

BESTSELLING AUTHOR of THE LAKE OF DEAD LANGUAGES

CAROL GOODMAN

H
A
W
T
H
O
R
N

*Can Ava change her fate—
and the world's?*

Hawthorn



CAROL
GOODMAN



Viking

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014



First published in the United States of America by Viking, an imprint of
Penguin Random House LLC, 2015

Copyright © 2015 by Carol Goodman

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Goodman, Carol.

Hawthorn / by Carol Goodman.

pages cm.

Sequel to: *Ravencliffe*.

Summary: "During her senior year at Blythewood Academy, Avaline Hall and her friends must stop the evil Shadowmaster, Judicus van Drood, as he rallies nations into a war that could destroy both the human world and Faerie"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-0-698-16490-1

[1. Supernatural—Fiction. 2. Fairies—Fiction. 3. Magic—Fiction. 4. Boarding schools—Fiction. 5. Schools—Fiction. 6. World War, 1914–1918—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.G61354Haw 2015 [Fic]—dc23 2015007472

Version_1

To Sarah, the third girl



Contents

[Title Page](#)
[Copyright](#)
[Dedication](#)

[Chapter 1](#)
[Chapter 2](#)
[Chapter 3](#)
[Chapter 4](#)
[Chapter 5](#)
[Chapter 6](#)
[Chapter 7](#)
[Chapter 8](#)
[Chapter 9](#)
[Chapter 10](#)
[Chapter 11](#)
[Chapter 12](#)
[Chapter 13](#)
[Chapter 14](#)
[Chapter 15](#)
[Chapter 16](#)
[Chapter 17](#)
[Chapter 18](#)
[Chapter 19](#)
[Chapter 20](#)
[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

1



“HAVE YOU EVER wished you had a spell to stop time?”

I turned to my friend and roommate Helen van Beek. We had come to the edge of the Blythe Wood, and she had turned to look back over the playing fields and gardens to the great stone castle of our school, Blythewood, glowing golden in the late afternoon sun. Four more girls and one boy were walking toward us. If the moment had been arrested it would have made a fine medieval tapestry, the lawns an emerald carpet stitched with a thousand bright flowers, the stones of the castle and the sleek heads of the girls picked out in gold thread, the boy's in silver, marking him as a nobleman or fairy prince. “The Falconers,” it might have been called, since on each of their gauntleted hands perched a falcon.

The viewer of that tapestry would imagine they were discussing the fine points of falconry or courtly love, but they weren't.

“A Morane-Saulnier monoplane with a Gnome Omega 7 cylinder engine.” Cam's excited voice rose into the air, her little kestrel squawking as it attempted to keep its balance on her gesticulating hand. “That's what I'm going to fly when I get out of here next summer.”

“You should see the hydro-aeroplanes they've got over in England now,” Nathan remarked, excitement breaking through the pose of boredom he'd maintained since returning from Europe. “They can take off from ships now. I'm going to join the Royal Navy as soon as I graduate.”

I shuddered as I did every time Nathan mentioned joining the military, and my gyrfalcon, Eirwyn, sensing my distress, ruffled her feathers. I

looked toward the three girls walking behind Nathan and Cam. Daisy, having failed to interest Helen in a description of her planned nuptials with her fiancé, Mr. Appleby, was trying to break into Beatrice and Dolores Jager's heated debate over the relative merits of Vassar and Smith Colleges.

I thought I had an idea why Helen would like to make time stop. It was the beginning of our senior year at Blythewood. After averting a serious threat to the school last spring, we'd attained the height of Blythewood honors by being selected as Dianas, an elite guard of falconers. It should have been a happy time, but all around us our classmates were talking about what they planned to do when they graduated. Helen, though, didn't have a happy marriage or college or a flying career or military adventures to look forward to after graduation. Her mother was insisting that the only way to save their family from financial disaster was marriage to a rich suitor, a half dozen of whom—"each as old as Methuselah"—had been waiting for Helen when she got back from Europe in August.

"No more chattering, Dianas," I told the others, recalling that I had been appointed leader for today. "We're on patrol."

"I thought I made it clear that I was not to be referred to as a Diana," Nathan drawled. "The male equivalent is Apollo."

"No one's going to call you Apollo, Nathan," Helen replied tartly. Since she and Nathan had returned from their trip to Europe they had been bristling at each other like molting hawks. They had gone to heal Helen from the gunshot wound she had suffered while saving Nathan from Judicus van Drood at the opening of the Woolworth Building last spring. Except for a slight limp when she was tired, Helen had come back miraculously cured—although she'd admitted to me before she left that she wasn't as impaired as she had made out. She'd let Nathan think she couldn't walk so he'd have a mission to keep him from falling under the dark influence of van Drood and his shadow creatures, the *tenebrae*. So what had happened to set them at each other's throats?

Helen refused to talk about the trip except to say that Nathan's sister, Louisa, was not doing well in the sanatorium where she'd been since she'd been rescued from Faerie over a year ago, and to complain that the Viennese put *schlag* on everything, that all anyone talked about in the cafes were the Balkan troubles, and that Nathan wouldn't talk about anything other than military tactics and aeroplanes. His mother, Dame Beckwith, was

only able to convince him to stay at school by charging him with the protection of Blythewood by making him a “Diana.”

“Diana or Apollo, we’re all here to patrol the woods, not to talk about wedding plans”—I glared at Daisy—“or colleges or aeroplane engines. Gillie found trow tracks at the edge of the wood this morning. We need to scout the perimeter to make sure it hasn’t gotten out of the woods.”

“And what are we supposed to do if we find the trow?” Daisy asked.

“Kill it, of course,” Cam said, patting her quiver of arrows.

Before Daisy could object—I knew she had a soft spot for all creatures of Faerie—I said, “Actually Gillie says we should try to capture it. There’s been an increase in fay activity in the woods lately—creatures straying out of the woods, ransacking local farmyards and orchards, even wandering into town. Gillie thinks something must be scaring them out of the woods.”

“Scaring trows and goblins?” Beatrice asked, raising an eyebrow. “What’s big enough to scare a trow?”

“That’s what we need to find out,” I said. “Nathan and Cam, head toward the river. Have your birds fly along the riverbank. The trows might have taken to the water. Bea, Dolly, Daisy, you take the eastern perimeter. Helen and I are going to go into the woods.”

“If you’re going into the woods I think I should go with you,” Nathan said.

“Because we’re so weak and helpless?” Helen asked.

I could see Nathan bristling, about to snap back a retort, but I cut him off. “We’ll be fine. We won’t go very far. If anyone finds any sign of the trow, whistle three times. Send your falcon if you need backup. Everybody clear?”

They all nodded, looking a little scared. Of the trow, I wondered, or me? Had I spoken too sharply to them? Well, I didn’t have time to coddle them. We had a trow to find.

I turned to enter the woods with Helen close at my heels. As we passed from the bright sunshine of the lawn into the cool green shadows under the pines, I felt Eirwyn tense on my hand, her talons gripping so tightly I was afraid they’d pierce the thick leather of my glove. Was she sensing danger, or my own bad mood?

“What’s wrong with you?” Helen asked.

“What do you mean?” I countered, peering into the shadows instead of looking at her. “I thought you wanted them to stop chattering about marriage and college.”

