

ONE

I OPENED MY EYES, AND I WAS ON THE TRAIN.

I was the only passenger left. How long had I been asleep? I looked down to make sure I still had my things: my straw hat, my suitcase stamped with the letter Z. I'd hung on to them this whole way, through sleeping on a bench in Penn Station and sprinting to catch a train in Boston, ever since I'd left Saint Brigid's School for Young Ladies this time yesterday. Thinking about it, I ran my tongue over my teeth again. No matter how many times I did it, I could still taste copper.

The door at the far end of the car clattered open, and I jumped. Just the conductor, coming down the aisle to check on me. He looked nervously down at me, and I felt guilty, wondering if he could tell I was on the run.

“You the stop in Winterport?” he said. I nodded. His eyes had wandered down to my suitcase.

“You got people there?” he asked. “I’m kin of the Hannafins, myself.”

People up here were like this, I remembered suddenly. Always wanting to know about your family. “The Zarrins,” I offered.

He twitched like a rabbit before settling himself back down. “I thought you might be,” he said. “They don’t leave Winterport much, do they?”

“I did,” I said. “I haven’t been back in eight years.”

Once I said it I froze, terrified he’d ask me why I was coming back now. I rummaged frantically in my mind for a convincing lie. But he just smiled at me tightly and touched his hat.

“We’ll just be slowing down, not a full stop,” he said. “Don’t worry, people do it all the time. When the whistle blows the first time, get ready.”

He disappeared, and I stared out the window and watched the landscape for a while. It had been almost summer in Maryland, but as we rumbled across the bridge that divides New Hampshire from Maine, I saw a few stubborn patches of snow clinging on beneath the pine trees. I’d been angry when I’d gotten on the train, and that had kept me in motion. But the weather chilled my anger and crystallized it into fear. Maybe there were good reasons I wasn’t supposed to be at home. I had a vague, half-remembered feeling that it wasn’t exactly safe. It all

felt faded and vaguely ridiculous. None of it seemed plausible when I held it up to the light. But if it was true, if I was right, then I needed to be home again.

After all, there was no other place for me in the world. Not after what I'd done.

Lucy Spencer flashed in my mind for a moment then. Her red hair coming out of its braid, her face twisted in that expression people make right before they start screaming—

And then the whistle was blowing. Get ready, he'd said. I hefted my suitcase, clapped my hat on my head. Time to go visit my family.

The conductor came back to open the door for me as the train slowed. He couldn't even look me in the eye. He mumbled something that sounded like "Be careful," and then we were rumbling slowly past a platform, and I was stepping out into the air.

I felt a jarring, sickening sensation of the world rising up to meet me. I staggered, let go of the suitcase, and hit one knee on the wood of the platform, the train still trundling behind me. I crawled away from it, feeling like I'd been in an accident. It was moving faster than I'd thought, when I was on it.

I told myself not to be weak. I made sure I hadn't scraped my knee; I didn't want anyone around here to see my blood. I got to my feet, checked to make sure my suitcase hadn't popped open in the fall, and took a moment to get my bearings.

The platform was deserted. Beyond it the single cobbled street of the town bent like an elbow out into the ocean, with houses lining the crook. Along the water were docks where fishing boats bobbed up and down at their moorings. The sun was going down behind the tree-covered hills, bathing the town in alternating stripes of red light and shadow. Three young boys knelt in the street, their hand-me-down coats straining threadbare over their backs.

I found myself watching them closely, my eyes locked on them. They were using a stick to try to loosen one of the cobblestones. One of them looked up and saw me, and froze. I watched him reach down as though he thought if he moved slowly enough I wouldn't see him. His dirty fingers scrabbled at the edges of the stone until he held it in his hand. I saw his fingers clamp shut around it, and I saw the muscles in his shoulder begin to tense. I tensed, too, sinking down lower, ready to duck or run forward. It was like he knew me. Like he knew what I'd done.

"You there!"

An old man hobbled out of a store, waving a walking stick. The boys scattered, tearing off across the cobbles.

I shuddered like someone being woken up from a dream. The man brandished the stick halfheartedly after the boys, but it seemed like he'd already forgotten them as he turned to look at me up on the platform, shielding his eyes to see me more

clearly. I clambered down to meet him. He was bent at the shoulder, his blue eyes cloudy with age, and he wore a clerical collar.

“Ah, young Eleanor,” he said.

“I . . . I’m sorry,” I said. “I don’t think I know you.”

“Father Thomas,” he said. “Your grandmother didn’t want to introduce you to me until you were older.” He had the same sharp, staccato accent as the man on the train. “But I know about all of you.” He winked. I blushed, not quite knowing why, wondering what it was exactly that he knew.

“Well, thank you for . . . chasing them off.”

“My job. Pastor of Saint Anthony in Winterport. Here to help the lost.” He chuckled a little to himself. “Do you need directions up to the house?”

“I think I remember. Who were they?”

“Oh, them? Kids from town,” he said. “They don’t understand that you’re safe enough. I suspect there’s something instinctual that makes ’em want to throw rocks at Zarrins.”

His matter-of-factness chilled me. But I’d known my family was dangerous, so why was I surprised that other people knew it, too?

“I don’t think they’re expecting me,” I said. “Will that be a problem?”

“The Zarrins have never much liked unexpected company,” he said. “But they are expecting you. Your grandma sent Margaret down this morning with a note, asked me to greet you.”

I hadn't seen that coming.

"I'll walk you as far as the church," he said.

He offered to take my suitcase, but I said I'd manage. He hitched along beside me, leaning on his cane. The whole way I thought I spotted people watching us—a twitch of lace curtains at a window, a rustle as though someone had just ducked behind a hedge. It was almost funny. But then when we got to the weathered clapboard church, and he went away up the path and in through the door, nothing about it seemed funny anymore. I was alone.

At the edge of town, the road went nearly straight up a steep incline into a copse of silver birch. The climb was hard; my suitcase banged against my already bruised leg and I started carrying it in my arms. The wind curled through the trees, blowing through my uniform until I couldn't stop shivering.

A car crawled along behind me for a while, and then passed me at a crest when the road widened. At school, cars would honk at us as we walked in groups, boys would lean out and ask us if we wanted a ride and the nuns would yell at them to leave us alone. Not here. I wondered if the driver recognized me, or just the direction I was walking.

I came to the place where the road forked. To the right, it became a bridge that spanned a narrow sound and traveled onward up the coast. To the left, a dirt road that darted directly up the steep slope into the deep woods. Trees made a tunnel overhead. It was beautiful up there, in the darkening forest, but

I sensed that it was not a place to be caught alone at night. I bent my knees and adjusted my gait to move silently, then crept forward.

Birds sang here, and wild creatures rustled in the bushes. My ears pricked at the small sounds. The geography settled into place around me. To my right down the tree-lined slope: a streambed that carried a torrent of meltwater every spring, eventually pouring off a cliff into the sea. A little to one side of that, there was a line in the woods where it transitioned from birch to aspen. And a little farther up the path, visible in glimpses as I climbed steadily, was the front lawn. I rounded a bend, and the trees fell away, and all that remained was the house.

It loomed over the landscape. Towers and porches and balconies and bay windows. Story after story of decorative gingerbread-ing, crown molding, sunburst emblems, recessed niches, and high gables, and all of it covered in gray scalloped shingles, like scales, and at the very top of the highest tower, the creaking weathervane in the shape of a running rabbit. It was hard to look at: not all of it fit in my view at once, even after I took a few steps back. I realized that now, it scared me. It was too much. It felt oppressive, a giant squatting at the top of the world.

I stared the house down, willing it to blink its windows first. And then I took a few quick steps across the narrow band of lawn, planted my foot deliberately on the first step, and launched myself up to the door.

It was black. Not painted: black wood, with twisted carvings

and a brass horsehead with a ring clenched in its teeth. I lifted the ring and let it fall.

No answer for a long moment. Behind me the wind ran up my spine and made me shiver. I reached for the knob and threw the door open.

A moan filled the air, a window open somewhere that pulled the air from the door through the house, turning the front hall into a throat. As soon as I stepped forward into the house, suction yanked the door shut behind me and the sound of the ocean sloughing against the cliffs on the far side of the house faded to a whisper. Other than that, there was no sound, except for somewhere down the hall, a heavy clock ticking.

I looked around with heart pumping, my hands locked around my suitcase. The entry hall soared two and a half stories, the ceiling lost in darkness somewhere overhead, the rails of the second floor lined with unlit post lamps. The central staircase snaked down in two streams from the upper floors, joining in the middle and unfurling into the front hall, covered in carpet the faded red of a tongue. The walnut wainscoting gleamed, but the baseboards were scratched and scarred, and the wallpaper, printed with scenes of men hunting stags, lay tattered in places. An age-spotted mirror stood propped on a narrow hall table that also held a cut glass dish of desiccated peppermints. The walls were lined with portraits of dim figures, paintings of sprawling landscapes, lovingly rendered still lifes of animal haunches and goblets overflowing with wine. Things I

remembered but didn't recognize, as though I'd seen them in a movie, or a dream.

I felt suddenly dizzy. I wanted to sit down, but what should I sit on—the chair carved in the shape of a grinning devil? A long bench lined with a dozen briefcases with deep gouges in the leather? A pile of twine-tied packages all stamped with FRAGILE and a picture of a skull? Maybe I should just keep moving forward. There were the stairs. Somewhere, two stories up, was my childhood bedroom, and maybe if I could make it in there, shut the door, I would be transformed back into someone who belonged here. But that seemed like a long way to go on legs that were longing to carry me down—to the floor, or ideally back to town, to the train, to safety. But there was no train.

I couldn't leave now, I told myself. Where would I even go?

The front hall was lined with portraits. I got close to them and studied them in turn, trying to see who I could remember. The largest was an oil painting of a squat, grinning young man with impressive sideburns, holding a team of white horses by their reins while they reared and foamed and rolled their eyes. My grandfather, I thought, but not the dotting, laughing man I remembered—he looked fiendish. Next to him, an array of men who looked like him but with varying expressions: a skittish man in a red sweater who must have been my father. A sleek boy with a jagged smile in the same sweater as my father's picture, but faded and frayed. And there were women here, too, all with sharp cheekbones, olive skin, dark eyes, nothing like my flat,

wide-mouthed face. I scanned the whole room and could not find a single photograph of me.

I closed my eyes and steadied myself on the newel post at the base of the stairs. And then from farther back into the house, I heard a voice call out, “Eleanor! Is that you?”

I’d know that voice anywhere: it was clear and gentle, like the bell on a buoy. It cut through my fear and touched me. Mother. She used to sing to me, when I was little. And she was here.

“Where are you?” I called.

“The back garden, dear.” She sounded happy. “Come through the kitchen, it’s fastest!”

Mother. She had soft hands and she’d let me braid her long hair when I was a child. Suddenly my reservations left me, and all I wanted to do was see her again.

I quickly followed the hallway to the door that led to the kitchen. I was about to be back with my mother, and then everything would be alright. I opened the door, and as it swung open, I realized someone was standing there, waiting for me to open it.

I’d forgotten about Aunt Margaret.

