-residence, Jessamine—but that was not uncommon in the Herondale family. It seemed they might both be blessedly normal, or at least as normal as a Shadowhunter could be. Even the Clave—the governing body of all Shadowhunters—had seemed to forget about them.

Then, when James was thirteen, he first traveled into the shadow realm. One moment he had been standing on green grass: the next, charred earth. A similarly scorched sky arced above him. Twisted trees emerged from the ground, ragged claws grasping at the air. He had seen such places in woodcuts in old books. He knew what he was looking at: a demon world. A hell dimension.

Moments later he had been jerked back to earth, but his life had never been the same again. For years the fear had been there that he might at any moment hurtle back into shadow. It was as if an invisible rope connected him to a world of demons, and at any moment the rope could be pulled taut, snatching him out of his familiar environment and into a place of fire and ash.

For the last few years, with his uncle Jem's help, he'd thought he had it under control. Though it had been only a few seconds, tonight had shaken him, and he was relieved when the Devil Tavern appeared before them.

The Devil made its home at No. 2 Fleet Street, next to a respectable-looking print shop. Unlike the shop, it was glamoured so that no mundanes could see it or hear the raucous noises of debauchery that poured from the windows and the open doors. It was half-timbered in the Tudor style, the old wood ratty and splintering, kept from falling down by warlocks' spells. Behind the bar, werewolf owner Ernie pulled pints: the crowd was a mix of pixies and vampires and lycanthropes and warlocks.

The usual welcome for Shadowhunters in a place like this would have been a cold one, but the patrons of the Devil Tavern were used to the boys. They greeted James, Christopher, Matthew, and Thomas with yells of welcome and mockery. James stayed in the pub to collect drinks from Polly, the barmaid, while the others tramped upstairs to their rooms, shedding ichor on the steps as they went.

Polly was a werewolf, and had taken the boys under her wing when James had first rented out the attic rooms three years ago, wanting a private bolt-hole he and his friends could retreat to where their parents wouldn't be hovering. She was the one who'd first taken to calling them the Merry Thieves, after Robin Hood and his men. James suspected he was Robin of Locksley and Matthew was Will Scarlett. Thomas was definitely Little John.

Polly chuckled. “Almost didn’t recognize the lot of you when you tramped in here covered in whatever-you-call-it.”

“Ichor,” said James, accepting a bottle of hock. “It’s demon blood.”

Polly wrinkled her nose, draping several worn-looking dishcloths over his shoulder. She handed him an extra one, which he pressed against the cut on his hand. It had stopped bleeding but still throbbed. “Blimey.”

“It’s been ages since we’ve even seen a demon in London,” said James. “We may not have been as swift with our reaction time as we ought.”

“I reckon they’re all too scared to show their faces,” said Polly companionably, turning away to fetch a glass of gin for Pickles, the resident kelpie.

“Scared?” James echoed, pausing. “Scared of what?”

Polly started. “Oh, nothing, nothing,” she said, and hurried away to the other end of the bar. With a frown, James made his way upstairs. The ways of Downworlders were sometimes mysterious.

Two flights of creaking steps led to a wooden door on which a line had been carved years ago: *It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. S.J.*

James shouldered the door open and found Matthew and Thomas already sprawled around a circular table in the middle of a wood-paneled room. Several windows, their glass bumpy and pocked with age, looked out upon Fleet Street, lit by intermittent streetlamps, and the Royal Courts of Justice across the way, dimly sketched against the cloudy night.

The room was a fond and familiar place, with worn walls, a collection of ragged furniture, and a low fire burning in the grate. Over the fireplace was a marble bust of Apollo, his nose chipped off long ago. The walls were lined with occult books written by mundane magicians: the library at the Institute didn’t allow such

things, but James collected them. He was fascinated by the idea of those who had not been born to the world of magic and shadows and yet yearned for them so strongly that they had learned how to pry open the gates.

Both Thomas and Matthew were free of ichor, wearing wrinkled but clean clothes, their hair—Thomas's sandy brown and Matthew's dark gold—still damp. "James!" Matthew cheered upon seeing his friend. His eyes were suspiciously bright; there was already a half-drunk bottle of brandy on the table. "Is that a bottle of cheap spirits I see before me?"

James set the wine down on the table just as Christopher emerged from the small bedroom at the far end of the attic space. The bedroom had been there before they had taken over the space: there was still a bed in it, but none of the Merry Thieves used it for anything besides washing up and storing weapons and changes of clothes.

"James," Christopher said, looking pleased. "I thought you'd gone home."

"Why on earth would I go home?" James took a seat beside Matthew and tossed Polly's dish towels onto the table.

"No idea," said Christopher cheerfully, pulling up a chair. "But you might have. People do odd things all the time. We had a cook who went to do the shopping and was found two weeks later in Regent's Park. She'd become a zookeeper."