“I did,” Helen admitted, “but why should you? You’ve got Raven.”

Raven. As if sensing my agitation at his name, Eirwyn rustled restlessly on my hand. Or maybe she just missed him. It had been a week since we’d flown with him and Gwynfor, Eirwyn’s mate, a week since we’d had the fight. Our first serious fight. I couldn’t even remember how it had started. Everything had been going so well. We’d spent the summer together, flying up and down the river and over the Catskill Mountains while Raven taught me what it meant to be a Darkling, a ferrier of souls, human and fay. Each evening we’d set down in the cliff-face niche in the Shawangunk Mountains and watch the sun set, our wings and hands interlaced.

Until a week ago . . .

“Do you think that solves all my problems?” I asked Helen now. “Maybe I don’t want to get married right out of school. Maybe I’d like to go to college.”

“So why don’t you? Your grandmother would pay your tuition. Your grades are good enough. And if you went to Vassar, Raven could visit you on weekends.”

“And how am I supposed to explain to my new roommate that I’ve got wings under my corset?”

“I’m not sure Vassar girls wear corsets,” Helen remarked. “My cousin Honoria goes there and she’s become rather a frightful bluestocking. I think you’d fit right in.”

I stared at Helen. Leave it to her to make it all a question of wardrobe. “But that’s just it. I won’t fit in. I’d be pretending I’m something I’m not with all those girls. They won’t know about Darklings or fairies or shadow masters or trows. At least here everyone knows what I am. So I wish everyone would stop talking about what we’re going to do after Blythewood. I would like to enjoy our senior year properly, for us to be Dianas together and have cocoa parties and play flush and trophies in the Commons Room and—”

“For time to stop?” Helen asked, touching my arm with her ungloved right hand, her gold hair gleaming in a shaft of sunlight piercing through the

trees. With her silver peregrine falcon perched on her other hand she looked like a goddess who might be able to grant my wish.

"Yes," I admitted, "exactly."

"We'll see if Mrs. Calendar knows a spell," Helen said. As she put her arm around me her peregrine squawked and darted from her glove.

"Frederica!" Helen cried as she watched the falcon rise into the trees. "Where do you think you're going?"

To a place where no one calls her by that ridiculous name, I began to say, but then my gyr launched herself from my hand and followed, uttering a high-pitched whistle.

"That's her hunting call," I told Helen. "Come on, they're tracking something."

I plunged into the woods. My wings itched to unfurl and follow Eirwyn and Frederica into the air, but I didn't want to leave Helen alone on the ground. Besides, it wasn't easy flying through the woods with a six-foot wingspan, and the falcons were leading us into a denser part of the forest, the trees growing so close together their branches interlaced overhead in a thick canopy that blocked out the sun. I couldn't see Eirwyn or Frederica ahead of us, but with my keen Darkling hearing I could hear Eirwyn's shrill hunting cry. I followed it into a copse of flowering thorny shrubs that caught at my shirtsleeve and tugged at my skirt.

"Is it my imagination," Helen asked in a hushed whisper, "or do the trees seem to be moving closer together?"

I halted, my gloved hand raised to push aside a thorny branch, and turned back to look at Helen. I saw from the frightened look in her eyes that she was remembering our foray into the woods last year when the trees separated us from our companions and trapped us in a thicket.

"The last time the woods acted to protect us, so we should be all right." I turned back and pulled the thorny branch away . . . uncovering the snarling, slavering face of a trow.

I screamed and let go of the branch, which slapped the trow across its thick overhanging brow. The creature opened its blue-lipped mouth and roared. Hot rank breath blew into my face—it smelled like rotting meat and ashes.

Trows are naturally vegetarians in their indigenous habitat. The line from Miles Malmsbury's *Field Guide to the Lychnobious Peoples* wafted

into my head. I'd have to tell him he was wrong—if I lived. I reached for the dagger strapped at my waist as the trow launched itself at me, but before I could unsheathe it I was slammed to the ground by what felt like the proverbial ton of bricks. *Only bricks wouldn't have such bad breath*, I thought, staring up into two glazed eyes that appeared to be covered in some kind of film behind which dark shapes moved like fish swimming under ice.

I'd seen something like that before—

Then the ice shattered.

A confused look came over the trow's massive brow and the creature's muscles slackened. "Mnnn," it said, then mercifully rolled off me.

"Ava!" Helen was shouting into my face and shaking my arms. She was still grasping her bow with one hand. I turned my head and stared at the trow. One of Helen's arrows—all of hers were fletched with snow-white dove feathers, which she deemed "smarter" than the dull brown ones the rest of us used—was sticking out of the trow's right eye. Black bile was oozing down its cheek.

"Y-you . . . you shot it."

"Don't start with Gillie's orders," Helen cried, her voice edging into hysteria. "That thing was going to eat you!"

"They're s-supposed to be veg . . . vegetarians," I stammered, struggling to my knees and kneeling over the trow.

Helen made a choking sound. "Well, this one's gone off his diet. He looks like he just finished a six-course steak dinner at Delmonico's—why his fur . . . whatsit . . ." Helen gestured at the shaggy fur tunic the trow wore, "doesn't fit him properly."

The trow's belly was indeed bulging out of his tunic and over his leather pants. It was disturbing to look at those clothes. This wasn't an animal—it was a person of sorts, one of the fay that had wandered out of Faerie into the Blythe Wood. Perhaps it had gotten lost and been scared. Its eyes looked dazed—

No, not dazed. Glazed. As if covered with ice. With something moving beneath them . . .

I leaned over to look more closely and saw something move beneath the opaque surface of the intact eye.

"Helen," I said, starting to get to my feet, "I think we'd better—"

Before I could finish, the trow's eye split open, releasing a spray of black ooze. Helen screamed and covered her face, shielding herself from the geyser that spewed out of the trow's eye—a geyser with feathers.

“Shadow crows!” I screamed, yanking Helen to her feet. “Run!”

I pushed Helen through a narrow opening in the brush into an open clearing—a perfect circle surrounded by bushes covered in white flowers and black crows. I dimly had the thought that the woods had been leading us here all along, mocking our desire to stop time. There was no way to stop time. If you didn't take the future in hand it took you and yanked you where it wanted you to go.

Then Helen and I were falling down a long dark tunnel into the vast unknown.

2



I'M NOT SURE how long I was unconscious. When I came to, the light trickling down the walls of the cavern where we had fallen was the dark gold of late afternoon. It turned the mud walls the color of maple syrup, puddling over the twisted roots. I stared at them as if making sense of their pattern could make my brain stop ringing—

The bass bell that signaled danger was ringing in my head. I lurched up, which made the ringing worse, and looked around me for the danger. Had the trow followed us down here? No—the trow was dead. But what had come out of him wasn't. A black crow perched on the rim of the cavern, silhouetted against the syrupy gold light, cocking its head curiously at me. It cawed and another one joined him.