She stared straight at me from under her ragged tangle of hair. She looked like the women in the portraits, but wilder: sallow skin, bags under her eyes, her clothes covered in grease stains. She frowned at me and muttered something I couldn’t make out. She didn’t like to be stared at, I remembered, and she didn’t like to be spoken to. I could work around this. I averted

my eyes and held very still. Slowly, she shuffled back a few paces from the door. “Mother?” I called out again, more tentatively.

“Just follow my voice, dear!”

I edged around Margaret. In my childhood memories she was somehow lovable, always humming a tune. She muttered to herself as I skirted around her through the dark kitchen, across its brick floor and past the big stone oven blackened with years of soot, to the old farmhouse-style back door. The top half was already propped open. I slipped out through the bottom half and shut it behind me, penning Margaret in the kitchen.

My eyes had adjusted to the darkness of the house, so I was blinded at first when I stepped out into the sun. Mother gasped, then said, “My little girl!”

As my eyes adjusted, I saw the shapes in the back garden more clearly. A tall, narrow old woman in a faded black dress, a man in a suit, a woman sitting in what looked like a large iron washtub. And behind them, a table set with plates and glassware and trimmed with faded bunting. A party?

“Hullo, Eleanor,” said the man. He was older than in his portrait, but I knew he must be my father. I stepped closer, but he didn’t reach out to hug me, just looked at me curiously for a long while. Finally, I put out a hand, and he shook it dazedly.

“Eleanor,” Grandma Persephone said. I was already looking past her, looking for the voice that had called to me earlier. But when I really saw my mother, I gasped.

She was wearing a thin robe, drenched with water. Half of

her face was just like mine. I recognized my high forehead, my profile. But as she turned to look at me I saw her other side: an eyeless, earless mass of red polyps that ran all the way down her body until they disappeared into the water of the tub. All of them were straining toward me, as though they could see me, as though they wanted to reach out and grasp me and suck me into the mass. I stumbled back and caught myself on the porch railing.

Her one eyebrow shot up, her half of a mouth opening in dismay. I forced myself to smile, but she reached out her good hand and took a damp towel from the edge of the tub and smoothed it protectively over the inhuman side of her face.

I knew I should go and hug her. I knew that I used to. That when I was little, I'd loved her. But now all I could think about was the feeling of those things squirming across my face.

"Hello, Mother," I said, trying to sound breezy, like the girls at school. But they always said *mummy*, or *mama*. I couldn't imagine what that would sound like in my mouth.

"I told them we should throw you a little party," Mother said. "It's been so long."

"How did you know I was coming?"

"I saw you," said Grandma Persephone. And when she spoke, I realized that my eye had been avoiding her in the way that it was still avoiding Mother. I forced myself to turn and take in the woman who had sent me away from home all those years ago.

Her hair was milk-white, like mine, and had been since she was young—a family trait. She towered over me, taller than

a woman ought to be by her age. Hers was the original face that had spawned all the women in the portraits: her features bonier, crueler, her nose more hooked, her eyes more sunken. I swallowed hard.

“Grandmother,” I said. In my mind it sounded dignified. But it came out softer than I’d expected. Like a question.

“You made it here, I see.”

I wondered if she was angry at me. She’d told me, in letter after letter over the years, to stay put, and I hadn’t. *Well, I’d better get this over with.* I cleared my throat.

“I need to talk to you,” I said. “Something happened.”

Her eyebrows shot up, and she looked angry for a moment. “Not now.” She glanced out across the fields. “The others are coming. They want to say hello to you.”

As if in answer, from the woods came a long howl.

“That will be your grandfather,” she said.

But it wasn’t just him—it was three voices, mingling on the breeze. I was surprised to realize I recognized them. The long vowels of Grandpa Miklos, the sharp yips of Luma, Rhys’s guttural bark. But a part of them felt different now. I used to hear that sound and run to the door. Now I stood frozen in place like a rabbit, my eyes scanning the tree line, dreading what might come out.

“Quite alright?” Grandma Persephone asked. My throat was too dry to speak.

It was spring dusk. They were nothing more than smears of light and shadow among the trees. If they came for my throat there would be no way I could stop them. The sound of their voices made my chest ache with longing, but my legs wanted to run. A dangerous combination, to want something so badly and also be so afraid. I felt that hunger open up inside me again, the same one I'd felt gripping Lucy Spencer by the hair—

I realized I'd shut my eyes, and when I forced them open again, three shapes had broken free of the tree line, ambling along upright, laughing and joking and straightening clothing. One of the shapes, a young man tugging on a red sweater, saw me and started into a run across the lawn. He vaulted the low stone wall, rushed me, grabbed me, and heaved me high into the air. Against my will my body went limp, preparing for death.

“Ellie!”

He caught me up and held me out to look at me. My feet dangled in empty air. I still couldn't draw breath.

“Rhys, put her down.” Grandma Persephone's lips were pursed, but I could see the smile twitching around the edges. She thought this was funny. I couldn't believe it.

“She likes it,” Rhys said. “Don't you?”

“Please put me down.”

He looked wounded, but he lowered me to the ground. As soon as my feet touched down I backed away. My ribs ached where he'd held me.

“Eleanor,” Grandma Persephone said, “this is your cousin Rhys. A college man, when he bothers to show up to his classes. Popular with the ladies, or so I’ve heard.” Rhys’s chest puffed up. “And clearly, as you can see, a brute with no manners.” She said it affectionately, but I didn’t think it was funny at all.

“She knows me.” He grinned at me. “Don’t you, Ellie?”

“Of course.” I tried to infuse my voice with warmth. He felt dangerous.

“I knew it!” He moved forward as though he wanted to scoop me up again, but stopped himself short. “Every time I’m home I ask *Where’s Ellie*, and Grandma says—”

“She’s been at boarding school,” Grandma Persephone said.

“I know *that*, Grandma. Where’s she been at Christmas?”

“Rhys, who’s got the meat?” she asked.

“Grandpa.”

“Why don’t you go help him with that?”

Rhys nodded, then sprinted back toward the other two figures making their way across the lawn. One was an old man who tottered slowly, the other a blond girl who kept pace.

“If he’s my cousin,” I said, “who’s his mother?”

“Margaret. And that’s your sister there, and your Grandpa Miklos,” Grandma Persephone said, behind me. She said it quietly, like a stage manager feeding me my lines.

“I know *that*,” I said. I watched Rhys catch up to them. He took the sack from the old man, leaped back over the wall, and opened the gate for him. The sack dropped to the ground

with a leaden thud. As she stepped through the gate, the girl glanced up, and although I knew it was her, I recognized my sister for the first time. And she was the first thing I saw that didn't frighten me. She'd grown up, but she still looked like a movie actress, with her wide, bright eyes, cherubic face, and soft hair the color of a star. She ran toward me and wrapped her arms around me, and from her clothes came the familiar smell of pine forest and mail-ordered perfume. Luma. My sister, my best friend. I'd written her probably a hundred letters and she'd never written me back, but now I was here, and she had me.

"Eleanor!" she said into my cheek. I let her hug me, and for a moment, things felt normal. Then she pulled back and grinned cheerily at me with her mouthful of sharp teeth. Strands of bloody flesh still clung between them, and her breath smelled gamey. I kept my smile fixed as she stroked my cheek with a fingernail caked in blood.

"Luma," I said. "I've missed you."

"And you!"

"I have so much to tell you," I said. "I—"

"Mother," Luma said, "what's in your bath? It smells incredible."

"Sage."

"Heaven." Luma sat down on the edge of Mother's tub with a sigh, stroked the water, and splashed some of it across her face. I couldn't quite believe that after eight years away, she hadn't even let me finish my sentence.

All around me were little domestic scenes: Luma sitting on the edge of the garden tub, Father listening sheepishly while Rhys talked about the hunting they'd done, Grandma Persephone tapping Grandpa Miklos on the chest with one bony finger. "You forgot your cane," she said.

"I don't need it on four legs."

"You need it coming back."

"Ehhhh . . ." He waved a hand. "I don't like it. It makes me feel old."

"You are old."

He slung an arm around her shoulders and she bent her knees to take his weight. As she moved to his side I got a look at his face. It was the face I remembered most vividly from childhood: those kind, dark eyes, those soft lines in his skin, his bushy eyebrows, his broad nose. But I didn't feel the way I used to when I looked at him. I was afraid.

"Miklos," Grandma Persephone said. "Don't you want to say hello to Eleanor? She's home."

He grinned as he turned toward me. But then he sniffed the air, his grin faded, and his head snapped up to lock onto his target. His eyes focused on mine, and as they did, his shoulders dropped down, relaxing but also . . . preparing.

I felt suddenly cold. Grandpa wasn't like Rhys or Luma or Father. He was older and came from somewhere less civilized. He wasn't seeing Eleanor, his granddaughter. He was seeing a young woman named Eleanor who had suddenly found herself

at an isolated manor house. Someone no one would miss if she disappeared on a spring evening.

He took a step toward me. I took half a step back, praying my foot wouldn't catch on a stone, praying I wouldn't falter or fall.

Grandma Persephone saw it, too. She snapped her fingers under his nose. "Miklos. Miklos!"

He shook his head and looked a little dreamy.

"It is good to see you, my . . . darling," he said. "It has been too long."

I nodded, waiting for my heart to stop racing.

Grandma Persephone had him by one arm. I could see her fingernails digging into his jacket. "Let's toast," she said.

They all turned toward the table and took up flutes of champagne. Someone put one into my hand.

"To our Eleanor," Grandma Persephone said, and they clinked glasses and drank. I sipped.

I'd pictured a time like this every night for years, until the image got threadbare and worn. My family, welcoming me back, thrilled to see me, as though I had never left. And now that I had it, it was wrong. Or I was wrong.

The rest of them quickly fell to chatting, and I let myself sidle out of the way. At school, the easiest way to get out of things was just to stop existing. I watched them for a while, and then Grandma Persephone detached herself and drifted back to stand near me.

“You’ll want to apologize to your mother once you’ve settled in,” she said. “You were a little rude, but I’m sure she’ll understand that you’re just nervous. Which, by the way, is not something you should show your grandfather, either. If something runs, he has to chase.”

“I wouldn’t have been afraid if you hadn’t sent me away.”

It was out of my mouth before I could stop it, and after I said it, I glowed hot with indignation. She studied me, and I studied her back, looking all over her face for any trace of remorse for what she’d done to me, for sending me away, for letting me be afraid. Nothing. I realized she was curious about me, that she might have known I’d come back, but now that I was here, she didn’t know exactly what I’d do next.

“I felt like that, once,” she said at last.

“I’m sorry?”

“After my son died,” she said. “The first Rhys. I looked at your grandfather, and I forgot everything that made him my family. I just saw a monster.”

I looked around at the gathering. How could she see anything else?

“Give yourself time,” she said, “to let your eyes adjust.”

I glanced around at my family. They’d clumped together, laughing, drinking champagne. Aside from a few glances at me, they looked like they’d already forgotten I was here, that I was the reason for the party. Evening fell across the lawn as my sister still perched on the edge of the tub. Her long, sharp teeth,

the ones couldn't retract like everyone else's, glinted in the light of the rising moon. Father and Grandpa Miklos were looking conspiratorially at the bag on the ground.

"What's for dinner?" Father asked Rhys. "Show me what you caught."

Rhys grabbed the sack and pulled out a brace of young rabbits by the ears. Their heads lolled limply from their broken necks. Their white throats were pink with blood.