Thomas raised his eyebrows. James and the rest of the group were never sure whether to entirely believe Christopher's stories. Not that he was a liar, but when it came to anything that wasn't beakers and test tubes, he tended to be paying only a fraction of attention.

Christopher was the son of James's aunt Cecily and uncle Gabriel. He had the fine bone structure of his parents, dark brown hair, and eyes that could only be described as the color of lilacs.

“Wasted on a boy!” Cecily said often, with a martyred sigh. Christopher ought to have been popular with girls, but the thick spectacles he wore obscured most of his face, and he had gunpowder perpetually embedded under his fingernails. Most Shadowhunters regarded mundane guns with suspicion or disinterest—the application of runes to metal or bullets prevented gunpowder from igniting, and non-runed weapons were useless against demons. Christopher, however, was obsessed with the idea that he could adapt incendiary weapons to Nephilim purposes. James had to admit that the idea of mounting a cannon on the roof of the Institute had a certain appeal.

“Your hand,” Matthew said suddenly, leaning forward and fixing his green eyes on James. “What happened?”

“Just a cut,” James said, opening his hand. The wound was a long diagonal slice across his palm. As Matthew took James’s hand, the silver bracelet that James always wore on his right wrist clinked against the hock bottle on the table. “You should have told me,” Matthew said, reaching into his waistcoat for his stele. “I would have fixed you up in the alley.”

“I forgot,” James said.

Thomas, who was running his finger around the rim of his own glass without drinking, said, “Did something happen?”

Thomas was annoyingly perceptive. “It was very quick,” James said, with some reluctance.

“Many things that are ‘very quick’ are also very bad,” said Matthew, setting the point of his stele to James’s skin. “Guillotines come down very quickly, for instance. When Christopher’s experiments explode, they often explode very quickly.”

“Clearly, I have neither exploded nor been guillotined,” said James. “I—went into the shadow realm.”

Matthew’s head jerked up, though his hand remained steady as the *iratze*, a healing rune, took shape on James’s skin. James could

feel the pain in his hand begin to subside. “I thought all that business had stopped,” Matthew said. “I thought Jem had helped you.”

“He did help me. It’s been a year since the last time.” James shook his head. “I suppose it was too much to hope it was gone forever.”

“Doesn’t it usually happen when you’re upset?” said Thomas. “Was it the demon attacking?”

“No,” James said quickly. “No, I can’t imagine—no.” James had been almost looking forward to the fight. It had been a frustrating summer, the first one in over a decade that he hadn’t spent with his family in Idris.

Idris was located in central Europe. Warded all around, it was an unspoiled country, hidden from mundane eyes and mundane inventions: a place without railroads, factories, or coal smoke. James knew why his family couldn’t go this year, but he had his own reasons for wishing he were there instead of London. Patrolling had been one of his few distractions.

“Demons don’t bother our boy,” said Matthew, finishing the healing rune. This close to his *parabatai*, James could smell the familiar scent of Matthew’s soap mixed with alcohol. “It must have been something else.”

“You ought to talk to your uncle, then, Jamie,” said Thomas.

James shook his head. He didn’t want to bother Uncle Jem about what felt now like a moment-long flicker. “It was nothing. I was surprised by the demon; I grabbed at the blade by accident. I’m sure that’s what caused it.”

“Did you turn into a shadow?” said Matthew, putting his stele away. Sometimes, when James was pulled into the shadow realm, his friends reported that they could see him blurring around the edges. On some occasions, he’d turned entirely into a dark shadow—James-shaped, but transparent and incorporeal.

A few times—a very few times—he’d been able to turn himself

into a shadow to pass through something solid. But he didn't wish to speak about those times.

Christopher looked up from his notebook. "Speaking of the demon—"

"Which we weren't," Matthew pointed out.

"—what kind was it again?" Christopher asked, biting the end of his pen. He often wrote down details of their demon-fighting expeditions. He claimed it helped him in his research. "The one that exploded, I mean."

"As opposed to the one that didn't?" said James.

Thomas, who had an excellent memory for detail, said: "It was a Deumas, Christopher. Odd it was here; they're not usually found in cities."

"I saved some of its ichor," said Christopher, producing from somewhere on his person a corked test tube full of a greenish substance. "I caution all of you not to drink any of it."

"I can assure you we had no plans to do any such thing, you daft boot," said Thomas.

Matthew shuddered. "Enough talk of ichor. Let's toast again to Thomas being home!"

Thomas protested. James raised his glass and toasted with Matthew. Christopher was about to clink his test tube against James's glass when Matthew, muttering imprecations, confiscated it and handed Christopher a glass of hock instead.

Thomas, despite his objections, looked pleased. Most Shadow-hunters went on a sort of grand tour when they turned eighteen, leaving their home Institute for one abroad; Thomas had only just returned from nine months in Madrid a few weeks ago. The point of the travel was to learn new customs and broaden one's horizons: Thomas had certainly broadened, though mostly in the physical sense.