Shadow crows. They had come out of the trow. I had pushed Helen away—

Helen. I tore my eyes away from the crow and searched for Helen. She was lying behind me, facedown in the mud. I cried out at the sight and stumbled toward her, calling her name. When I grabbed her arm it felt cold. *That's only because she's been lying on the cold ground for a long time,* I told myself. I rolled her over. I could barely make out her face in the murky light—because it was covered by mud, as was her white shirtwaist. Helen would be furious. She'd bought this shirtwaist at Miss Janeway's just before coming to school, spending extra for the fine French lawn and the pearl buttons. She was going to be terribly out of sorts—I gave her another good shake—the moment she woke up.

She moaned.

A feeling of relief washed over me. Helen's eyes struggled open, their whites startling in her muddy face.

"Ava, whyever are you covered with mud? And why are you crying? What's happened?"

"We fell down a hole!" I exclaimed, streaking more mud over my face when I tried to wipe away my tears.

"You needn't make it sound such an accomplishment . . . ow!" Helen moaned as she sat up, rubbing her elbow. "You're not Alice and this hole doesn't look a bit like Wonderland. And what do you think all those crows are looking at?"

I swiveled around. The rim of the cavern was lined with crows now, their black eyes fixed on Helen and me. "They're shadow crows," I said as quietly and calmly as I could. "They came out of the trow—that's why it was acting so strangely. It was possessed by the *tenebrae*."

"All those crows couldn't have come out of the trow," Helen said. "They must have been waiting . . ." Helen looked around the muddy pit. "Like they wanted something in here. What do you think they want?"

To rip our eyes out and burrow inside us until we're their creatures, I thought. But to Helen I said, "You're right. There must be something here they want. We should tell Gillie . . ."

"Yes, we'll give him a thorough report typed up in triplicate . . . but, um, Ava, *how exactly* will we get past those crows?"

"Remember how Miss Sharp mesmerized them with her dagger? I think I can do that." As I reached for my dagger the crows cocked their heads at the same angle at the same moment as if they were ruled by the same mind. They were controlled by Judicus van Drood, the Shadow Master. He had sent them . . . but what could he want in this muddy pit? Well, we'd have to worry about that later. My hand closed on the sheath—and found it empty.

"I don't have my dagger! It must have fallen."

"Well, I have mine, but even if we mesmerize the crows, we'd have to keep them mesmerized while climbing out of this pit. And I'm not sure I *can* climb on account of my ankle, which I believe I've sprained."

I looked back at Helen, who had lifted her skirt to inspect her ankle. It was swollen and was turning as blue as the trow's face had been.

"Helen, that looks painful."

“Yes, it is rather. I will mesmerize the crows while you climb out and go for help. You can bring our friends back to get me out—”

“I’m not leaving you alone here,” I said, looking around at the muddy pit. Even with the last of the golden light shining into it, it was a gloomy place. Once the light was gone it would be terrifying. Those tangled roots would assume monstrous shapes—leering faces, looming monsters—even now I could see pictures in them.

“Helen,” I said, “do you notice anything about the walls?”

“I notice that they’re very steep. Now help me remember Miss Sharp’s spell.” She drew out her own dagger. A ray of sunlight glanced off one of the gems encrusted in its hilt and sent a beam of ruby light arcing through the gloom. The crows rustled their feathers above us but I didn’t look up. Where the light struck the wall a pattern had emerged.

“Keep the dagger just like that,” I told Helen as I got up and moved stealthily toward the wall. The crows cawed over my head and I felt the skin on the back of my neck prickle as I imagined the bite of their sharp beaks. I concentrated on the bit of wall I could see through the roots—it was a wall, a proper stone wall with carvings on it. I moved the tangled roots away, cringing as a centipede slithered over my hand, and stared at the carvings of tiny winged creatures, their wings encrusted with jewels. *Lampsprites*. Moving more roots away, I saw other figures—tall graceful men and women in long medieval robes, falcons perched on their arms and graceful deer walking beside them like tame greyhounds. Some of them carried jeweled coffers.

“It looks like some kind of ceremonial procession,” I said to Helen.

“I’m sure it’s very interesting, but I think you should start climbing. I’ve got the birds under control.”

I looked up and saw that the crows were following the movement of Helen’s arm. She was sweeping the dagger in the air, murmuring Latin words. The runes carved on her dagger floated free and hovered in the air like dragonflies. Then they darted across the cavern and landed on the wall, burning straight through the roots. I could see the pattern now. The lords and ladies in the procession were carrying their coffers toward three enormous urns, big as houses. The chests held by the figures closest to the urns were opened. Dark shapes flew out of them—some abstract, others shaped like crows, snakes, bats, and wolves. The tiny lampsprites herded

the shadowy shapes into the urns. They were lowering the lids onto the last of the urns.

“Helen!” I cried. “The pictures tell the story of the three vessels. Raven told me about it.” As I said his name I felt a pang at the memory of our quarrel but I pushed it away. “Ages ago the fairies drew out all the bad qualities of mankind and stored them in three urns. But then humans missed some of those qualities and found one of the urns and broke it. The shadows flew out and possessed the first shadow master. He found another of the vessels and broke into it.” I glanced at the middle vessel and saw that the runes around it were glowing. I put my hand on the wall and felt that it was trembling.

“That’s a fascinating story, Ava, but I’m not sure how much longer I can hold the crows at bay.”

The entire wall was shaking now. The outline of the middle urn was glowing like a rim of fire. The runes from Helen’s dagger had unlocked something. From deep in the earth came a rumbling. The middle urn was moving, swinging inward like a giant door. Above me I heard the crows let out a raucous caw as they took flight, diving down into the pit. Helen screamed as one landed on her. I reached behind me and grabbed her hand and pulled her through the open doorway. I turned back to see if the crows were following us, but they had all flown back to the opposite rim of the pit, squawking and beating their wings.

“Come on,” I said, “they’re afraid to follow us.”

“Do you think it’s really a good idea to go someplace that scares shadow crows?” Helen asked.

“The crows must want something here if they’ve surrounded the place even though they’re afraid of it. I think we’d better find out what it is. Look, we’re in a tunnel—and there are lanterns hanging on the wall.” I removed an oddly shaped glass lantern from a hook on the wall. It was shaped like a jam jar with a wire around the rim affixed to a handle with some kind of wick inside. I shook the jar and the “wick” unfurled its wings, stretched its arms, and yawned.

“It’s a lampsprite!” Helen cried. “In a lamp! How droll!”

The lampsprite came flying out of the open jar, brushing its wings against Helen’s and my faces. *Not so droll waiting years and years in a jar!* I heard its voice transmitted into my head through the powder in its wings.

She flew toward the pit and then backpedaled on the threshold when she saw the crows.

Shadow-things! She hissed. *Come, come quick, we must go tell the guardian.* She flitted past us and flew deeper into the tunnel.

“Is this guardian down there?” Helen asked, looking nervously into the dark tunnel.

Yes, yes, yes, the guardian is always here, since before and forever. He guards against the shadow-things but he won’t harm two humanlings. . . .

She flitted back to us and brushed her wings over our faces again.

Humanling and . . . She cocked her head at me. *Half-bloodling.*

“Hey!” Helen said. “Don’t call her that!”

“That’s what I am,” I answered. “Half-human, half-Darkling. Will this guardian of yours have a problem with that?”

Oh no, the lamprite chirped. He’s been waiting for you.