Maybe my eyes were adjusting, I thought, since everything seemed to be getting darker around me. And then I fainted.

TWO

I WOKE UP IN A DIM ROOM. FOR A MOMENT I thought I was back at Saint Brigid's, and I was relieved. Everything that had happened had been a terrible dream. Now I would wake up for morning Mass. I'd eat toast in the dining hall alone. Maybe I'd spend the morning reading with Sister Katherine. It was June, and everyone but me would be gone on summer vacations at last, so there would be no one to bother me.

But the bed underneath me was too soft, almost saggy. And there was a weight on me, pressing down, heavier than a blanket.

I glanced down, then screamed, instantly awake. Sprawled across my legs was a dead—something, big and covered in brown fur. I scrambled backward until I hit the headboard, and I stayed there, breathing hard, until I could bring myself to look more closely. A groundhog. No blood on it, just dead. A prank,

I guessed. Probably Rhys. And I remembered all at once where I was.

Rhys was a beast. Was he trying to frighten me away? He could try his best. This wasn't the first time someone had put something horrible in my bed.

I slithered out from under the covers, stumbled around the room until I found the curtains, and tugged them open.

Light flooded the room, and I blinked for a moment, stunned. My window overlooked the high cliffs and beyond that the ocean, sunlit and deep blue. I opened the window and felt an ache under my ribs. The smell of the sea called to me. I shut my eyes and sighed. I loved it here, in this place. I couldn't let Rhys scare me away.

I went to the bed and picked up the top sheet by the corners. I heaved the groundhog to the window and rolled it out. It hit the lawn with a thud.

There, that was a little better. I shook out the sheet and risked a look around.

My room at school had been austere: white walls, two narrow beds, one perpetually empty because no one would room with me. This room was its opposite, so packed with things and life that it was almost hard to look at. It had wallpaper printed with tiny flowers, an enormous black wardrobe carved with grinning faces buried in sprays of oak leaves, a cheery pink-and-red rag rug, a chandelier hanging from the high ceiling, heavy curtains of faded pink velvet with gold tassels, a spindly-legged

desk crouched in one corner, and a dollhouse in the shape of the house itself, the roof caved in, as though someone had stepped on it. My suitcase was propped up by the wardrobe. There was a little armchair with a rabbit sitting in it, and my heart raced until I realized it was a stuffed toy. There were sheets of paper pinned to the walls, page-sized pieces that flapped a little in the breeze from the open window. Some had come unpinned and fluttered to the floor.

They were poems, their edges showing the rough scissor-work of a young child. They must have been cut out of a book. I leaned forward to read one. *O you who turn the wheel and look to windward*

Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

My poem, the one I knew most of the lines to, the one I mouthed to myself late at night in my dormitory room at Saint Brigid's. I thought I'd read it for the first time when I was thirteen, when I'd found it in our school's little library. I felt like I'd found a part of my soul. I'd borrowed the book so many times that Sister Katherine had finally let me keep it. It was the only book I'd grabbed when I hastily packed my suitcase and ran for the train station. But here it was, something a much younger me had loved, too. How could I have forgotten?

Downstairs, plates clattered and people spoke in hushed voices. I should go down there and say something. I should try again. They were all I had, after all. I stopped in front of the

mirror; they'd put me to bed fully dressed, so I was still in my school uniform. I smoothed my collar down. Close enough.

When I descended the stairs and came to the dining room, I hesitated at the door. Then Mother saw me. She was sitting in a barrel of water, a gauzy robe draped over her and trailing in the barrel. She turned toward me and smiled winningly with the side of her face that had teeth.

"Eleanor!" she said. "You're awake. We were so worried after last night."

"I feel much better now."

"Come have some breakfast!"

I tried not to look tentative as I stepped across the threshold. I remembered Persephone's words: If you run, he has to chase. So I tried to look confident as I turned toward Miklos, but he didn't see me. His face was a snout, buried in his breakfast, licking it up from the plate. Bits of meat and egg flew in all directions. At his elbow, Rhys and Luma were fighting over a last slice of thick undercooked bacon, until finally it ripped apart between them and Luma fell backward into Father, jostling his elbow while he cut his meat into little squares. Rhys looked up at me with an expectant grin. Determined that he wouldn't scare me, I stared impassively until the grin vanished. After his eyes dropped to his plate I let my gaze wander, and realized that there was someone else at the table, someone whose back was turned to me.

“Arthur,” said Grandma Persephone. “You remember Eleanor?”

And the man whose back was turned stood up, unfolding himself from the chair in front of me.

He was not astoundingly tall, but his thinness accentuated his height. He looked neither young nor old—he had no hair on his head, but also no wrinkles, aside from deep pleats in his lips that made him look stern. He wore a black suit in an old style with a celluloid collar and a pair of old-fashioned dark glasses, the kind with lenses on the sides, obscuring his eyes. His skin looked almost bloodless, but he didn’t seem sick. I noticed he kept one hand on the back of his chair, and a silver-handled cane was resting not far from his feet.

He smiled without opening his mouth. “I suppose the real question is: Do you remember me?”

“. . . Mr. Knocks?” I ventured.

“Please, call me Arthur.”

I remembered someone of about his shape from my childhood. A dinner guest for the adults who had little to say to children. He drove an old Model T and sometimes parked it in our carriage house. At the time he’d seemed to me to be impossibly old and fusty, except when he’d—

“You used to play piano,” I said, realization dawning. “I think you might have taught me how to play.”

Grandma Persephone glanced over at him sharply, suddenly.

His back was to her, so he didn't see it. I remembered sitting next to him on the bench, learning scales on a sunny afternoon.

"I might have," he said. "It's been a while."

How was he so young? He didn't look like he'd aged a day since I'd left. But maybe I'd been wrong back then; maybe he was just one of those young people who seemed old.

He pulled out my chair for me, and when I sat in it, he settled me in closer to the table. I felt less afraid with him here. Not because he would protect me, but because he'd survived so long in the company of my family. That meant it was possible.

I liked him instantly. There was something delicate about him that made me want to hold him too tightly, dig fingernails into him, bite into him to test his firmness. At the same time, he felt cool, self-contained, like my favorite teachers at Saint Brigid's. I wanted to impress him.

"What brings you by today?" I asked, hoping it sounded natural, the kind of question that adult people ask one another.

"Your grandma didn't get her taxes done on time."

Grandma Persephone rolled her eyes. "I pay them enough that you'd think they could wait."

"And, of course, you'll stay for dinner," Father said. Mr. Knox—Arthur—smiled tightly. "Of course."

I tried to concentrate on my breakfast, but I was aware of him in a way that reminded me of the feeling of someone standing just behind you. But every time I turned to try to talk to

him, someone else already had his attention. Luma asked him about his car; Rhys wanted to show him how he could throw his spoon as high as the ceiling and then catch it in his teeth. Even Margaret, on her trips back and forth from the table to the kitchen, stopped muttering and looked at him fondly. Every time someone talked to him, he was courteous, charming. He didn't eat, but sipped at a cup of coffee with a wry smile flickering around the corners of his mouth. At one point he saw me looking at him and, for a second, turned that smile on me, and I felt like someone had held a match up to the edge of me and lit me on fire. But when I started to open my mouth, Father was already asking him when they could play billiards.

Finally, Grandpa Miklos pushed back his chair. "I am ready for some hunting."

"Father, you hunted yesterday," my father said. "Don't you think you'll wear yourself out?"

"The day I can't hunt, I am not Miklos. Who's coming?" Grandpa glanced hopefully at me.

"I can't," I said. In the woods he'd kill me for sure.

"You still can't become the wolf? I hoped you would grow into it."

"Miklos, hush," Grandma Persephone said. He shrugged and made a face at her. She giggled like a girl.

"I'm going to stay in today," Luma said. "You go, Daddy. Keep Grandpa company."

"Any requests?"

“Postman?” Luma said, and everyone but me laughed. “But really, anything. You know I don’t mind.”

“I’ll come.” Rhys stood up and stretched, flexing his shoulders until his sweater strained across his chest and pulled up to show his flat belly downed in dark hair. “See you later, Arthur.”

“Luma, why don’t you want to go with your cousin?” Grandma Persephone asked.

Luma laughed and combed her hair behind her ear with a long-taloned hand.

“I want to spend time with Eleanor,” she said.

The hunters—Father, Grandpa Miklos, and Rhys—left, jostling their way out of the dining room. Persephone half waved at them before turning to Arthur. “Let’s get this over with,” she said.

Arthur picked up his cane and rested his weight on it while he waited for her. I looked at his legs, wondering what ailed him, or if he was simply older than I’d thought. He saw me looking and gave me a covert smile. How had I not remembered him? Maybe I’d been too young to notice someone so subtle. Now he was all I could see.

“I’m going upstairs to play,” Luma said. “Do you want to come with me?”

“Aren’t you a little old for that?” I said without thinking, wanting to sound mature in front of Arthur. But Luma scowled at me, and I instantly felt sorry.

“If you think so, you don’t have to come,” she said. She turned and flounced up the stairs.

“We’ll see you later, Eleanor,” Grandma Persephone said. And then she and Arthur were gone, and I was alone.

I thought about going up and apologizing to Luma. But what would I say? That I’d snapped at her to impress our grandmother’s accountant? It sounded silly, even to me. And she barely knew me now. What would she even say, if I tried to apologize? What if she didn’t care?

I tried to forget the whole conversation, and looked around the house for things to amuse myself. But as the morning turned into afternoon in the big empty house, I realized I was bored. I sat and read a book in the front parlor for a while, a dark red room with a big fireplace and heavy rugs, and played chess with myself until I realized I couldn’t remember all the rules. I pulled the dust cloth off of the piano and tried out some scales.

I could still smell the sea on the breeze and a part of me wanted to go to the water, but I was afraid of it—I hadn’t swum in eight years. Maybe the ocean was now just another thing that wanted to kill me. And once from the woods I heard a series of quick barks, and then a wild creature screamed in a way that reminded me it wasn’t safe to leave the house.

Finally, I went up to my room, where I squinted at myself in the fly-specked mirror and tried to make myself change my shape, like Rhys and Luma did. What did it feel like, to change? How would I know if I was close?

I thought of a way of making up with Luma. I crept down

the hall and knocked on her door. “Hello?” I called out. I opened the door a crack and saw her sitting on a low chair with her back to the door. “Luma, I have an important question and I really need your help.”

She didn’t turn around from her vanity, where she sat brushing her hair. But she nodded at herself in the mirror, and I knew she was pleased.

“Well,” she said. “Don’t stand in the door, come in.”

While my room seemed like storage for old furniture, hers was all matched: white bed, white dresser, white vanity with an enormous mirror. That whole wall was lined with mirrors of all shapes and sizes. There was a copy of *Rebecca* tented open on her bed, and a smattering of lipsticks around it, and *Jane Eyre* bookmarked with a sheet of false eyelashes on the bedside table on top of a tattered book that said *Birds of North America*. At Saint Brigid’s you weren’t supposed to read more than one book at a time. It was considered lax. I sat down carefully on the edge of the bed and tried to figure out how to ask her what it felt like to change your shape.

“It’s a bit like turning yourself inside out,” Luma said, after I tried asking three or four different ways. “Or like turning your insides into a disguise, and then tucking your disguise into your insides.”