Though the oldest of their group, Thomas had been slight in

stature. When James, Matthew, and Christopher arrived at the dock to meet his ship from Spain, they combed through the crowds, nearly failing to recognize their friend in the muscular young man descending the gangplank. Thomas was the tallest of them now, tanned as if he'd grown up on a farm instead of in London. He could wield a broadsword in one hand, and in Spain he had adopted a new weapon, the *bolas*, made of stout ropes and weights that whirled over his head. Matthew often said it was like being comrades with a friendly giant.

"When you're entirely done, I do have some news," Thomas said, tipping his chair back. "You know that old manor in Chiswick that once belonged to my grandfather? Used to be called Lightwood House? It was given to my aunt Tatiana by the Clave some years ago, but she's never used it—preferred to stay in Idris at the manor with my cousin, er . . ."

"Gertrude," said Christopher helpfully.

"Grace," James said. "Her name is Grace."

She was Christopher's cousin too, though James knew they had never met her.

"Yes, Grace," agreed Thomas. "Aunt Tatiana's always kept them both in splendid isolation in Idris—no visitors and all that—but apparently she's decided to move back to London, so my parents are all in a dither about it."

James's heart gave a slow, hard thump. "Grace," he began, and saw Matthew shoot him a quick sideways glance. "Grace—is moving to London?"

"Seems Tatiana wants to bring her out in society." Thomas looked puzzled. "I suppose you've met her, in Idris? Doesn't your house there adjoin Blackthorn Manor?"

James nodded mechanically. He could feel the weight of the bracelet around his right wrist, though he had worn it now for so many years that usually he was unconscious of its presence.

"I usually see her every summer," he said. "Not this summer, of course."

Not this summer. He hadn't been able to argue with his parents when they'd said the Herondale family would be spending this summer in London. Hadn't been able to mention the reason he wanted to return to Idris. After all, as far as they were aware, he barely even knew Grace. The sickness, the horror that gripped him at the thought that he would not see her for another year was nothing he could explain.

It was a secret he had carried since he was thirteen. In his mind, he could see the tall gates rising before Blackthorn Manor, and his own hands in front of him—a child's hands, without scars, cutting industriously away at the thorny vines. He could see the Long Hall in the manor, and the curtains blowing across the windows, and hear music. He could see Grace in her ivory dress.

Matthew was watching him with thoughtful green eyes that were no longer dancing. Matthew, alone of all James's friends, knew that there was a connection between James and Grace Blackthorn.

"London is being positively swarmed by new arrivals," Matthew remarked. "The Carstairs family will be with us soon, won't they?"

James nodded. "Lucie is wild with excitement to see Cordelia."

Matthew poured more wine into his glass. "Can't blame them for being tired of rustivating in Devon—what's that house of theirs called? Cirenworth? I gather they arrive in a day or two—"

Thomas upset his drink. James's drink and Christopher's test tube went with it. Thomas was still growing accustomed to occupying so much space in the world, and he sometimes proved clumsy.

"All of the Carstairs family are coming, did you say?" said Thomas.

"Not Elias Carstairs," said Matthew. Elias was Cordelia's father. "But Cordelia, and of course . . ." He trailed off meaningfully.

"Oh, bloody hell," said Christopher. "Alastair Carstairs." He

looked vaguely ill. "I'm not remembering incorrectly? He's an awful pill?"

"'Awful pill' seems a kind way of putting it," said James. Thomas was mopping up his drink; James looked at him with concern. Thomas had been a shy, small boy at school, and Alastair a rotten bully. "We can avoid Alastair, Tom. There's no reason for us to spend time with him, and I can't imagine he'll be yearning for our society either."

Thomas spluttered, but not in response to what James had said. The contents of Christopher's spilled test tube had turned a violent puce and begun to eat through the table. They all leaped up to grab for Polly's dish towels. Thomas hurled a pitcher of water at the table, which drenched Christopher, and Matthew doubled over laughing.

"I say," said Christopher, mopping wet hair out of his eyes. "I do think that worked, Tom. The acid has been neutralized."

Thomas was shaking his head. "Someone should neutralize you, you mopstick—"

Matthew collapsed in hysterics.

In the midst of the chaos, James could not help feeling very far away from it all. For so many years, in so many hundreds of secret letters between London and Idris, he and Grace had sworn to each other that one day they would be together; that one day when they were adults, they would marry, whether their parents wished it or not, and live together in London. It had always been their dream.

So why hadn't she told him she was coming?

"Oh, look! The Royal Albert Hall!" Cordelia cried, pressing her nose against the window of the carriage. It was a brilliant day, bright sunlight streaming down over London, making the sparkling white row houses of South Kensington glow like rows of

ivory soldiers in an expensive chess set. “London really does have marvelous architecture.”