We followed the lamprite—whose name was an unpronounceable word that Helen decided sounded like Primrose—deep into the tunnel, her light illuminating the walls in fitful bursts.

“Are you quite sure there’s a back door to this place?” Helen asked. “I don’t know how much longer I can walk on this ankle. It seems like we’ve been walking forever.” She peered down at her wristwatch and shook it. “My watch seems to have stopped. It must have broken when I fell.”

I withdrew my automaton repeater from my pocket and opened it. Two figures—a winged man and woman—hammered out a frantic little melody and the watch hands spun backward. “Primrose,” I began warily, “these tunnels . . . are they . . .”

“At an end!” Helen cried pointing toward a light at the end of the passage. “Finally!”

I followed Helen into a large domed chamber. “Oh! I thought we’d come out, but it’s only a room of sorts.” She was turning around in a circle, looking at the walls, which were so grown over with thick, twisted roots that we seemed to be in a basket. In fact, the roots seemed to be moving, creaking like a wicker laundry basket when you pick it up. I looked around for a door but couldn’t find one. I turned around to point this out to

Primrose, but my eye was caught by a long pale root with a strange pattern in its woody fiber—almost like a face. I could make out two eyes—large pale celery-colored eyes that blinked at me.

I started back and bumped into Helen, who clutched me with one hand while pointing her dagger with the other. “What is it?” Helen asked, her voice trembling.

Primrose flitted over to the root and brushed her wings against its face. At the touch of her powder the root creature yawned and stretched its long limbs, which hung in the thatch like a scarecrow hanging on a pole.

“Are you sure you want to wake it up?” Helen asked, watching the root man warily.

The guardian never sleeps, Primrose chirped, only waits.

The guardian must have been waiting a long time. He was so knitted into the fabric of the roots that he was having trouble pulling his arms free. I wondered if we ought to run, but then, where could we run to? The only way out led to the pit with the shadow crows. I decided we might as well help him.

“Can we give you a hand?” I asked, holding out my hand to the creature.

He blinked his celery-colored eyes at me, and his face—which looked rather like a rutabaga—crinkled into a smile. “Thank you,” he said in a creaking voice. He laid his long thin hand in mine. It was cool and limp, like wilted carrots, but then he squeezed with surprising strength and pulled himself free of the roots in one splintering burst. Dirt and moss fell to the ground along with a dozen centipedes and worms. When he unfolded himself to his full height he towered over Helen and me. He brushed dirt from his long cloak, revealing it to be more green than brown and embroidered with runes and sigils. The symbols resembled the ones in the carvings.

“My stars, it’s been a long time since I had a visitor,” he said, looking down at his tattered, dirt-stained cloak. He bowed to Helen and me.

“Welcome, children of men and . . .” He sniffed at me, which would have seemed rude had he not done it so delicately. He himself smelled like a turnip. “And Darkling. I am Aelfweard, of the race of Alfar, Guardian of the Vessel.”

Helen, no matter how flustered, knew a formal introduction when she heard one. “We’re pleased to meet you, Mr. . . . er, Mr. Ward. I am Miss Helen van Beek of Washington Square and Hyde Park and this is my friend Miss Avaline Hall, of Fifth Avenue and Blythewood.”

“Ah, the Blythe Wood. I had another visitor from the Blythe Wood some time ago but the poor fellow was so agitated he wasn’t able to tell me very much. When my sisters sent me here they told me they were founding an order to protect the vessel. Do you belong to that order?”

“Er, we belong to the Order of the Bell,” I replied, wondering who his visitor might have been. “But we haven’t been taught anything about a vessel.”

Mr. Ward screwed up his pulpy face and sniffed at us again. “I don’t smell shadow on you. But if you aren’t here to protect the vessel, why are you here? Is all well in the Blythe Wood?”

“Not really,” I said. “Shadow crows have gathered around the entrance to your, er, home.” I glanced over the walls again, hoping for a door I hadn’t noticed. Where Mr. Ward had broken free was a bit of curving wall with a large crack running through it, but no door.

“Shadow crows!” Mr. Ward exclaimed, blinking his large pale eyes. “They didn’t get in, did they?”

“No. They seemed afraid to follow us.”

“Ah, good, then the wards I put in place are still sound. But if they came to the entrance to the tunnel they must be trying to get in. I may have to reinforce the wards.” He was wringing his long hands, his knuckles popping like twigs snapping.

“Mr. Ward,” Helen said, “if you don’t mind me asking, why would they want to get in here? There doesn’t seem to be much of value here.”

Mr. Ward’s eyes widened. “Much of value? My dear child, this is one of the three vessels of Aelfrir, forged by Volundyr in the fires of Hel to hold the darkneses of mankind. What could be more valuable?”

“*This* is one of the vessels?” I asked, turning around in a circle. I noticed now that the curving walls tapered upward to an opening, like an oculus . . . or an opening in a bottle. “We’re *inside* one of the vessels?”

“Yes, yes!” Mr. Ward’s large bulbous head bobbed up and down on his thin neck.

“But then where are the shadows it held?” I asked, chilled at the thought of all the evil once imprisoned inside these walls.

“Fled when the vessel was broken,” he answered, his voice so thick with grief I was afraid he might collapse in front of us. “A great army came, too many to defend against. They broke the vessel and the shadows flew out. I am told the world became a much darker place, and I have heard rumors from my friends the lampsprites that one of the other vessels was broken not long afterward.”

“But if this vessel has already been broken,” I asked, “what are you guarding that the shadow crows want so badly?”

Mr. Ward blinked his large celery-colored eyes at me, clearly taken aback by the question. “Why, the location of the other two vessels, of course.”

3



“THE WALLS OF each vessel were carved with the locations of the two other vessels,” Mr. Ward explained. He brushed back a heavy curtain of roots to show us the carvings on the wall depicting a huge vessel shaped like an amphora buried beneath the earth. Above it grew a tree.

“A hawthorn,” Mr. Ward said, tracing the tree with a long tapered finger. “Above each vessel was planted a hawthorn tree to guard against dark creatures.”

“That’s the white flowering shrub we saw in the woods,” I said. “But that can’t be the only landmark. There are hawthorn trees all over Europe and North America.”

“If you look closely you can see a drawing of the surrounding landscape. Here . . .” He traced a line with a long twiggy finger. “Here is the river and the mountains . . .”

“I recognize that ridge!” I said. “It’s the Shawangunk ridge across the river. The drawing depicts this vessel.”

“Lot of good that does us,” Helen remarked. “Wouldn’t it be more helpful to show us where the other two vessels are hidden?”

“How perceptive of you, Miss van Beek of Hyde Park. Here is the second vessel.” Mr. Ward pointed to a drawing of another urn buried beneath a hawthorn tree. This one was beside a lake below a mountain, on top of which was a stone tower that looked like a finger pointing to the sky.

“That’s not a lot to go on,” Helen said. “Do we even know which of these other two were already destroyed?”

Mr. Ward shook his head heavily. A fat, resinous tear appeared in one eye and streaked down his face, slow as sap in winter. "It is kept secret to make it harder to find the last remaining vessel. No fairy is allowed to talk of the vessels. But if the shadows are looking for them you must find both vessels and protect them—especially from the hope-eaters."

"The hope-eaters?" I asked, shivering at the name. "What are those?"