“It’s like a disguise?” I said. “It seems a little more complicated than that.”

“It’s . . .” She left the brushing and rummaged in the toy box

she still kept beside her bed. I felt embarrassed for her. She came out with a cloth doll in a long dress.

“Flip up her skirt,” she ordered, and, still not understanding, I did. Underneath was another head and torso of a doll. The skirt, turned inside out, was a different color. The doll, upside down, a different woman.

“It’s like that,” she said. “Only faster.”

I looked at Luma, in her white slip with her layers of blotted pink and red lipsticks staining her sharp teeth. I tried to imagine where the other creature was.

“Why does it bother you?” she asked. “It didn’t used to. You could always keep up anyway.” She pulled up the sleeve of her robe and showed me a ring of white scars on her forearm. “You bit harder than any of us, too.”

The scars stared at me accusingly, as pearly as a set of baby teeth. I stared aghast, wanting to put my own teeth up against them, to prove by size and angle that they weren’t mine.

“Oh, Luma,” I said. “I’m so sorry.”

“I’m fine!” she said, and I felt even worse. What kind of sister had I been? “It wasn’t so bad, at least you don’t have teeth like us.”

“I guess I take after Mother.”

She laughed. “But she’s so quiet!” she said. “You know, I think she said something once about you being a bit like her mother. And then I asked her what she meant and she said she couldn’t tell me.”

“Her mother?”

“Our other grandmother, silly. She lives in France, I think. Mother writes a letter every year at Christmas.”

“Have you seen her?” I felt a little kindling of hope. “Maybe I am like her.”

“I always imagined she’d be like Mother, only all over,” Luma said. I winced.

From downstairs I heard a door creak open. Grandma Persephone’s voice filtered up through the front hall, and Arthur’s, too. I’d forgotten he was going to eat with us.

“Can I borrow something pretty to wear?” I asked. “And maybe you could do my hair?”

She looked at me strangely then. “Why?”

“I just want to try something different,” I said. “I’ve worn a uniform for a long time now.”

She tilted her head. “That’s sad,” she said. “Sit down.”

She arranged me in front of her mirror and began taking down my hair. It was nearly the same color as hers, but somehow hers was lustrous, and mine a faded grayish white that made me look old. .

“What’s this?” she asked, touching the back of my neck. It stung.

“Ow!” I said.

“It looks like someone pulled out a chunk of your hair back here.” She looked me over. “And you’re bruised, too. What happened to you?”

I thought of Lucy Spencer gripping my hair, yanking on it,

trying to hold me back. My face burned. “It’s nothing,” I said. “I got in a fight at school.”

She tutted.

“Well, you’re home now,” she said. “If anyone comes after you, I’ll eat them up.” And then she giggled, and hummed as she began brushing my hair. In her own room, she seemed wise, knowing. She was a few years older than me, but we’d always switched like this, taking turns being the older sister. I used to like it, but now I was suddenly unsure of my footing.

“Let’s make you lovely,” she said.

I didn’t feel lovely, even in the frilly dress I borrowed from her. On her, I’m sure it looked elegant, voluptuous; it sagged on me like a sack, so that I looked like a little girl in a nightgown, and I ended up putting my school uniform back on. But my hair was nice the way she’d done it, in braids coiled around my head. She made me turn around and started dabbing creams onto her wrist, and then smudging them onto my cheeks and eyes. As she worked, a savory smell drifted up the stairs from the kitchen. They’d caught something, then.

“Why didn’t you come home sooner?” she asked, tilting my mouth open and swiping a little lipstick on with her pinky finger. She frowned at it and reached for a handkerchief to wipe it off. “No. You’re such a strange color. Almost green.”

“They wouldn’t let me come home,” I said.

“Funny,” she said. “Grandma told me you were too busy.”

She licked her hand and used the spit to smooth back the flyaways at my hairline. I winced. “She lied. I wasn’t busy.”

She shrugged. “I don’t see why she had to be lying. Maybe you were too busy and you just didn’t know it.”

“Busy eating plain toast for breakfast? Busy trying to make friends so the other girls wouldn’t pour water on my bed while I was sleeping? I learned Latin, I suppose, but I could have done that here.” I sighed. “I don’t know.”

Luma’s eyes went wide. “That sounds awful. Why didn’t you kill them?”

I started. “Because that’s wrong!” I said, and then thought of Lucy, and felt a sick guilt in my stomach. “They were terrible, but not that terrible.”

She cocked her head to one side and seemed about to say something, when Grandma Persephone called from downstairs that it was time for dinner.

“She should get a bell,” I said, as we made our way to the staircase. “There’s no way everyone heard that.”

From behind us I heard a clattering of toenails on bare wood, and in a blur, Rhys came rocketing down the stairs past us on four legs, his black pelt glistening as he leaped clear over the last several steps. He skidded around a corner into the hall closet below, and emerged a few moments later on two legs, pulling a sweater on over his head and then reaching down to button his pants.

And then he did something strange. He stopped in front of the speckled mirror in the front hall and licked his palm. Carefully, he smoothed his gleaming black hair back from his forehead, the way Luma had just done to me. He turned left and right, watching his own reflection, rolling his shoulders back and sticking his hands in his pockets just so before he crossed the threshold into the dining room.

As soon as he was out of sight, I turned to Luma. “I don’t remember him ever caring what he looked like,” I said. It wasn’t in his character. Rhys was a predator, sleek and unstoppable. It was strange to see him pouting at himself.

“I don’t know who he’s fooling,” Luma said. “He’s been trying to impress Arthur ever since he came home for the summer.”

“Impress him? Why?”

“If you ask me, it’s very childish,” she said, and she flounced down after him. But I noticed that when she came to the hall mirror, she stopped, too. I hung back, watching as she curled a strand of hair around the tip of her finger, and then unspooled it so that it hung down alongside her face.

I was the last one in, and everyone else had already taken seats: Grandma Persephone at the head, with Miklos next to her, which surprised me since I’d assumed they’d sit in the same place every time. Mother was again in her barrel at the foot of the table. Luma and Rhys jostled for a seat opposite Arthur, and in the chaos I slipped into the seat beside him, unnoticed. Margaret came in bearing an enormous tray loaded with cuts of rare

venison: loins, steaks, something I couldn't identify. Grandpa Miklos speared it with the carving fork and brandished it at me. "Little one, you should have the heart."

I froze. The heart on the fork quivered, and Grandpa Miklos looked confused, then sad. Finally, Rhys snatched it off the end of the fork with both hands. Grandpa grunted indulgently. And with that, dinnertime descended.

The air filled with the gnashing of teeth and the clink of fork tines on china. Grandpa Miklos shoved his whole face into the dish, scarfing up the tender bits and licking the plate clean with a tongue that seemed too big for his mouth. I ate slowly, the way they'd taught me in school, and watched the carnage from the corner of my eye. It was a little easier than breakfast had been, but I still felt that I could be next.

I glanced sideways at Arthur. He seemed to be smiling a little. I realized that he wasn't eating, just pushing food around his plate and occasionally slipping pieces of it into a napkin in his lap. I felt mortified.

"I'm sorry they're like this," I whispered to him over the chomps and satisfied snarls. "This would put anyone off eating."

He turned his head to me, looking perplexed.

"I've dined enough times with the Zarrins to know what to expect," he said. "You can't sit down to table with the wolf and not see a mauling."

"But you aren't eating," I said. "I'll ask them to use some table manners."

He snorted, and then composed himself. “You’re very kind,” he said. “But believe me when I say that this has nothing to do with the Zarrins’ table manners.”

I kept eating, bringing small forkfuls of venison to my mouth, but I watched Arthur out of the corner of my eye. I watched the way he tilted his head at the family, in . . . affection? Concern? It was hard to say.

“You seem to like them,” I said. The cloud of noise made me feel like we were alone at the table, the only ones not scarfing down food with wild abandon. “Or you seem amused by them, maybe. Aren’t you afraid?”

He raised his eyebrows, and I was happy to think that maybe I’d surprised him.

“Afraid?” he said. “No, not for a long time now, anyway. There have been times I’ve been furious with them. Or not wanted to see them at all. But I think I will miss them, when it’s all said and done.”

I felt my heartbeat accelerate wildly. “You’re not planning to leave? Stop working for us?”

“Not anytime soon,” he said. “But I work for Persephone, and she’s getting on in years. Things will change when she dies. I suspect your grandfather will leave the public affairs to Rhys, and something tells me he won’t have your grandmother’s interest in business.”

We both looked over at Rhys. He was pointing to something out the window to get Luma to turn her head, and when she

did, he lunged forward and grabbed a joint of venison off her plate with his teeth. She looked back and swatted him and they both laughed, juices trickling down their chins. I glanced back at Arthur and saw him looking at me—or at least, I saw my own half smile, half grimace reflected in his mirrored lenses. But he was smiling, just a little.

“Why would they ever leave it to him?” I asked, feeling bitter. I tried to correct myself: “I mean, why not to my father? He’s older.”

“Because Rhys is their favorite. Because he reminds them of their long-lost firstborn son. They half believe Rhys is him.” He clicked his tongue. “And because they think your father is missing the patriarchal quality. The Zarrins are a surprisingly traditional people.”

I looked around at them: covered in blood and sauce, eating with forks, hands, and faces indiscriminately. He must have seen my shock, because he leaned in toward me, not touching me, but close enough that I could feel the electricity of it.

“You’ve been gone a long time,” he said. “I know you think that’s a bad thing, but you might be able to see things more clearly from your vantage point.”

They ate until the platters were empty. A silence descended slowly over the table, except for a few sounds of lapping. Arthur leaned forward.

“That was a fine dinner,” he said. “Persephone, can I trouble you for a cup of coffee?”

“I’ll get it,” Luma said. Rhys shoved her. She shoved him back. They began growling at each other, shoulders tensing.

“Eleanor,” Grandma Persephone said, “why don’t you get it? I’m sure Margaret’s got the tray ready.”

“Wish me luck,” I said to Arthur. He laughed a little, under his breath.

“Luck with what?” Grandma Persephone was tilting her head at me again, in that way she did when she wanted me to stop being rude. I was going to start hating that soon.

“Never mind.”

The coffee tray was already on the counter by the door. Aunt Margaret stood scrubbing dishes with her back turned to me. I picked up the tray as silently as I could, but a rogue spoon leaped off and hit the stone floor with a clatter. She turned and stared at me.

“Just a spoon,” I muttered, setting the tray down and scooping it back up. I wiped it off on the edge of my skirt. “Sorry.”

“Mmmmmmmmm . . .” She was humming to herself, or it seemed that way at first. “Mmm . . . traitor.” Margaret hadn’t said a clear word to me that I could remember, but now she was making herself understood perfectly.

“Excuse me?” I said.

“Hm.” And she turned her back on me, and returned to scrubbing a roasting pan.

I told myself I wasn’t upset. She was just a madwoman, just

a very strange aunt who would rather cook and clean than sit down to dinner with her family. I'd never seen her even speak to her own son; of course she didn't like me. I was a disruption in her routine.