“A shrewd observation,” drawled her older brother, Alastair, who was ostentatiously reading a book on sums in the corner of the carriage, as if to announce that he couldn’t be bothered to glance out the window. “I’m sure no one has ever commented on London’s buildings before.”

Cordelia glared at him, but he didn’t look up. Couldn’t he tell she was just trying to raise everyone’s spirits? Their mother, Sona, was leaning exhaustedly against the side of the carriage, violet hollows under her eyes, her normally radiant brown skin sallow. Cordelia had been worried about her for weeks now, ever since the news about Father had come to Devon from Idris. “The point, Alastair, is that now we’re here to live, not visit. We’ll meet people, we can entertain visitors, we needn’t stay in the Institute—even though I would like to be near Lucie—”

“And James,” said Alastair, without looking up from his book. Cordelia gritted her teeth.

“Children.” Cordelia’s mother glanced at them reprovingly. Alastair looked resentful—he was one month shy of his nineteenth birthday and, in his mind at least, certainly not a child. “This is serious business. As you well know, we are not in London to amuse ourselves. We are in London on behalf of our family.”

Cordelia exchanged a less hostile look with her brother. She knew he was worried about Sona too, though he never would have admitted it. She wondered for the millionth time how much he knew about the situation with Father. She knew both that it was more than she did, and that he would never speak to her of it.

She felt a little thump of excitement as their carriage pulled up at 102 Cornwall Gardens, one of a row of grand white Victorian houses with the number painted in austere black on the rightmost pillar. There were several figures standing atop the front steps,

beneath the portico. Cordelia instantly recognized Lucie Herondale, a little taller now than she had been the last time Cordelia had seen her. Her light brown hair was caught up under her hat, and her pale blue jacket and skirt matched her eyes.

Beside her stood two figures. One was Lucie's mother, Tessa Herondale, the famous—among Shadowhunters, at any rate—wife of Will Herondale, who ran the London Institute. She looked only a little older than her daughter. Tessa was immortal, a warlock and a shape-shifter, and she did not age.

Next to Tessa was James.

Cordelia remembered, once, when she'd been a small girl, reaching to pet a swan in the pond by her house. The bird had launched itself at her, barreling into her midsection and knocking her down. For several minutes she had lain on the grass, choking and trying to get her breath back, terrified she'd never suck air into her lungs again.

She supposed it was not the most romantic thing in the world to say that every time she saw James Herondale she felt as if she'd been attacked by a waterfowl, but it was true.

He was beautiful, so beautiful that she forgot to breathe when she looked at him. He had wild, tumbled black hair that looked as if it would be soft to touch, and his long, dark lashes fringed eyes the color of honey or amber. Now that he was seventeen, he had grown out of his gawky younger self and was sleek and lovely all over, perfectly put together, like a marvelous bit of architecture.

"Oof!" Her feet hit the ground and she nearly stumbled. Somehow she'd wrenched the carriage door open and was now standing on the pavement—well, wobbling really, as she struggled to keep her balance on legs that had gone to sleep after hours of disuse.

James was there instantly, his hand on her arm, steadying her. "Daisy?" he said. "Are you all right?"

His nickname for her. He hadn't forgotten.

“Just clumsy.” She looked around ruefully. “I was hoping for a more gracious arrival.”

“Nothing to worry about.” He smiled, and her heart turned over. “The pavements of South Kensington are vicious. I’ve been attacked by them more than once myself.”

Make a clever response, she told herself. Say something witty.

But he had already turned away, inclining his head toward Alastair. James and Alastair had not liked each other at school, Cordelia knew, though her mother did not. Sona thought Alastair had been very popular.

“I see you’re here, Alastair.” James’s voice was curiously flat. “And you look—”

He eyed Alastair’s bright yellow-white hair with some astonishment. Cordelia waited for him to continue, with great hope that he would say *you look like a turnip*, but he didn’t.

“You look well,” he finished.

The boys looked at each other in silence as Lucie raced down the steps and threw her arms around Cordelia. “I am so very, very delighted to see you!” she said, in her breathless way. For Lucie, everything was always very, very, very something, be it beautiful or exciting or horrid. “Darling Cordelia, we shall have so much fun—”

“Lucie, Cordelia and her family have come to London so that you and Cordelia can train together,” said Tessa in her gentle voice. “It will be a great deal of work and responsibility.”

Cordelia glanced down at her shoes. Tessa was being kind in repeating the story that the Carstairs had come to London in a hurry because of Cordelia and Lucie needing to be *parabatai*, but that wasn’t the truth.

“Well, you must remember being sixteen yourself, Mrs. Herondale,” said Sona. “Young girls adore dances and dresses. I certainly did when I was their age, and I imagine you did as well.”