"All of the shadows prey on the worst emotions of mankind, but the hope-eaters are a particular kind of shadow that sucks every bit of hope out of the person it attaches to. If those get loose . . ."

"We won't let that happen," Helen said. "We'll tell the Council."

"And the Darkling Elders," I added. "We ought to copy down these pictures. Maybe there's something in the libraries that can help identify them."

Helen took out the little notepad she carried in her pocket and began drawing the pattern of the mountain and lake in the second picture.

"Is there anything else you can tell us about the locations of the other two vessels?" I asked.

"Well," he said, stroking his chin with his long fingers. "They are, of course, always located by a door to Faerie."

"Why is that?"

"So the fairies can guard it. They couldn't put the vessels in Faerie because the shadow creatures—or those touched by them—can never cross over to Faerie."

I recalled what van Drood had said to me in the fun house in Coney Island: that the Darklings could never enter Faerie because their race had been infected with the shadows when Aderyn was attacked by a shadow crow. But I had been to Faerie and I was half-Darkling. I tried to focus back on what Mr. Ward was saying—something about the vessels always being buried near a door to Faerie. ". . . however, I hear from the lampsprites that there are fewer and fewer of my kind." He smiled at Primrose, who had come to perch on his shoulder. "Perhaps they were all killed by the shadow creatures or some other enemy."

Helen looked up from her drawing and met my gaze. We had been taught that the Blythewood School for Girls had been founded on this spot precisely because the door to Faerie was here, so the knights and ladies of the Order could patrol the woods and keep fairy creatures from straying out

and invading the world. Although the Order was changing its policies now, it had been the cause of untold numbers of fairy massacres. Perhaps we were to blame for the destruction of this vessel.

“How long ago was this vessel destroyed?” I asked.

Mr. Ward shrugged his bony shoulders. “Time moves differently here.”

“Yes, I noticed that,” I said, recalling the spinning hands of my repeater. “Actually, I wondered—”

“Mr. Ward?” Helen interrupted. “I’ve finished with this picture. Where is the one of the other vessel?”

Mr. Ward walked over to stand beside Helen and drew back a swath of shaggy roots. The wall beneath it had been shattered so badly, though, that it was impossible to make out the carvings.

“Oh dear,” Helen said, “how will we find that one?”

“Find the second vessel,” Mr. Ward said. “If it’s been opened you can go inside and look at the pictures on its walls. It will have the same drawings. They will lead you to the third vessel.”

“And if the second vessel is the one that hasn’t been destroyed?” Helen asked.

“Well, then, you’ll have no need to find the third. You will simply have to defend the unbroken vessel with your lives.”



I was afraid that we would have to go back through the tunnels to get out but Mr. Ward said that wouldn’t be necessary. “You can go out through the top,” he said, pointing a long finger toward the skylight in the ceiling.

Helen and I looked up and then down at her swollen ankle. Then she brightened. “Ava can fly us both up there!”

“Excellent idea,” Mr. Ward concurred.

I wasn’t so sure it was a good idea. I could certainly fly the short distance to the skylight with Helen on my back, but it would be difficult to hover there long enough for Helen to climb through the oculus. Also it looked closed.

“Isn’t it sealed?” I asked, peering up through the gloom.

“The seal was broken when the vessel was destroyed. It opens into a cave near the surface. You shouldn’t have any problem getting back to your

school from there. Not that I've been up there in quite some time." He flapped his hands in the air and then clasped them together as though he were afraid they might fly away. I looked at his pale wrinkled face and his large sad eyes.

"Do you want to come?" I asked. "I mean . . . couldn't you guard the vessel from up there? Or we could find someone to take turns guarding it for you. Our friends at Blythewood would help."

"Yes," Helen said eagerly. "We could form an honor guard and take shifts and you could come live at Blythewood and teach, er, botany or something."

Mr. Ward looked from Helen to me, his eyes shining in the light of Primrose's wings. "That is very kind of you girls to worry about an old fellow like myself, but it is my duty to guard the vessel, broken or not, and I would never feel right leaving it. But . . . if you would come back and visit an old man after you've found the other vessels . . . well, I'd be glad to hear news of the other guardians." He unclasped his hands to wipe a sticky tear away.

"We'll let them know how admirably you are fulfilling your duty," Helen said, clasping his hand.

"And we'll bring you back their news," I added.

"Thank you, my dears," he said, holding each of our hands. "Tell them . . . tell them *I am the vessel and the vessel is light*. Now you'd better go or your friends will be wondering where you are. You may have been gone longer than you think."

Despite the warmth of his hand I felt a chill at his words and an anxiety to be gone. I handed my quiver to Helen and reached around my back to unbutton the two vents that Miss Janeway had sewn into my shirtwaist. I didn't need a corset anymore to keep my wings in. I'd learned how to fold and release them at will. I unfurled them now, feeling the relief of stretching them out to their full span.

Mr. Ward gasped. "A phoenix! You didn't say!"

"Ava's very modest," Helen said, looking proudly at me.

"But that's marvelous! Look—" Mr. Ward riffled through the hanging roots to uncover a carving of a winged woman with wings painted red and gold just like mine. "There is a legend that a phoenix will protect the last vessel."

“I’ll certainly do my best,” I said, too impatient to be gone to enjoy the idea of being part of a legend. “Come on, Helen.”

I bent over so Helen could climb on my back. Then I flapped my wings and pushed up. The oculus was farther away than I’d thought. When we reached it and I looked down, Mr. Ward’s upturned face looked small and dim. I focused on it while beating my wings to stay in place while Helen grasped the rim of the oculus.

I felt sad suddenly that I’d hurried away when he’d been telling me about the phoenix legend. I lifted a hand to wave good-bye and he lifted both his hands, fingers splayed. His face, illumined by Primrose’s glow, looked like a moon half hidden behind tree branches. I suddenly had the feeling that I was looking at someone I’d known a long time ago—someone I would never see again. I looked up to tell Helen we should go back, but she was already crawling through the oculus and I was seized by the conviction that I would lose her too if I didn’t stay close, so I followed her. When I looked back down, the chamber was dark. Primrose must have extinguished her light to protect Mr. Ward’s privacy, but I had the uneasy feeling that they had both vanished into the oblivion of the past.



When I crawled out of the oculus I was cheered by the sight of Helen crouched beside a crackling fire.

“I did a needfire spell to warm us up a bit before heading back. It’s gotten so cold! I don’t remember there being a forecast for frost. It’s only September!”

“The weather can play tricks in the Blythe Wood,” I said, remembering ice giants and frost fairies while I warmed my hands at the fire. I draped a wing over Helen’s shoulders and she moved closer to me.

“I forgot you had your own furnace,” she said, rubbing her arms. “Marlin’s wings were warm too . . .” She stopped, her face rosy in the firelight. “I mean . . .”

“You needn’t pretend in front of me, Helen. I know you two are close. Have you seen him since you came back?”

“Er, no, not exactly, I mean once, but only briefly—we should go, don’t you think? We have to tell the others that the shadow crows are trying to get

in the vessel. Nathan's probably got a search party out looking for us."