But I was rattled. And the rattling spread from my mind down my arms and rattled the tray I carried, the cup of bone china ticking away in the socket of its saucer, the silver coffeepot brimming over, the cream and sugar spoons chiming. When I stepped back over the threshold, Arthur looked at me, and all went silent. I glided across the floor to him. I thought about how Luma must do this job sometimes, and I thought about how she would do it: her long hair draped over one shoulder, her steps light as they were when she walked the forest. I did it like that, tilting my head at a soft angle, pointing my toes, turning myself into someone else. I set the tray down in front of him and a stray lock of my hair brushed against his suit jacket. He glanced up at me, his face only inches from my ear.

“Thank you,” he said.

I nodded and let go of the tray. My wrist brushed the hot coffeepot and I yanked it back, but I didn't even feel the pain. Not really.

“You've hurt yourself,” he said.

“No, I'm fine.”

“You're quite the stoic.”

I found myself smiling. When I'd first gotten to school, I'd been a crybaby, someone who lost fights. But I'd learned.

"There's a salve for that in the kitchen," Grandma Persephone said. "Get it from Marg—"

"I'm *fine*," I said, a little too sharply.

She sat back in her chair, eyeing me as I settled back in. The noise in the room soon resumed, talking instead of gnashing, and the tension between us slackened a little.

But now my father was watching me. He had a perplexed look on his face, and he kept looking back and forth between Arthur and me. I looked at him closely for the first time since I'd gotten here. He looked like a young Grandpa Miklos, or an old Rhys: the thick dark hair, the heavy brows and jaw. But Arthur was right: my father was missing some essential quality that Rhys and Grandpa Miklos both had. He was timid and watery inside that solid body, like he was always embarrassed. I felt like I knew something else, too, but I wasn't sure exactly what that was yet. When he saw me watching him, he asked, "So, Eleanor. How are you getting settled in?"

"I feel like I've lost so much time," I said. "I only half remember how it is to be here. I don't feel like it's real."

"Oh, no," said Miklos, from the far end of the table. I glanced up at him. He looked genuinely sorrowful. Maybe he was the grandfather I remembered, when he wasn't eyeing me like I was a wounded deer. Maybe I could help him see me differently.

“I remember you used to tell the best stories, Grandpa,” I added. “Maybe you can help me understand.”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” Arthur said.

My father glanced askance at Arthur again, but Grandpa smiled. The rest of him was human now, but his teeth were still the wolf’s, so his grin was too big for his mouth. I forced myself to regard him, to breathe deeply through the darkness that swam at the edges of my vision. This would only work if I could be strong.

“What do you want to hear?” he asked.

“I want to hear how you first became like you are now,” I said. “How you started”—I fumbled for the phrase he’d used at breakfast—“becoming the wolf.”

Grandma Persephone looked shocked. “Eleanor!”

“Easy, my love.” Grandpa Miklos put a hand on her shoulder. “That’s a hard story,” he said to me. “Too hard for right after a big meal. Another time, I promise. Let me tell you instead . . .” He thought. “Another story about our family. The story about my name.”

Grandpa Miklos leaned forward in his chair and propped his elbows on the table.

“When I was young,” Miklos said, “I was not Miklos. I was not Zarrin. I was a boy with no name.”

I glanced around the table. Rhys and Luma had leaned forward, ears pricked, dutifully attentive. Mother had stretched her

arm across the table to stroke Father's hand, Father was watching Arthur, and Arthur was watching me. I wondered what each of them saw, or thought they saw.

"You were an orphan?" I asked.

"No," Miklos said. "I had a family, a mother and a father and two sisters who were older. They had no names. None of us had names. Because none of us had any words.

"We lived like this."

He shifted in his chair, raised both hands, and began to pantomime like a silent movie star. His gestures created invisible objects: A wooden bowl worn smooth by generations of hands. A pitchfork that he used to stab at mounds of hay. A soft hat that his mother sewed for him and placed on his head.

I watched, transfixed.

Grandpa Miklos made a gesture that seemed to embody transition, the passage of time. "And so when I walked across the land—"

"Europe," said Grandma Persephone.

"—Europe, to the water, and got in the boat, that was almost the first time I heard people talking. I knew maybe people talked, but only the nobles, royalty. And on the boat, everyone was talking all the time. Such a waste! I loved it."

"But why did you leave the old country?" I asked.

The focus of the table shifted to me. Grandma Persephone raised an eyebrow. I stared her down. What did she want from

me? How was I supposed to let my eyes adjust if I wasn't allowed to see anything at all?

Grandpa Miklos looked a little proud. "Ah, trying to get me to tell, I see. Clever," he said. "Not today."

"The boat," Grandma Persephone prompted.

"But the boat! I loved the boat. The men there, they taught me so many words. The ones who taught me good words, like hello, and share, and blanket, they lived and came to America, and the ones I could find later when I was rich, I made them rich. But the ones who taught me bad words . . ." He shrugged, and in the candle flicker, he let his face slip shape. One moment he was Grandpa Miklos. The next he was just a snarling mouthful of teeth.

It was over in an instant. I didn't have time to faint, so I just clung to the table for dear life while my heart thundered in my chest.

"Miklos!" Grandma Persephone said. "She's not ready for that kind of theatrics."

"She used to love it," Grandpa Miklos said. "*Grandpa, grandpa, show me the wolf—*"

"I'm fine," I said. He nodded at me approvingly. He could like me. He would like me. I'd make sure of it.

"And then I came to New York," he said. "And it was so *busy!* I didn't know there was more than one language; they taught me Polish on the boat, I think. And here, Spanish and Greek

and Italian and English. I tried to get food, but I had no money. I tried to go in a house to sleep, but they chased me out. I fell asleep in a—a hole between houses.”

“An alley,” Grandma Persephone supplied.

“With trash cans and dead birds. And then when I woke up it was dark, and a drunk man was pissing near me!”

My face flushed hot. This was not a good story.

“And I was hungry,” Miklos said. “And, well . . .” He bared his teeth and clacked them together. “And then I saw he had these fine clothes, so I put them on. And then I felt something in the pocket.”

He reached into the pocket of his own vest and pulled out a cheap gold-plated watch on a chain much finer than the watch itself. He flipped it open and showed me the inside of the lid. It was stamped with the name MIKLOS ZARRIN.

For a moment I thought, absurdly, *This creature has eaten my grandfather.*

“And so that was my name,” the man with the pocket watch in front of me said. “Two whole words that belonged just to me. My first week in America, and I was rich.”

“Do you ever think about the man whose name you stole?” I asked.

When I said it, everyone got very quiet. Grandma Persephone’s head swiveled to stare me down. Beside me, I heard Arthur give an amused cough.

Grandpa, though, looked thoughtful.

“Sometimes,” he said. “Sometimes I think about him.”

“And what do you think?”

“I thank him,” Grandpa said. “He gave me everything.”

And he did a little flick of his wrist and spreading of the fingers that encompassed the candle-bright dining room with its chinoiserie wallpaper and imported dishes, the cavernous dark of the foyer beyond, the zigzagging staircase. His gesture traveled up a winding path through pipes and ladders to the attic and burst forth from the lightning rod atop the tallest tower, arcing into the sky to rain like fireworks over our house, our land, the fishing village beneath where people whispered when they said the name Zarrin.

“And everything I have,” he said, “I will someday give to *you*.”

And just for a moment, I felt home.

Until I realized that when he'd said *you*, his gaze had shifted to Rhys, who sat there grinning like a king but not surprised. He had perfect teeth, Rhys. And Grandpa's face. And the absolute certainty of someone who has never had a troubled thought in his life. I realized that this must not be the first time Grandpa had promised him the house and everything in it.

“Well,” Grandma Persephone said, “should we go sit in the parlor?”

I felt my stomach growl, and when I looked down, I realized I hadn't touched my dinner. Arthur glanced up at Grandma.

“She hasn't finished yet,” he said. “Eleanor, are you still hungry?”

“I’m fine.”

“Nonsense,” Grandma Persephone said. “Take your time.”

“I’ll sit with her,” said Arthur.

Grandma nodded, then left. The rest of the family followed her in a ragged train.

“Why did you do that?” I asked.

“You were hungry,” he said. “And you weren’t going to say anything.”

He was still sipping his coffee. I looked into the cup when he set it down. It was blacker than any coffee I’d seen, and an oily sheen hung around its surface. It didn’t look good to me, but it was the only thing he seemed to like.

“So,” he said, “no one has told me much. What brings you home all of a sudden?”

I glanced up at him. “I ran away from boarding school.”

“You must have used the money she sent you.” He smiled at my confusion. “Don’t look so surprised; I do all her books.”

“Do you know why she’s kept me away?”

He pursed his lips and shook his head. “If you think she tells me anything,” he said, “you don’t know your grandmother very well.”

“What do you mean?”

He looked a little surprised. “You ask a lot of questions, for a Zarrin.”

“What does *that* mean?”

He laughed. I found myself laughing, too, a little.

“I mean that you’re curious,” he said. “I like that. And you should know I’m not exactly your grandmother’s most trusted friend, more an ally of necessity. I protect her assets, and she—well, she makes me coffee.” He took another sip. “But I’m sure that whatever she’s up to, she doesn’t mean to harm you.”

“It doesn’t feel that way. Sometimes—” I thought about stopping myself, and then I plunged forward. “Sometimes it feels like she hates me.”

I told him about boarding school, about the girls who had teased me for years, saying my family had given me away because I was too ugly to keep. How I’d written to Grandma Persephone begging to come home at first, and she’d sent me vague news and ignored my question. How I’d run away a few times and been picked up by the police and driven back to the school while they lectured me. How Lucy Spencer had made friends with me when I was twelve, and for a while I’d felt alright, but then she’d spread rumors about me later, told people things about me that made them hate me. How the fact that I used to care about her only made me hate her more. At that last part, Arthur raised his eyebrows.

“Tell me about her,” he said.

“I mean,” I said, “we used to be friends. Good friends. And then we just weren’t. And it wasn’t like anything happened.”

“As though she’d outgrown you.”

“Exactly!” I said, and I wondered if he’d ever felt that way about someone. I realized I’d said more to him than I had to

anyone in years. And he had listened silently while I shared almost as much as I knew about myself. And so I told him about Lucy Spencer pushing me down the stairs.

We'd been the last people at school, her and her new best friend and me. They were waiting for one of their mothers to come pick them up and take them to New York. At breakfast, they'd caught my eye, hummed some little song, and then crossed their hands across their chests and snapped their fingers and dissolved into giggles. I was used to ignoring them, so I did. But then later that morning, I'd been carrying a box of files for Sister Katherine from a second floor storage room, and I'd heard footsteps, and then I'd been shoved hard, from behind. As I stumbled, spilling the box, I saw Lucy standing at the top of the stairs, smiling at a job well done.

Arthur shook his head. "People are so amused by cruelty. I've never been able to understand it."

He slipped his hand on top of mine for a moment. It was like the marble thigh of Saint Cecilia I'd touched in the cathedral one day when no one was looking: cool, and heavy, and smooth. I felt a chill run from the arches of my feet to the base of my brain. He had long fingers, hands good for piano, weighted like ivory keys. It felt like a weight that could carry me to the bottom of the sea. I almost felt as though I could tell him what I'd done next. But I didn't. I was too afraid that if I did, he'd look at me like he looked at the rest of the Zarrins.