Cordelia knew this was entirely not true about her mother but

kept her mouth shut. Tessa arched her eyebrows. “I do recall attending a vampire frolic once. And some sort of party at Benedict Lightwood’s house, before he got demon pox and turned into a worm, of course—”

“Mother!” Lucie said, scandalized.

“Well, he did turn into a worm,” said James. “Really more of a vicious, giant serpent. It was entirely one of the most interesting parts of history class.”

Tessa was saved further comment by the arrival of the removers’ vans carrying the Carstairs’ belongings. Several large men leaped down from one of the vans and went to pull back the canvas covering the various furniture pieces, which had been fastidiously roped down.

One of the men assisted Risa, Sona’s lady’s maid and cook, down from the first of the vans. Risa had worked for the Jahanshah family when Sona was in her teens and had been with her ever since. She was a mundane who had the Sight, and thus a valuable companion for a Shadowhunter. Risa spoke only Persian; Cordelia wondered whether the men in the van had tried to make conversation with her. Risa understood English perfectly, but she liked her silence.

“Please thank Cecily Lightwood for me, for the loan of her domestic help,” Cordelia’s mother was saying to Tessa.

“Oh, indeed! They will come on Tuesdays and Thursdays to do the rough, until you can find suitable servants of your own,” Tessa replied.

“The rough” was everything Risa—who cooked, shopped, and helped Sona and Cordelia with their clothes—would not be expected to do, like scrubbing the floors or caring for the horses. The idea that the Carstairs were planning to hire their own servants soon was another polite fiction, Cordelia knew. When they left Devon, Sona had let all the servants go, save for Risa, as they were

trying to conserve as much money as possible while Elias Carstairs was awaiting trial.

A large shape on one of the vans caught Cordelia's eye. "Mama!" she exclaimed. "You brought the piano?"

Her mother shrugged. "I like a bit of music about." She gestured imperiously toward the workmen. "Cordelia, it's going to be messy and noisy. Perhaps if you and Lucie would go take a turn about the neighborhood? And Alastair, you stay here and help direct the servants."

Cordelia was delighted at the prospect of time alone with Lucie. Alastair meanwhile looked caught between sourness at having to remain behind with his mother, and pomposity at being trusted with the responsibilities of the man of the house.

Tessa Herondale looked amused. "James, go with the girls. Perhaps Kensington Gardens? It's a short walk and a lovely day."

"Kensington Gardens does seem safe," James said gravely.

Lucie rolled her eyes and seized Cordelia's hand. "Come along, then," she said, and pulled her down the steps and onto the pavement.

James, with his long legs, matched them easily. "There's no need to bolt, Lucie," he said. "Mother isn't going to haul you back and demand that you drag a piano into the house."

Cordelia cast a sideways look at him. The wind was ruffling his black hair. Even her own mother's hair was not so dark: it had undertones of red and gold. James's hair was like spilled ink.

He smiled at her easily, as if he hadn't just caught her staring at him. Then again, he was doubtless used to being stared at when with other Shadowhunters. Not just because of his looks, but for other reasons as well.

Lucie squeezed her arm. "I'm so happy you're here," she declared. "I never thought it would really happen."

"Why not?" said James. "The Law demands you train together

before you can become *parabatai*, and besides, Father adores Daisy, and he does make the rules. . . .”

“Your father adores any Carstairs,” said Cordelia. “I’m not sure it’s to my particular credit. He may even like Alastair.”

“I think he has convinced himself Alastair has hidden depths,” said James.

“So does quicksand,” said Cordelia.

James laughed.

“That’s quite enough,” said Lucie, reaching over to smack James on the shoulder with a gloved hand. “Daisy is my friend, and you’re monopolizing her. Do go off somewhere else.”

They were walking up Queen’s Gate toward Kensington Road, the clatter of omnibus traffic all around them. Cordelia imagined James wandering off into the crowd, where surely he would find something more interesting to do, or perhaps be kidnapped by a beautiful heiress who would fall in love with him instantly. These sort of things happened in London.

“I will walk ten paces behind you like a train-bearer,” said James. “But I must keep you within sight, otherwise Mother will kill me, and then I will miss tomorrow’s ball and Matthew will kill me, and I will be dead twice.”

Cordelia smiled, but James was already dropping back as promised. He ambled along behind them, giving the girls space to talk; Cordelia tried to hide her disappointment at the lack of his presence. She lived in London now, after all, and sightings of James were no longer rare glimpses but would hopefully become part of her everyday life.

She glanced back at him; he had already taken out a book and was reading it while walking and whistling under his breath.