She doused the fire with a splash of conjured ice water and limped out of the cave as fast as she could. I folded my wings, glad for their warmth as I stepped outside. It was cold. The ground was rimed with frost, the hawthorn bushes bare and skeletal in the light of the full moon—

"That's funny," I said to Helen, "wasn't the moon waning gibbous just two nights ago?" We were supposed to keep track of the phases of the moon, as they affected certain spells.

"I suppose. I can't recall. Can we go, Ava? Those awful crows might still be about."

I shuddered at the thought of the shadow crows. "Perhaps we should fly," I suggested. "What with your ankle."

"No, no, I don't want to be a burden. I can limp along all right," she said, lurching in front of me. I had the feeling that Helen wanted to be alone. Had something happened with Marlin? Maybe I wasn't the only one who'd had a fight with her boyfriend.

I hurried after Helen, looking side to side for any sign of the shadow crows, but I didn't see or feel anything stalking us. In fact, the woods felt empty, barren even. As if all the life had been drained out of them. The bare tree branches rubbed against each other with plaintive creaks that sound like scared mice. The wind moaned as though in mourning. Even the moon hid its face behind a shroud of tattered clouds. *I'm just feeling sad about leaving Mr. Ward all alone*, I told myself, *and because I haven't seen Raven all week*. I'd go looking for him tomorrow. For now, I'd feel better when we got back to Blythewood.

After a half hour had passed I wondered if we'd struck off in the right direction. "Do you know where we're going, Helen?" I asked, tugging at her shirtsleeve.

She looked up at me, startled, as if I'd asked her a difficult question. "I-I don't know . . . oh, wait, do you hear that?"

She held her finger to my mouth, telling me to be quiet. With my Darkling ears I should have heard it first. A bell chiming in the distance.

"It's the Blythewood bells. They're ringing us home! Come on!" She grabbed my hand and pulled me through a narrow path between fallen trees—I didn't recall so many fallen trees at the edge of the woods. It looked like a tornado had come through here. Also, there was something funny about

the bell. Yes, it sounded like one of the Blythewood bells—the big bass one—but if they were ringing us home why weren't they ringing all the bells?

My worries were allayed when we came out on the lawn and saw the river glinting to our right and the dim bulk of Blythewood looming under a cloud-cloaked moon. The lawn was so swathed in fog that it was hard to see our feet, much less the castle. Helen stumbled twice, her ankle—and no doubt her older injury—clearly bothering her.

"Those confounded nestlings!" Helen swore. "They've left their hockey equipment on the lawn. I'm going to have a word with Dame Beckwith about them."

"I'm sure Dame Beckwith and our teachers will want to hear about the shadow crows trying to get into the vessel first." I pictured Miss Sharp, Miss Corey, and Mr. Bellows all gathered around the fire in the library. Funny they weren't out here looking for us, though. And why was the school so dark? Even if it was very late I'd have thought they would leave lights burning to guide us back.

"Helen," I said as we reached the edge of the hockey field where a torn goal net was flapping in the wind. "Don't you think it's strange . . ."

I never finished my sentence. Helen was standing mute and white-faced in the light of the moon, which had come out from behind the clouds. Her face reminded me for a moment of Mr. Ward's, her eyes as wide as his, her skin as pale as his underground pallor. I followed her shocked gaze up to the tower of Blythewood—only there wasn't any tower, just the skeletal fragment of one rising up out of the blasted ruin that had been our school.

4



“GONE!” HELEN’S VOICE was so hoarse that for a moment I thought the shadow crows had come back to caw over the gutted remains of Blythewood. Then, rushing forward, she cried, “Nathan!”

I grabbed her before she could throw herself on the rubble. She turned on me, flailing her arms in my face. “We have to get inside! People might be trapped and hurt . . . Nathan . . . and Daisy and Cam! Dolores and Bea! That’s why they aren’t looking for us, because the school was bombed just like Herr Hofmeister tried to bomb the Woolworth Building. Van Drood has bombed Blythewood! Don’t you see . . . Ava, why are you looking at me like that? Why don’t you let me go help them?”

“Helen,” I said, grabbing both her arms and looking into her wide frightened eyes. “Our friends aren’t in there. Look at it.”

“What do you mean? There’s plenty of building left!” She raked her eyes over the rubble, fully revealed now by the merciless moon. “There could be survivors.”

“Then they’ve survived for a long time. Look at the vines and moss growing over the rubble.” I dragged Helen over to a toppled wall and plucked at a vine climbing over the stones. It came loose with a dry snap. Something moved within the rocks. Mice. Or snakes. “This didn’t just happen, Helen. It happened *years* ago.”

Helen turned to me, the whites of her eyes glowing in the moonlight. “But we just left. We’ve only been gone a few hours.”

“We must have passed into Faerie at some point in the tunnels and come out in a different time. Remember how your watch stopped and my repeater started acting funny?” I took out my repeater now and opened it. It played the mournful tune the bells tolled when a Blythewood alumna had died. I looked up at Helen. Her eyes were full of tears.

“How long?”

“I don’t know.” I followed the broken wall to a smashed marble heap that had been the front steps. The once majestic oak doors with their carved shield of Bell and Feather were still there but they were gouged and scarred as though animals had scratched at them. A rough plank was nailed slantwise across them with a rune burned into it.

“It looks like they tried to barricade and ward the doors,” I said, touching the rune. I felt a faint tingle of magic, its power drained. My fingers came away blackened. “Someone might still be inside,” I said doubtfully. The truth was I was afraid to go inside, afraid of what we might find amidst the rubble and the mice. But Helen was braver.

“Someone must be inside,” she said, squeezing my arm. “Else who rang the bell?”

I looked up at the bell tower. The belfry was a crater, but she was right—there must still be one bell hanging and we had heard it ringing. “We’ll explore,” I said, “but we have to be careful. The whole place could come toppling down on us.”

“So what?” Helen asked, her face stone white. “If all our friends and teachers are gone, what’s left for us to live for?”



I followed Helen through a gap in the stones. Blythewood’s walls were over three feet thick, built in the Middle Ages to withstand a siege, before they were carried to America. *What could have been strong enough to bring those walls down?* We had to scramble over a lot of stones, disturbing whole nests of mice. I felt like we were digging ourselves into a pit, but then we came out into a large vaulted space. Skeletal stone arches stood bone white against a midnight-blue ceiling spangled with gilt stars.

In Mr. Bellows’s history class he had shown us a picture once of a chapel in France with a vaulted ceiling painted with gold stars against a

blue background. It wasn't half as beautiful as this, because this ceiling really was the night sky. We were in the Great Hall, where we'd eaten our meals and listened to Dame Beckwith give her inspirational speeches. It was where I'd taken my oath to protect Blythewood—to *stand by my sisters in peril and adversity*. I could almost hear the ghosts of girls' voices and the chiming of the handbells. I listened for a moment for my own bell signaling danger, but heard nothing. I had a bell that rang for danger and one for love, but none for the empty ache of sadness I felt now. All I heard was the wind clattering the loose glass hanging from twisted lead in the windows. The seven arched windows that had held stained-glass portraits of our founders—the seven bell maker's daughters—had been reduced to a framework of glass shards. Our feet crunched on broken glass as I moved closer and looked up at one remaining pane that featured Merope, the youngest daughter. The top of her face had been blown away, leaving only a ghostly smile that smoldered in the moonlight like a dying ember. I felt a hand steal into mine.