"I've been alone for so long that I can't remember what it

feels like to belong,” I said. “And I’m worried that I won’t belong here, and that if it doesn’t end with Grandpa killing me, it will with Grandma telling me I have to leave.”

He sighed deeply. “It was a cruel thing your grandmother did,” he said. “You might never forgive her for it. But I don’t think she’s going to send you away. Not after you’ve come looking for her.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“She admires it,” he said. “It’s obvious she’s proud of you.”

“Then why didn’t she want me to be here?”

His hand slipped off of mine, and he shrugged. “She’s inscrutable,” he said. And then he laughed, as though to himself.

“I will say this about her,” he said. “Whatever Persephone does, she does for her family.”

But wasn't I her family?



We talked in the dining room for a long time before we went across the hall to the parlor. Mother sat in a copper tub by the fire reading a crumbling issue of *LIFE*, and Grandpa Miklos had sprawled out on the hearth and was dozing—not as the wolf but as a human, the vest of his three-piece suit unbuttoned to let his after-dinner belly expand. My father and Grandma Persephone sat playing chess, but when we came in Father stood up abruptly.

“Here,” he said, and helped Arthur to a chair. He was

courteous with him in a way that surprised me, and I wondered if it was because Arthur had a bad leg. It was definitely a little stiff, especially when he walked, but it was hard to imagine him needing help. I thought about how gracefully he'd helped me into my own chair.

Arthur got caught up in a conversation with Mother. Father's chess game with Grandma Persephone ended, and Arthur climbed out of his chair, the two of them switching places as though they'd done it a hundred times—Father to Arthur's chair, Arthur to chess table. Luma sat down next to me and talked to me about hunting bears and this new color of lipstick she liked, but my mind wasn't there. I kept thinking about my conversation in the dining room—what Grandma Persephone would do for her family, what to do about the new electric feeling in my core when I thought about Arthur touching my hand. I ignored her and half listened to the chess game. Eventually Luma stood up and left.

“. . . had some luck with the plants this year,” Grandma Persephone was saying. “The heated floor is working out well.”

“I wouldn't say that taking my advice counts as luck,” Arthur said.

“I was just tired of dealing with that odd little woodstove in there. A disaster.” Persephone frowned at the board. “Check.”

“You distracted me,” Arthur said. I couldn't tell where his eyes were. I felt like a child, perched on the edge of the sofa, my hands folded in my lap. Mother was trying to show Father

something in the magazine, but Father was watching the game, too. I realized that both of us were trying not to look too obvious about it.

“How did you meet my father?” I called to Arthur.

He turned from the board, but Grandma Persephone spoke first.

“He’s been a family friend for some time,” she said.

“So you and Father grew up together?”

“In a way,” Arthur said.

I studied him. He didn’t look nearly as old as my father. His eyes would have told me how old he was, but he’d kept those smoked glasses on all evening. I wondered if he was blind. Maybe that was why my father tried to hold his arm. Why he watched him so attentively. But then how did Arthur play chess if he was blind, or pull my chair out for me, or drive his Model T?

“Checkmate,” Arthur said at last.

“Ah,” said Grandma Persephone. “I didn’t see that.”

His lips peeled back into a smile. “I know.”

I studied him. In the warm light of the parlor, he looked less pale than he had in the dining room, the fire casting a glow on his almost translucent skin. What kind of thing was he? Just a man, or something less or more? If he was my father’s friend, where had they even met? Generally, no one from the family left town until they’d grown up. I tried to imagine Arthur as one of the ruddy children of Winterport, a wool scarf around his face clotted with frozen snot. It didn’t seem possible.

Arthur must have noticed me staring, because he shifted in his chair to face me.

“Did you . . . want something?” he asked. It had no malice in it, but I flushed.

“I was just wondering where you were from,” I said.

He smiled with his lips sealed shut. Grandma Persephone shot me a look. Something else I wasn’t supposed to ask about.

“Arthur,” she said, “will you play piano for Eleanor, since she’s home?”

He glanced up from the board. “If that’s what you want.”

I knew, somehow, that that meant he didn’t want to.

“Please do,” she said. He began to stand up.

“You don’t have to,” I said from my place on the sofa. “You’ve been working all day. Please, *don’t do anything you don’t want to do tonight.*”

I was surprised by how vehement I was. A glance around the room told me that everyone else was, too.

Arthur pushed in his chair. “Excuse me for a moment.”

As he left the room, I saw Grandma Persephone’s eyes follow him, and then look at me. I was starting to get annoyed with her constantly studying me. Even the nuns hadn’t paid this much attention to every little thing I said and did.

“Let’s play, Mother,” Father said as he began to set up the board. Grandma Persephone humored him for a few minutes, but I could see her mulling something over.

“Eleanor,” she said, when a few minutes had passed. “Would you go see if your aunt needs any help with the dishes?”

I stood up and left the room without saying anything. I wanted to scream at her, but I knew that would do no good. You couldn't let people see you were angry; they'd only use it against you. It was better to hold it in and wait for your moment to retaliate. I'd done it at boarding school more than once. Like with the girl who held me down while her friends rummaged through my trunk and took turns reading parts of my diary in an imitation of my voice. Back when I still kept a diary, with little bits of poems stuck in it, little notes to myself about things I wanted or dreams I'd had. I'd waited until that girl was shopping in town and cut the quilt her mother had sewn her to ribbons. I'd heard the scream from my dormitory room.

Of course, her mother had just sewn her a new one at Christmas. That was what it was like to have a family that wanted you.

I was so wrapped up in my own thoughts that I was halfway down the hall to the kitchen when I heard a scabbling inside the wall.

I stopped under the portrait of Grandpa Miklos with the horses and listened, my ears pricked. It was coming from the opposite wall, the one under the staircase. What was making the noise? Rats? Ghosts? If there were such a thing, they'd be here. And when I looked at that wall more closely, I could see a crack, a seam, where I had thought there was solid wall. A door,

I realized. For a moment, it rattled in its frame. And then it exploded open, and Rhys came flying out.

He hit the wall opposite, and I saw his head snap back. His lips were so red they looked bitten, and there were red marks like handprints on either side of his neck. When he lowered his head again, his eyes were wild, his grin wide, and I saw his teeth grow sharp. He started to lunge back toward the doorway, but then he saw me and stopped in his tracks, stumbling forward. He caught himself on the wall, glowering at me.

“What did you see?” he asked.

I shook my head. “Nothing,” I said. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the door moving—being pulled shut from inside. What *had* I seen?

I forced myself to look at Rhys instead. He was angry. And something else, too. He was worried. About what I’d seen, or what I’d say. To whom? Who had pulled the door shut?

“What are you looking at?” he snarled.

“Calm down,” I said. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I looked right into his eyes. That was the trick, when you were lying. Stare them down. It worked on nuns, so I prayed it would work on Rhys.

He became the wolf all at once, his body stretching and snapping, and my head swam with the impossibility of it as he sprang away into the shadows of the kitchen. The back door slammed. After a minute, Margaret came out and gathered his clothes, which had fallen to the floor. She hung them up in the

real closet, the one whose door wasn't just a crack in the wall. Glowering and muttering, she backed away from me and vanished into the kitchen.

When she'd gone, I ran my fingers along the crack—it looked like little more than a seam in the wallpaper. If I got my fingernails under it just right, I could pry it up a little ways. But after the first inch I could move it no farther. There was something on the inside, a latch or a chain, holding it shut. A secret passage? I didn't remember anything like that from when I was a child. Someone had latched it from the inside.

Luma wandered around the corner, and I turned on her.

"What's this?" I demanded, pointing at the wall.

She frowned. "I don't know," she said breezily.

"Were you just in there?" I asked. "Were you and Rhys fighting in the closet? Is he bullying you?"

"No," she said. "I just came from upstairs."

"Well, someone was in there with Rhys. And then shut the door again."

Luma's eyes narrowed. "I'm going to kill him," she said. "Which way did he go?"

"Luma, what's going on?"

She looked at me like I was stupid. "Rhys is trying to be with him," she said.

"With who?"

"With *Arthur*," she said.

I felt a little ringing in my ears. "What?"

“Oh, you know. Wanting to spend all his time with him. Wanting to be alone with him. Grandma told Rhys to stop playing with him, but he won’t listen. He does whatever he wants,” she said, tossing her head.

My mind reeled. It explained a lot—the preening in the hall, the mad attempts to impress him. And it was clear to me that Rhys was dangerous. I could see him cornering Arthur in the closet, shoving him against the wall. I imagined the look on Arthur’s face, cool and reticent, in the face of my cousin’s raw malice, and felt a little shiver that I liked. Maybe I’d like to shove Arthur against a wall.

And of course, that made me think of Lucy Spencer. What I’d done. What I was running from.

“We can’t let this go on,” I said. “What if Rhys hurts him?”

Luma grabbed my hands.

“You’re right,” she said. “And anyway, it’s not fair for him to be keeping Arthur to himself like this. Arthur is the family friend, not his. And I hardly see Rhys anymore.”

My thoughts were racing. This didn’t seem right, somehow. Some piece was missing. I thought of the red marks on Rhys’s neck, and imagined Arthur grabbing at Rhys, trying to push him away. I had to protect Arthur, I thought. Rhys was determined, and whatever he wanted with Arthur, he’d get his way.

“You can’t make Rhys stop doing anything by force,” I said. “He’s too strong.”

“Oh, I could fight him,” Luma said. “He’s a bigger person, but I’m a bigger wolf.”

“No, we can’t just attack him,” I said. Why was this always her first answer to a problem? “He’s family. But maybe he’d leave Arthur alone if he was with someone else.” I could spend all my time with him, I thought. Whenever Arthur was here, I could be with him. Rhys didn’t want me to tell anyone, so he wouldn’t do anything in front of me. Probably. It scared me, but I was excited, too, to think I could help Arthur. After all, he’d already helped me. I thought of his laugh as Luma clasped my hands in hers.

“Of course!” she said. “You’re so smart, Ellie. I’ll fix this.”

She turned on her heel and made for the parlor with deliberate strides. I followed along behind, more slowly, not sure what she was doing. I stopped for a moment in the doorway. Luma was taking Arthur by the hand and pulling him to his feet.

“I want you to take me on a romantic walk,” she said. “In the moonlight.”

For a moment I saw a ripple of anger pass across Arthur’s face. He turned it, somehow, into a smile.

“Miles,” Arthur said to my father, “Luma’s told me she wants me to take her on a romantic walk. In the moonlight, apparently.”

From her chair by the fire, Grandma Persephone gave a small irritated sigh. Father stood, looking worried. “Arthur, really?”

“What the lady asks for, I must obey.”

He took her by the arm. As they passed me, Luma flashed me a radiant smile and a shoulder shimmy. Arthur gave me a smaller, conspiratorial smile, one that turned my guts to spiders. And then they left through the front door, disappearing into the night.

“Mother,” Father said to Grandma Persephone. “Are you really going to let this happen?”

“She’s a woman, Miles,” Grandma said mildly.

“I think it’s nice,” Mother said from her washtub. No one responded.

They didn’t come back for a long time. I sat and watched my father nervously try to converse with my mother while Grandma Persephone stroked Grandpa Miklos’s belly with one foot. Someone put the record player on. Still they didn’t come back. Father stood up and began pacing, but everyone else ignored him. Grandma Persephone asked Mother if she wanted a game of chess. Mother said no. Father sat back down and huffily pretended to read a book. Finally, I couldn’t stand it anymore, and I stood up and made for the hall.