“What ball did he mean?” she asked, turning to Lucie. They passed under the black wrought-iron gates of Kensington Park and into leafy shade. The public garden was full of nannies pushing

babies in prams and young couples walking together under the trees. Two little girls were making daisy chains, and a boy in a blue sailor suit was running along with a hoop, shrieking with laughter. He ran to a tall man, who picked him up and swung him into the air as he laughed. Cordelia squeezed her eyes shut for a moment, thinking of her own father, of the way he had tossed her into the air when she was very small, making her laugh and laugh even as he caught her on her way down.

"The one tomorrow night," Lucie said, linking her arm with Cordelia's. "We're throwing it to welcome you to London. All the Enclave will be there, and there will be dancing, and Mother will have a chance to show off the new ballroom. And I will have a chance to show off you."

Cordelia felt a chill go over her—part excitement, part fear. The Enclave was the official name for the Shadowhunters of London: every city had an Enclave, who answered to their local Institute as well as the superior authority of the Clave and the Consul. She knew it was foolish, but the thought of so many people prickled her skin with anxiety. The life she had lived with her family—constantly traveling save when they were at Cirenworth in Devon—had been devoid of crowds.

And yet this was what she had to do—what they had all come to London to do. She thought of her mother.

It was not a ball, she told herself. It was the first skirmish in a war.

She lowered her voice. "Will everyone there—does everyone know about my father?"

"Oh, no. Very few people have heard any details, and those are being quite closemouthed about it." Lucie eyed her speculatively. "Would you be willing—if you told me what happened, I swear I would not share it with a soul, not even James."

Cordelia's chest hurt, as it always did when she thought about her father. But she must tell this to Lucie nevertheless, and she

would need to tell it to others, too. She would not be able to help her father unless she was straightforward in demanding what she wanted. “About a month ago, my father went to Idris,” she said. “It was all very secret, but a nest of Kravyād demons had been discovered just outside the border of Idris.”

“Really?” said Lucie. “They’re nasty ones, aren’t they? Man-eaters?”

Cordelia nodded. “They had wiped out nearly a whole pack of werewolves. It was the wolves, actually, who brought the news to Alicante. The Consul put together an expeditionary force of Nephilim and called in my father because of his expertise with rare demons. Along with two of the Downworlders, he helped plan the expedition to slay the Kravyāds.”

“That sounds very exciting,” said Lucie. “And how wonderful, to be working with Downworlders like that.”

“It ought to have been,” said Cordelia. She glanced back; James was a good distance away, still reading. He couldn’t possibly hear them. “The expedition went wrong. The Kravyād demons had gone—and the Nephilim had trespassed onto land that a vampire clan believed was theirs. There was a fight—a bad one.”

Lucie paled. “By the Angel. Was anyone killed?”

“Several Nephilim were injured,” said Cordelia. “And the vampire clan believed that we—that the Shadowhunters—had allied with the werewolves to attack them. It was a terrible mess, something that could have undone the Accords.”

Lucie looked horrified. Cordelia didn’t blame her. The Accords were a peace agreement between Shadowhunters and Downworlders that helped maintain order. If they were broken, bloody chaos could ensue.

“The Clave launched an investigation,” Cordelia said. “All right and proper. We thought my father was meant to be a witness, but he was arrested instead. They are blaming him for the expedition having gone wrong. But it was not his fault. He couldn’t have known—”

She closed her eyes. "It nearly killed him, having let down the Clave so badly. He will have to live with the guilt all his life. But none of us expected them to end the investigation and arrest him instead." Her hands were shaking; she laced them tightly together. "He sent me one note, but nothing after that: they forbid it. He is being held under house arrest in Alicante until his trial can take place."

"A trial?" said Lucie. "Just for him? But there were others in charge of the expedition as well, weren't there?"

"There *were* others, but my father is being made the scapegoat. Everything has been blamed on him. My mother wanted to go to Idris to see him, but he forbid it," Cordelia added. "He said we must go to London instead—that if he is convicted, the shame that will fall on our family will be immense, and that we must move quickly to stave it off."

"That would be very unfair!" Lucie's eyes flashed. "Everyone knows Shadowhunting is a dangerous job. Surely it will be determined after your father is questioned that he did the best he could."

"Perhaps," Cordelia said, in a low voice. "But they need someone to blame—and he is right that we have few friends among Shadowhunters. We have moved so much because Baba was ill, never living long in one place—Paris, Bombay, Morocco—"

"I always thought it was very glamorous."

"We were trying to find a climate that might be best for his health," said Cordelia, "but now my mother feels she knows few allies. That is why we are here, in London. She hopes we can make friends quickly, so that if my father faces imprisonment, we will have some to stand by our side and defend us."

"There is always Uncle Jem. He is your cousin," Lucie suggested. "And Silent Brothers are held in high esteem by the Clave."

Lucie's uncle Jem was James Carstairs, known to the majority of Nephilim as Brother Zachariah. Silent Brothers were the doctors and archivists of the Nephilim: mute, long-lived, and powerful,

they inhabited the Silent City, a mausoleum belowground with a thousand entrances all over the world.