“Come this way, Ava. The North Wing seems to be mostly intact.”

She pulled me into the hall that led to our old classrooms. Without the open sky it was darker here, but Helen found an old spirit lamp in the chemistry lab and lit it with a spell. It cast our shadows on the blasted walls. For a moment I thought I saw the shadow of Professor Jager, with his majestic mane of hair and his unruly eyebrows, lecturing an abashed Daisy on how air magic worked by creating a simulacrum out of a pair of scissors, but then the shape wavered and vanished as I followed Helen back out into the hallway where glass crunched under our feet, fallout from the display cases that held trophies and plaques from older classes. I peered into them now at framed pictures of girls in long dresses playing field hockey, bronze trophies for archery and bell ringing, engraved plaques for first place in Latin contests—*Abigail Montmorency 1869, Lucinda Hall 1879, Honoria Thistle 1883* . . . I found myself saying the names aloud as I followed Helen down the hall until I came to one that brought me up short.

“Helen! Here's Daisy! She placed first in Latin in 1914. So the school wasn't destroyed before the end of our senior year.”

“Daisy was always good at Latin,” Helen said with a wan smile. The spirit lamp gave her face a ghoulish appearance, as if she were one of these

dead girls in the pictures. “Bully for her. Oh look, Dolores won for best essay—”

A loud bang from one of the classrooms interrupted Helen. We looked at each other, then both hurried into the room. I think for a second we were both thinking so much about Daisy we thought it was her, that we’d find her sitting in the first row, saving us two seats, chiding us for being late.

But the room—Mr. Bellows’s history classroom—was empty. The sound was one of the big heavy maps slapping against the wall in a draught coming in through a broken window. Helen marched to the map, put her spirit lamp down on Mr. Bellows’s desk, and ripped it from the wall as if she blamed it for raising our hopes. She stood clutching it in her hands, her back convulsing. I went to put my arms around her but she shrugged me off.

“If I hadn’t been so awful about listening to her wedding plans she’d be here with us now.”

“And would that be better for her?” I asked. “We haven’t found any . . .” I was going to say *bodies* but thought better of it. “. . . sign that anyone was hurt when the school was attacked. Perhaps they evacuated first. It would have happened after Daisy graduated.”

I was scanning the walls, looking for something that would tell us Daisy was okay—perhaps a note pinned to the corkboard where Mr. Bellows had put up interesting newspaper stories (“History in the making, girls!”), that said, “Went to Kansas to marry Mr. Appleby!” The board was covered with yellowed newspaper stories cut from the New York papers. Mr. Bellows would give extra credit to any girl who clipped out a story that he deemed “history making,” but he’d been discriminating.

“A sale on hats at Best & Company is *not* history making,” he’d lectured Georgiana Montmorency our first year. “But a bill passed to make killing birds for ladies’ hats illegal *is*.”

As a result, the board was usually only about half-full. Now it was not only full but the articles overlapped one another, leaving only the headlines showing. I scanned the top of the board.

Heir to Austrian Throne Is Slain by a Bosnian Youth . . . Widespread Political Plot Thought to Have Inspired Killing of Archduke . . . Austria and Servia Ready for War . . . Russia Gives Warning to Germany . . . London Still Sees Hope for Peace . . . Austrian Troops Invade Servia . . . Peace of Europe Now in Kaiser’s Hands . . . Germany Declares War on Russia . . . First Shots Are Fired . . . Russia Invades Germany . . . Germany Invades

France . . . German Marksmen Shoot Down a French Aeroplane . . . England Declares War on Germany . . . Germans March on Belgium . . . Liege Fallen . . . Charleroi Fallen . . . French and British Troops Routed at the Marne . . . Paris Fallen . . . London Fallen . . .

“Helen,” I said without turning around, “it looks like a war broke out the summer after our senior year. Something that started with the assassination of the archduke in a place called Sarajevo . . .”

“It’s marked here on this map,” Helen said, coming over to stand next to me, clutching the heavy wall map in her hands. “There’s a big X drawn on it—Mr. Bellows never let us draw on the maps!”

I looked at the map. In addition to the X, someone had outlined a river in Belgium—a very *bendy* river—and drawn a question mark in one of the bends.

“The X marks a place called Ypres . . .” Helen was saying.

“I saw that name somewhere,” I said, looking back at the corkboard. “Here, there’s a story about Ypres. It says over thirty thousand British soldiers are dead. Can that be right? What kind of war is that?”

“A most horrible one,” Helen replied. “Here’s a story about soldiers dying on some river called the Marne. ‘Germans Defeat Allies at the Marne and March on Paris’ . . . oh, look! Here’s something about two schoolteachers volunteering to aid the war effort in France. It’s Miss Sharp and Miss Corey!” Helen leaned closer to read the article in the flickering light from the spirit lamp. I leaned forward to adjust it while Helen read. “It says they’re driving an ambulance and tending to the wounded on the Western Front,” she said, then read, “‘Miss Vionetta Sharp gained her nursing training at the Henry Street Settlement House.’”

I shivered, recalling Miss Sharp saying to me that the world would soon have more need of nurses than English teachers.

“And here’s a story about Cam flying aeroplanes on the Mexican border! Oh, and here’s one about the boys of Hawthorn Hall who have enlisted in the army—and it’s written by Dolores Jager, ‘special wartime correspondent’ to the *Times*.”

As Helen read out all the wartime accomplishments of our classmates and teachers I bent down to adjust the flame on the lamp and noticed a pile of telegrams held down by a paperweight. I picked up the first one. “It is with regret that we inform you . . .”

My heart thudded in my chest.

“What is it?” Helen asked.

I tried to slip the telegram into my pocket but Helen grabbed it from me. I saw her squinting at it and knew she couldn’t read it in the dim light and that I should adjust the wick on the lamp to give her more light. But I couldn’t. My fingers were frozen. My whole body was frozen. Helen moved to the window and stood in the moonlight to read the telegram. She looked like a girl in a Dutch painting reading a letter from her lover.

“This can’t be right,” she said, shaking her head, annoyed as if it were a bill from her dressmaker that didn’t add up. “It’s dated August 1916, and it says that Nathan Beckwith was killed in a place called Verdun. But what would Nathan be doing in France?” she demanded, looking up at me.

“What could all of this”—she waved her arms at the bulletin board and the maps—“a war all the way across the ocean, have to do with Blythewood?”

“We’re pledged to fight evil,” I said, holding up another letter I’d found on the desk. It was dated the same day as the telegram. “That’s what Mr. Bellows says here in his letter to Dame Beckwith resigning from Blythewood to enlist in the British army. He says, ‘I can no longer remain here at my post pinning flags on maps and recording the names of the dead on my honor roll when the flower of our youth goes forth to fight. Although our country remains neutral, we at Blythewood cannot. This is not a natural war—if any war can be said to be *natural*—but a war fueled by the evil of the shadow creatures. I am convinced that since the beginning our old enemy van Drood has had a hand in this war, seeding dissent on all sides. Hence it is our war and as a knight of the Order it is my duty to go forth and avenge our dead.’”