Margaret was in the dining room. She had the silver coffee service spread out and was polishing the pieces before putting them back in the cabinet. I looked back, into the room of warm idleness I’d left, and back at her, angrily scrubbing tarnish off of a pointless pile of junk used by one person who would have probably been fine with just a single cup. And that was the moment I couldn’t stand it anymore.

“Why do you let them treat you this way?” I asked.

Her eyes narrowed, her brow furrowing over them.

“I know you can understand me,” I said. “I know you can talk. You called me a traitor, remember? So what here did I betray? Did I ask too many questions, like about why you let them sit and relax and laugh and talk while you get nothing? Don’t you get that? All your work is for nothing!”

She opened her mouth, and for a moment nothing happened. I knew that silence, though. It was the long silence of a child who’s fallen down and hurt themselves. And then from deep in her throat came the groan.

At first, I thought she was just trying to scare me. But as the noise went on longer it got louder and climbed in pitch, until the silver on the table was rattling and the pictures jostling on the walls, and still it climbed. I felt frozen to the spot. The sound was going to rattle my bones out of my body, shatter me and turn me to jelly, bring down the rickety rafters of the high towers and then nothing would—

The sound stopped. I looked up to see Margaret slumped over. Grandma Persephone was kneeling on the floor beside her, cradling Margaret’s head in her arms.

“You know you’re not supposed to talk to her,” she said evenly. “Now you’ve upset her.”

“That’s crazy,” I said. “Don’t you see how crazy that is?”

“Eleanor,” Grandma Persephone said, her voice full of warning.

“What are you going to do?” I asked. “Abandon me again?”

Make me cook and clean for you?” I laughed, a little drunk on my own stupidity. “You can’t just tell me to stop. After everything you did to me, I don’t care what you think of me anymore.”

Persephone straightened up and squinted at me. I felt suddenly cold. She studied me for a long moment.

“I don’t think that’s true,” she said.

I’d had a thousand things to say lined up, but when she said that, they fled. I wanted to get away from her, so I started walking quickly toward the stairs. That was a mistake.

In the parlor, Miklos’s head shot up. He clambered to his feet and started for me, stumbling toward me, his long wolf teeth already sliding into place. His shoulders had dropped, his eyes fixed on me.

I looked at the front door, but on open ground he’d catch me almost immediately. So I bolted left up the stairs, as behind me Grandma Persephone yelled, “Miklos! Stop it!”

I didn’t dare glance behind me. I heard his claws clacking on the stairs, and then I felt something swipe the back of my ankle, stinging hot. I ran until I reached my room, then slammed the door shut, locked it, and shoved the rocking chair under the door handle. From the hall came the clicking of toenails on the parquet, and then shoes, and Grandma Persephone chastising Miklos softly. I held still until the sounds receded.

I looked down at my leg. He’d only scratched it, but blood was welling up along the back of my calf in bright beads, oddly

yellowish, not red the way blood should be. Stupid. I wanted to cry every time I looked at my own weird blood. No matter how strange the rest of the family was, I bet even Miklos bled red.

I couldn't go get a bandage, not now. I went to my old wardrobe and got down a nightgown that was far too small for me now, then wrapped it around my leg, pressing it against the bleeding. Let Margaret clean this useless thing, if she wanted.

I was angry, but once that subsided, I was terrified. I climbed into my bed and sat listening for any sound of a tread on the stairs, any scratching at the window. This door between us couldn't keep me safe, I realized, if Grandma Persephone decided I wasn't welcome.

Eventually I heard footsteps in the hall outside, light and fast, and then a knock at my door. I sat up in bed. Was it Miklos, come to kill me? I'd shunned his family, and now I was like the men on the boat. I'd treated my grandmother with unkindness, and he was there to—

"Ellie?" Luma's voice sounded tentative. I breathed out, my heart still racing.

"One second." I scrambled to un-wedge the rocking chair and unlock the door, and climbed back into bed. "Come in."

She slipped in through the door and crawled under the blankets with me. I could smell the lavender water she splashed on her hair, the rank stink of meat on her breath. Her body was warm and downed in hair, like a cat's. I felt snug with her here. She sighed.

“It was so hard,” she said. “Rhys saw us out walking and he looked so unhappy. I thought he was going to start a fight, but he just ran off into the forest.”

“Luma, what I said earlier—I didn’t mean *you* had to do it.”

“Oh, I wanted to,” she said. “There’s something about him. It feels like I want to rip him to pieces, but I don’t. I don’t know, I kind of like it. Do you know what I mean?”

I did. And now I felt sick.

“You’re in love with him?” I asked, not sure I wanted the answer.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “But I don’t want Rhys to have him, so maybe I do love him?”

I’d never been good at talking to boys—even when we’d had school dances, I’d hid in a corner in a borrowed dress. But I knew about boys from watching them with other girls, and from listening to the gossip afterward. So I knew that no matter what you were like, or who you preferred, boys liked you best if you were beautiful. My chances weren’t good here. Fish-face, the other girls had called me. I was funny looking, with protruding, heavy-lidded eyes and a wide mouth, to say nothing of the ugly web of skin between my thumbs and forefingers. Luma was beautiful. Even if I did say something to Arthur, he would choose Luma anyway.

Well, I shouldn’t be upset about it, if it kept Rhys away from him. Rhys frightened me. I hadn’t liked that look in his eyes in the hall earlier. It reminded me of Grandpa Miklos’s eyes when he’d sprung at me, all raw intention.

“Did he like you?” I asked. “Did he kiss you?” It was like picking at a scab. I’d barely spoken to him, I told myself. Anything I thought I knew about him was wrong, so why was I so upset?

“He didn’t try,” she said. “He wanted to talk.”

“What did he want to talk about?”

“Funny stuff,” she said. “Poetry. He wanted me to tell him what all the noises in the forest meant, all the ones he couldn’t hear. It was nice.”

“I’m tired,” I said.

She leaned over and kissed me on the forehead.

“Thank you,” she said. “I never could have done this without you. I’m so glad you’re home.”

She slipped out. Her side of the bed cooled rapidly without her.

Maybe it wasn’t too late to leave. I could ask for some more money, go to another school in another town where no one knew me. I could start over. But the thought of doing that chilled me, too. There was the thing I’d nearly done to Lucy Spencer to consider. I thought about how elastic and soft her neck had felt, and about Luma’s ringed scar.

I fell asleep with racing thoughts, wishing I had any kind of clue of what to do next. When I finally drifted off, I dreamed about the greenhouse.

THREE

IT DIDN'T REALLY FEEL LIKE A DREAM. IT FELT like getting up sleepy for a glass of water, that shambling feeling. I drifted across the upper gallery that overlooked the ground floor to the back staircase, the one old houses have for servants. The stairs led down to the laundry, and to a rickety porch that had been walled in to make a hallway. It led across the yard to Grandma Persephone's greenhouse.

I was heading there to meet with the other children, Luma, Rhys and Charlie. We were going to play a game. We'd often meet up there to play, the four of us. Rhys and Charlie were the biggest and the smallest so we always put them on a team together. It balanced it out. I think that was my idea.

Moving along the corridor, I could already half see in my mind's eye the greenhouse, packed with rows of orchids and

other exotic plants, the battered wingback chair where Grandma Persephone liked to sit and drink tea while she contemplated her deck of cards. It was a bright place, a daytime place. I was happy when I could get there.

Thunder rolled somewhere in the distance. When had a storm come in?

I opened the door and found the greenhouse shattered.

Shards lay everywhere, the ceiling and walls still raining down in places onto the bodies of crushed plants, intermixed with smashed pottery. Overhead the sky was red and thick as blood. Dim shapes stirred in that heaven. I didn't like it. I opened my mouth to speak and found that I could not make a sound. I woke up choking on words.

A loud crash of thunder came, and I screamed.

I sat up in bed and looked out the window. Nothing but a heat storm. Dim lightning flashed on the horizon over the water, no specific strokes, just an illumination of the sky. The sea below looked calm, but I could tell it churned beneath the surface, gathering force.

Someone knocked on my door. I went and opened it. Grandma Persephone stood outside, carrying a candelabra that threw her face into sharp shadows. It took me a few seconds to realize I wasn't still dreaming.

"The lights could go out any minute," she said.

"It's not raining here."

"Somewhere down the coast, the storm's breaking. Winterport's

electricity has a long way to travel.” She tipped her head back, and for a moment I could see the mysterious smile I’d loved and feared when I was little. For a moment I felt eight again, like she’d never sent me away and no time had passed at all.

“It’s the perfect weather for what we will do,” she said.

She moved on down the corridor, the light receding with her. I ran after.

The house with its vast open spaces had the feel of a jungle. I felt safe from ambush in her circle of light and nowhere else. Around any corner could be Miklos, or Rhys. I realized I wasn’t certain if Grandma Persephone had any power of her own, or if she was just a mad old woman who played at magic to make herself feel better about being surrounded by beasts. To make herself less afraid.

“How did you know I was coming home?”

“I read the cards yesterday, early in the morning,” she said. “I saw you traveling and knew you’d come here.”

“Not because you got a call from Saint Brigid’s?” I asked, both skeptical and afraid of the answer.

“Have you seen a telephone in this house?”

She took me down the route I had followed in the dream. Down the back stairs, through the laundry, across the long crude corridor. I had a terror of what we would find at the end.

“We added this room and refitted the upstairs for a bathroom when your mother moved in,” Grandma said. “After the war.”

I nodded. I didn't know what any of this had to do with the middle of the night, or if she was just making conversation.

It was almost too dark to see in the hall, but when Grandma Persephone threw open the door to the greenhouse, a bolt of lightning split the dark and illuminated the room: the forest of palms and hydrangeas, the hothouse roses and African violets and so much of this one strange plant, a black orchid.

"*Draconis vulgaris*," Grandma Persephone said. "On Crete we called it *drakondia*, snake lily. Prepared one way it's a love potion; another way, it's poison. It's the backbone of our fortune, but it mostly takes care of itself. It's very hardy, under the right conditions."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Sit," she said, waving me toward one of the armchairs, the velvet streaked with droppings from the birds that sometimes got trapped in the greenhouse. I remembered Rhys and Luma trying to catch them, when we were young. But I'd always been more interested in these chairs, and in the little table where Grandma Persephone laid out her cards.

The tarot deck was there now, in the middle of the table.

I perched on the edge of the chair, not wanting to lean back, resting my hands on the clean spots on the table in front of me.

"Eleanor," she said, "why did you come back?"

"This is my home."

"You barely remember it. You barely remember us."

"I had nowhere else to go."

“What did you do?”

That stung. “What makes you think I did anything?”

“Because I know you,” Grandma Persephone said. “You were always doing something. Always up to something.”

It sounded like she was talking about someone else. “I’m not like that. I’m a good student. I never get in trouble.” Except that wasn’t true anymore.

“I suppose that might be so,” she said. “You’ve lived outside of the family. You have some sense of what the world is like, and you haven’t killed anyone, which says good things about your character. Sister Katherine even says you look after people. Younger girls at school. She says you’re never cruel, even to people who mistreat you.”