The oddest thing about them to Cordelia was that—like their counterparts, the Iron Sisters, who carved weapons and steles out of *adamas*—they chose to be what they were: Jem had been an ordinary Shadowhunter once, the *parabatai* of Lucie’s father, Will. When he had become a Silent Brother, powerful runes had silenced him and scarred him, and shut his eyes forever. The Silent Brothers did not age physically, but neither did they have children, or wives, or homes. It seemed an awfully lonely life. Cordelia had certainly seen Brother Zachariah—Jem—on important occasions, but she did not feel she knew him as James and Lucie did. Her father had never been comfortable in the presence of a Silent Brother and had done his lifelong best to prevent Jem from visiting their family.

If only Elias had thought differently, Jem might now be an ally. As it was, Cordelia had no idea how to begin to approach him.

“Your father will not be convicted,” said Lucie, squeezing Cordelia’s hand. “I will speak to my parents—”

“No, Lucie.” Cordelia shook her head. “Everyone knows how close our families are. They won’t think your mother and father are impartial.” She exhaled. “I am going to go to the Consul myself. Directly. She may not realize they are trying to make this scandal with the Downworlders go away by blaming my father. It is easier to point the finger at one person than to admit everyone made mistakes.”

Lucie nodded. “Aunt Charlotte is so kind, I can’t imagine she won’t help.”

Aunt Charlotte was Charlotte Fairchild, the first woman ever to be elected Consul. She was also the mother of James’s *parabatai*, Matthew, and an old family friend of the Herondales.

A Consul had enormous power, and when Cordelia had first heard of her father’s imprisonment, she’d thought immediately of

Charlotte. But the Consul wasn't free to do whatever she wanted, Sona had explained. There were groups within the Clave, powerful factions always pressuring her to do this or do that, and she couldn't risk angering them. It would only make things worse for their family if they went to the Consul.

Privately Cordelia thought her mother was wrong—wasn't that what power *was*, the ability to risk angering people? What was the point of being a female Consul if you still had to fret about keeping people happy? Her mother was too cautious, too fearful. Sona believed the only possible way out of their current situation was for Cordelia to marry someone influential: someone who could salvage their family name if Elias went to prison.

But Cordelia would not mention that to Lucie. She had no intention of mentioning it to anyone. She could barely bring herself to think about it: she was not against the idea of marrying, but it had to be to the right person and it had to be for love. It would not be as part of a bargain to reduce her family's shame when her father had done nothing wrong. She would solve this with cleverness and bravery—not with the sale of herself as a bride.

"I know, it absolutely is awful right now," said Lucie, and Cordelia had the feeling she'd missed several moments of Lucie talking, "but I just know it will be over soon and your father will be back safely. And meanwhile you'll be in London and you can train with me and—Oh!" Lucie took her arm out of Cordelia's and dipped into her handbag. "I almost forgot. I have another installment of *The Beautiful Cordelia* for you to read."

Cordelia smiled and tried to put the situation with her father out of her mind. *The Beautiful Cordelia* was a novel that Lucie had begun when she was twelve. It had been intended to cheer Cordelia up during an extended stay in Switzerland. It chronicled the adventures of a young woman named Cordelia, devastatingly beautiful to all who beheld her, and the handsome man who adored her, Lord

Hawke. Sadly they had been parted when the beautiful Cordelia had been kidnapped by pirates, and ever since then she had been trying to find her way back to him, though her journey was complicated by many adventures as well as so many other attractive men—who always fell in love with her and desired marriage—that the real Cordelia had lost count.

Every month, faithfully, for four years, Lucie had mailed Cordelia a new chapter and Cordelia had curled up with her fictional counterpart's romantic adventures and lost herself in fantasy for a while.

"Wonderful," she said, taking the sheets of paper. "I can hardly wait to see if Cordelia escapes from the wicked Bandit King!"

"Well, as it turns out, the Bandit King isn't entirely wicked. You see, he's the youngest son of a duke who's always been—sorry," Lucie ended meekly at Cordelia's glare. "I forgot how you hate to be told the story before you read it."

"I do." Cordelia knocked her friend in the arm with the rolled-up manuscript. "But thank you, darling, I shall read it directly I have a moment." She glanced over her shoulder. "Is it—I mean, I wish to chat alone with you, too, but are we being dreadfully rude asking your brother to walk behind us?"

"Not a bit," Lucie assured her. "Look at him. He's quite distracted, reading."

And he was. Though James seemed entirely caught up in whatever he was perusing, he nevertheless skirted oncoming passersby, the occasional rock or fallen branch, and once even a small boy holding a hoop, with admirable grace. Cordelia suspected that if she had tried such a trick, she would have crashed into a tree.

"You're so lucky," Cordelia said, still looking over her shoulder at James.