That definitely wasn’t true anymore. I cringed. I hadn’t known I was being tested, all those years. I’d just been trying to survive. I thought about all the things I’d done because I hadn’t known I was being watched.

I thought of Lucy Spencer’s neck.

“Was Sister Katherine spying on me?” I asked. She’d been my favorite of the nuns, quiet and bookish like me. She used to let me read in her office.

“I wouldn’t call it that. She just told me how you were doing.”

This all felt so unfair. If I’d known, I might have behaved better.

“And now you’ve seen us again,” Grandma Persephone said.

“Have we satisfied your morbid curiosity? You certainly don’t seem happy here.”

“I don’t want to leave,” I said. I didn’t. There was so much I still wanted to know. And I didn’t want to let go of Luma. And I needed to keep Arthur safe from Rhys. And I—

“I can’t go back, Grandma.”

“And why not?” she asked. She sat up a little straighter in her chair, her body angling toward me like a knife. “I told you to stay put, and you still came back here. Why? Why are you here, Eleanor?”

I could barely breathe. I told myself I would say it on the count of three. I counted down twice before I managed to say, “Because I did something bad.”

I told her, as best as I could. I told her what I’d told Arthur: about Lucy Spencer, our friendship, her hating me. I told Grandma Persephone about the other day, when Lucy had pushed me down the stairs. And then I told her the rest of it. How her shoving me wasn’t a surprise, or it shouldn’t have been. Lucy had always bullied me, pinching me and taunting me about my strange webbed thumbs and my buggy eyes, my worn-out clothes and how I had no family. I’d learned to avoid her. I should have seen this coming, I thought, and that made me angry.

And so instead of catching myself on the railing, I’d tucked my head into the cradle of my shoulder and rolled headfirst

all the way down. It hurt a lot, but I let myself go limp and knock about until I sprawled at the bottom in a heap among the books. I made it look worse than it was, letting one leg jut out oddly as though I'd broken it. I held very still until I could see Lucy's feet in front of my face through slitted eyes. And then I lunged.

I grabbed her ankles, and she let out a startled gasp and sat down hard on the floor of the stairwell. I sank in my nails and dragged myself up and over her by her legs, and pinned her arms to the floor. She started kicking at me, so I dropped my weight onto her so she couldn't move. I used my forehead to bash her face to one side, and then I bit into the soft skin where her neck met her shoulder. I bit until it snapped like a rubber band, and warm blood gushed into my mouth while she screamed, while she pulled at handfuls of my hair, while she kicked her legs under me, trying desperately to get me off of her—

“Stop,” Grandma Persephone said. I stopped. “Did you kill her?”

I shut my eyes. “I don't think so,” I said. When I'd fled the room, she'd been sitting upright, hands pressed to her neck, screaming. “No. I didn't.”

She sat back in her chair, still gripping the arms.

“So you're dangerous,” she said. “I knew that already. What I need to know is: Are you dangerous to my family?”

I wanted to cry. I realized that I had been hoping she'd like me better after I told her. That she'd see me and think of Luma,

of Rhys, of the others. That I'd be one of them. Instead, she seemed unmoved. What was she so afraid of?

"No!" I said. "I don't want to hurt anyone. It all just happened so fast. And I didn't know where else to go. I don't have anyone else."

And at last, she softened.

"I want to be sure," she said gently. "Will you let me read for you?"

"Why?"

"So I know whether you're here to help us or to hurt us."

"Why would I hurt you?"

"Will you let me do it?"

I nodded.

She shuffled the deck, and the cards leaped between her hands. She'd drawn them all herself, I knew, years ago. The cards were soft with wear, edges blurred. She handed the deck to me and had me cut it, and then she laid out an elaborate spread. She turned over the first card, at the center.

"This is you," she said.

My heart leaped when I recognized that first card: the Page of Bones, the card that had always come up first when she read for me when I was younger. A young scholar, not clearly a man or a woman, peering at the skull of a bird with a magnifying glass. Maybe I hadn't changed as much as I thought, if this was still the card that meant *me*.

I watched Persephone, too. Her eyes unfocused as she worked,

as though she were seeing something near and far at the same time.

“A young person of great intelligence who relies on their wit,” she said.

She turned over the rest of the cards, following the old pattern, narrating as she went.

“Covering you—doubts and fears. Are you good enough? Strong enough? Crossing you—a great crowd of people, yammering different things in your ears. Who do you listen to?”

She looked up at me. “Well,” she said, “you’re not much of anything yet, it seems. Not this or that. Not sure what you’re going to become. You could be anything right now. You could be like me. Or you could be something . . . very different.”

“I could be like you?” I asked. “You mean, read cards and do magic?”

“That’s only some of what I do. Mostly I manage the family.”

“How?”

She sighed.

“I keep them from killing people, mostly,” she said, “and deal with the damage when they inevitably do. I keep them healthy, and make sure they understand right from wrong as much as they can. I tend to the plants and distill the extracts and sell them to distributors. And I keep Winterport happy, as much as I can, so they don’t turn on us and burn the house to the ground while we sleep.”

“I could do that,” I said. “You could teach me, and then I could help you.”

She frowned.

“Eleanor,” she said, “you already have enough talents. I’m not sure it would be a good idea for me to teach you anything.”

I didn’t feel talented. I had no sharp teeth or secret second body hiding under my skin. The least I could do was learn how to make myself useful. And maybe, I thought with a little hope, I could learn how to see the future.

“Please,” I said. “I really want to learn.”

“I’m not giving you an answer tonight. Let me finish reading for you, and I’ll think about it.”

She flipped over the next card. “Behind you: imprisonment, restriction, restraint. Just before you: freedom, but a kind that makes you nervous.” She paused here to smile at me. “You’re perched on the brink of a decision. Mine, or yours, I suppose. Still want to stay?”

I looked down at the cards, trying to puzzle them out. My card appeared to have vanished, until I realized it was under the card she’d said covered it. Oh, it was that simple. And then across it, a card with a group of people crowded around a heap of bones, stretching like they were getting ready for a dance. And a picture of a woman kneeling in a barren cell, holding a viper to her breast, and a picture of a great wheel with a blindfolded girl in spangled tights strapped to it and the word FORTUNE printed

on it in large type. I wondered how she could see the future in all this chaos.

“How do you know what it means?” I asked.

“Metaphors.”

“Metaphors?” I was stunned. I’d only ever heard the word *metaphor* used in class, and never heard of one doing anything useful.

“You triangulate,” she said. “Between your own knowledge, the images, and the words. And for a moment you can escape your own perspective, and leave the present, and you can see a little more widely.”

My eyes went wide. “*I want to learn that!*”

She shuddered as though trying to shake something loose.

“Stop that,” she said. “I can’t make a decision tonight. Let’s finish this.”

I found myself excited at the prospect of learning to read the cards. It was one of those things that was easy to learn but would take a lifetime to master. I wasn’t like Rhys or Luma because I wasn’t supposed to be. I’d be something else, something just as good. And it wasn’t something I’d gotten through dumb luck. I was going to earn it.

Persephone turned over the next card. I paid attention to the way her hand flicked the card, the way she slapped it down on the table.

“Above you,” she said, “your best possible future.”

It was a card that read Ace of Blood. It showed a chalice

pouring red out over a landscape, splashing over a horde of dancing figures below. It frightened me the way Grandpa Miklos's teeth did, the way Rhys's embrace did. It was a feral card. It didn't seem best to me.

"This card tells me that you might save our family," she said. "Save us, restore us, put us right—I don't know what it thinks it means," she said, giving the card a little tap, as though chastising it. I felt a twinge of fear. Fear would pass, I told myself. I had to hold steady. She said she wanted to know what I was. I wanted the same thing.

She flipped the next card. It was a rough drawing of the Chrysler Building in New York. People leaped from the windows, their faces contorted with pain and fear. "And this card tells me that you might ruin us."

"Grandmother," I said, "I'll do my best, I promise. Whatever it takes. I won't let them get hurt."

"You can't make promises like that," she snapped, and then took a breath and softened her voice. "I believe that you'll try. But it's important that you not take this lightly. You're at a crossroads. There are two ways that things can go, if you stay. And one is ruin. Do you understand me? This is not a game, Eleanor."

I felt like the worst creature ever to have lived. Everyone knew there was something wrong with me. Lucy'd known it, and look what I'd done to her. Margaret knew it. Grandma Persephone and every single card in her whole deck seemed to know it.

This wasn't what I remembered from my childhood. We used to play in the greenhouse while Grandma Persephone called us over one at a time to read for us, any question we asked. She'd lay out the spread and talk us through the problem, and then she'd turn over one last card and tell us how it was supposed to go.

"You haven't done the last card yet," I said. "The one that gives us a clue about the outcome."

She glanced up. "You're correct."

She reached for the top card of the deck. Her hand hovered, hesitating. The sky flashed.

She flipped it over and onto the table, but withdrew her hand quickly as though she'd been stung.

"Ahh," she said, her voice faint.

It was a card I had never seen in a reading before. It was a mass of dim shapes, hard to discern—spewing, spiraling outward from a central mass, where lurked a pair of glowing, yellow eyes with slit pupils. When I looked at it, I was entranced. It was ugly, but I wanted to stare into it forever.

"Grandma," I said. "What does it mean?"

I looked up and realized she was clutching her arm. She slumped back in her chair, her white hair streaming back from her rigid face.

"I didn't draw this," she said. She could barely open her mouth.

"What do you mean? Where did it come from?"

“This is very bad,” she said, through clenched teeth, shuddering as she fought to speak. “Listen carefully. I’m dying. You have to take over for me. Don’t let any strangers in this house after I’m gone.”

“But I can’t. I don’t know—”

“Shut up. You know what you can do. Make them listen to you. Keep them safe. Promise me!”

“I—”

Her whole body stiffened, and then sagged back against the chair.

“Grandma?” I said. And then again, louder. She wasn’t breathing. Her eyes looked empty.

And then lightning split the sky and struck some point almost directly overhead. Saint Elmo’s Fire sizzled down the glass walls, green and flickering. It was like the light under the ocean, filtered through water, and in it Grandma Persephone looked like a drowned creature.

I killed her, I thought. She read my fortune, and whatever she saw was so bad that it killed her.

I didn’t know where I would go, as I sprinted down the wooden corridor that led from the greenhouse. I would have kept running if I hadn’t bumped into Margaret in the scullery. She took one look at my face, grabbed me by the arm, and yanked me back the way I had come, into the greenhouse. When she saw Grandma Persephone in the chair she lifted her and put her on the floor, and then got down on her knees. She

pinched Grandma Persephone's nose shut and started taking big breaths and breathing out into her mouth. She turned up to me and gave me a wild-eyed look, which I thought at first was hatred, and then realized was some kind of order. She jerked her head toward the door, and I nodded. Get the others. I forced my legs into a run, took the back stairs through the scullery up to the second floor, and started pounding on doors.

My mother came dripping from her bathtub, Rhys shirtless and matted from his room. He grabbed my mother up in her towel and carried her down the back stairs. I went to Grandpa Miklos's room, Father's, Luma's. When I told them what had happened they all took off running without saying a word to me. And so running around, I was the only one who didn't go to see her last moments alive.

Eventually I was alone on the stairs, the thunder outside the only sound. One by one the lights in the hall fizzled, flared, and went out.