"Why on earth?" Lucie looked at her with wide eyes. Where James's eyes were amber, Lucie's were pale blue, a few shades lighter than her father's.

Cordelia's head snapped back around. "Oh, because—" *Because you get to spend time with James every day?* She doubted Lucie thought that was any special gift; one didn't, when it was one's family. "He's such a good older brother. If I'd asked Alastair to walk ten paces behind me in a park, he would have made sure to stick by my side the entire time just to be annoying."

"Pfft!" Lucie exclaimed. "Of course I adore Jamie, but he's been dreadful lately, ever since he fell in love."

She might as well have dropped an incendiary device on Cordelia's head. Everything seemed to fly apart around her. "He what?"

"Fell in love," Lucie repeated, with the look of someone enjoying imparting a bit of gossip. "Oh, he won't say with who, of course, because it's Jamie and he never tells us anything. But Father's diagnosed him and he says it's definitely love."

"You make it sound like consumption." Cordelia's head was whirling with dismay. James in love? With who?

"Well, it is a bit, isn't it? He gets all pale and moody and stares off out of windows like Keats."

"Did Keats stare out of windows?" Sometimes keeping up with Lucie was difficult.

Lucie plowed on, undeterred by the question of whether England's foremost Romantic poet had or had not stared out of windows. "He won't say anything to anyone but Matthew, and Matthew is a tomb where James is concerned. I heard a bit of their conversation this morning by accident, though—"

"Accident?" Cordelia raised an eyebrow.

"I may have been hiding beneath a table," said Lucie, with dignity. "But it was only because I had lost an earring and was looking for it."

Cordelia suppressed a smile. "Go on."

"He is definitely in love, and Matthew thinks he is being foolish. It is a girl who does not live in London, but she is about to arrive

here for an extended stay. Matthew does not approve of her—” Lucie broke off suddenly and clutched at Cordelia’s wrist. “Oh!”

“Ouch! Lucie—”

“A lovely young lady about to arrive in London! Oh, I am a goose! Of course it’s clear who he meant!”

“Is it?” Cordelia said. They were nearing the famous Long Water; she could see the sun sparkling off the surface.

“He meant you,” Lucie breathed. “Oh, how lovely! Imagine if you got married! We could be sisters in truth!”

“Lucie!” Cordelia dropped her voice to a whisper. “We’ve no proof he meant me.”

“Well, he’d be mad not to be in love with you,” said Lucie. “You’re terribly pretty, and just as Matthew said, you’ve just arrived in London for an extended stay. Who else could it be? The Enclave simply isn’t that large. No, it must be you.”

“I don’t know—”

Lucie’s eyes rounded. “Is it that you don’t care for him? Well, you can’t be expected to, yet. I mean you’ve known him all your life, so I imagine he isn’t that impressive, but I am quite sure you could get used to his face. He doesn’t snore or make rude jokes. Really, he isn’t bad at all,” she added judiciously. “Just consider it? Dance one dance with him tomorrow. You do have a dress, don’t you? You must have a lovely dress, if he is to be properly stunned by you.”

“I do have a dress,” Cordelia hastened to reassure her, though she knew it was far from lovely.

“Once you have stunned him,” Lucie went on, “he will propose. Then we shall decide whether you will accept and if you do, if you will have a long engagement. It might be better if you did, so that we can complete our *parabatai* training.”

“Lucie, you are making me dizzy!” Cordelia said, and cast a worried look over her shoulder. Had James heard any of what they had said? No, it didn’t seem so: he was still wandering along, reading.

A betraying hope swelled in her heart, and for a moment she allowed herself to imagine being engaged to James, being welcomed into Lucie's family. Lucie, her sister in the eyes of the law now, carrying a sheaf of flowers at her wedding. Their friends—they would certainly have friends—exclaiming, *Oh, you two make a perfect couple—*

She frowned suddenly. "Why does Matthew not approve of me?" she asked, and then cleared her throat. "I mean, if I was the girl they were talking about, which I am sure I was not."

Lucie waved her hand airily. "He did not think the girl in question cared for James. But as we have already ascertained, you can fall in love with him quite easily, if you put a bit of effort into it. Matthew is overly protective of Jamie, but he is nothing to fear. He may not like many people, but he's very kind to the ones he does like."

Cordelia thought of Matthew, James's *parabatai*. Matthew had hardly left James's side since they had both been in school in Idris, and she had met him now and then at social events. Matthew was all gold hair and smiles, but she suspected there might be a lion under the kitty cat if hurting James was involved.

But she would never hurt James. She loved him. She had loved him all her life.

And tomorrow she would get the chance to tell him so. She had no doubt that would give her the confidence to approach the Consul and present her father's case for leniency, perhaps with James by her side.

Cordelia raised her chin. Yes, after the ball tomorrow, her life would be very different.