I looked up from the letter and saw Helen’s face shining in the moonlight. She was looking at the long white scroll pinned over Mr. Bellows’s desk. The honor roll. In our day—only yesterday for Helen and me but years ago now—the roll had held the names of the students who got a perfect score on the history final. But now the roll held the names of the dead. Henry Higginbottom, Hawthorn Hall ’14, fallen at the Marne, August 1914; James Jenkins, Hawthorn Hall ’14, fallen at Ypres, October 1914 . . .

The list went on and on.

“All these Hawthorn boys,” I said, reading the names over again as if by memorizing them I could save them. “No wonder Nathan enlisted. He

knew them from the summer he spent at Hawthorn. He wouldn't have felt right not joining up."

"That idiot!" Helen cried, wiping her face. "He must have thought it would be ripping good fun. Look, here's a picture of the Hawthorn Hall class of 1914." She pointed to a photograph tacked to the corkboard of the castle, our brother school in Scotland, in front of which stood a group of young men in graduation robes. One of them held a placard that read "Class of 1914." They were all laughing and smiling, their ruddy faces impossibly young. Too young to be heading off to a war in just a few months. I recognized Nathan in the back row.

"Nathan must have transferred to Hawthorn after—"

"After we disappeared." Helen finished my thought for me. "Of course. He would have blamed himself for not going with us into the woods. So he went off to Scotland and then off to war to get himself killed. And all because we fell down a hole into Faerie."

"Helen, we don't know that it would have been any different if we were here. This war"—I waved my hands at the newspaper articles, the maps, the lists of the dead—"was bigger than all of us. Even if we'd been here we couldn't have stopped it."

Helen's eyes widened and she opened her mouth to say something, but before she could a sound startled both of us. It came from above us, in the bell tower. One of the bells was tolling.

"Come on," Helen said. "Someone's up there and I've got some questions for them."

She grabbed the spirit lamp and limped out of the room. Even with her injured ankle it took me a few minutes to catch up with her at the foot of the bell tower stairs. "Helen!" I grabbed her arm. "We don't know who's up there. We have to be careful."

"Why?" she bit back. "What do we have to lose? We've already lost everything." She shook off my arm and clumped up the stairs, shouting as she went. "Who's there? In the name of the Order of the Bells I demand you show yourself!"

We reached the landing below the belfry—or what used to be the belfry. Open sky yawned where the six bells of Blythewood once hung. The bells themselves lay on the stairwell in a tumble of molten bronze. I didn't like to imagine the force that could have melted the bells. But I could only make

out five bells. The sixth bell was hanging from a platform. Someone had built a shelter in the ruin of the belfry. It looked like a nest, like Raven's tree house in the woods . . .

I shoved past Helen and scrambled over the barricade of bells. There was a rickety wooden ladder braced against the crumbling stone wall—just like the ladder leading up to Raven's nest. When I put my foot on the first rung, though, what I remembered was Raven lifting me bodily from the roof of the Triangle factory onto the ladder leading to the neighboring roof. I remembered how his hands had felt around my waist—and I was remembering that I hadn't seen his name on the list of the dead. And why would I? Darklings didn't fight in human wars. He would have carried the souls of the dead from the battlefield—and then he would have come back to wait for me. Who cared how many years it had been. Darklings were long-lived and even if he were an old man I would love him still.

A burlap sack hung over the opening to the shelter. I pushed it aside—and wings burst over my head. I nearly fell backward but Helen was behind me, steadying me.

"Blodeuwedd!" she cried at the sight of the huge barn owl. A face appeared in the opening, so lined and withered I thought it was a carving in the wood until he opened his mouth and spoke in a thick Scottish brogue I recognized as the voice of Blythewood's caretaker, Gillie.

"Och, my lost lasses," he crooned. "You've come back at last."

5



HELEN PUSHED PAST me to throw herself into the caretaker's arms. Gillie was slight, but he caught Helen up and held her, patting her awkwardly on the back. "There, there, lass," he crooned, leading Helen into his little hut. "Gillie won't let no harm come to ye now that yer back."

I followed them inside and looked around the makeshift shack cobbled together from wood scraps. I thought I recognized the backboard from the hockey goal post and desktops from our classrooms still bearing the carved initials of generations of Blythewood girls. There was barely room in the little hut for tiny Gillie. A bedroll stood in one corner, and there was a camp stove and a lantern, and a chair with torn upholstery, to which he led Helen. When he had her settled, plumping the cushion behind her head and turning the heat up on the stove, he turned to me.

Gillie's face had always struck me as ancient. He *was* ancient. He was a Ghillie Dhu—a sort of woodland elf who returned lost children to their homes. I'd seen his green eyes change color with the weather—and seen the weather change with his moods—but I'd never seen them sunken so deep in his lined face or looking so defeated.

"Ye look just the same as the last day I saw you," he said, gazing at me.

"It *is* the last day we saw you," I said. "For us."

"Ah, you strayed into Faerie, then." He shook his head and turned to put a kettle on the stove. "'Twas what I told the Dame must have happened. She sent three expedition parties to find you but them that came back said you weren't anywhere to be found."

“I don’t think we were in Faerie *proper*—” I began, but Helen broke in.

“Were people lost looking for us?” she asked.

“Aye, Miles Malmsbury and Euphorbia Frost. Nathan was lost for a while—”

“Nathan went into Faerie looking for us?” Helen’s face looked hectic and pink in the stove light.

“Three times. The last time he was gone for two months. When he came back, he was no’ the same. He had an idea that he might find ye in Scotland, so he transferred to Hawthorn Hall. Then the war broke out and that gave him something else to fight for . . .” Gillie’s voice trailed off and his eyes turned a muddy green.

“We saw the telegram in Mr. Bellows’s classroom,” I said, wishing to spare Gillie the burden of having to tell us that Nathan was dead and also to give Helen a moment to regain her composure. “And we saw the newspaper clippings about the war. Tell us what happened. What was the war *for*?”

Gillie shook his head and made the tutting sound he made when some girl left the door to the hawk mews open or did something else foolish. “What’s any war for? Some foolishness in the Balkans started it the summer after you vanished, some addled fool shot the archduke and his lady. Then one thing led to another, one country declarin’ against another, then the other taking up arms because they had a treaty with the first. To tell the truth, I found it hard to follow. But before ye could say Jack Flash, the Hun were marching through Belgium into France and then on to England. And they didna march alone; they marched with the shadows.”

“The *tenebrae*?” I asked, feeling a chill. “Do you think van Drood was behind the war?”

“Aye. Although, the Bells know, there’s enough evil and foolishness in man to have started the war themselves, but there’s no doubt van Drood was spurring it on. The Order sent emissaries to stop him—Professor Jager and his girls to Vienna, Miss Sharp and Miss Corey under cover of driving an ambulance and tending to the wounded—although sure enough they had plenty of real tending to do in the end. Mr. Bellows joined the army and most of the boys from Hawthorn Hall. Our girls, too—Miss Camilla dressed up as a boy and flew fighter planes. Miss Dolores wrote stories for the newspaper. And Miss Daisy—well, you won’t hear too much about what she did because it was all secret, but after her feller died—”

“Mr. Appleby?” Helen cried. “Mr. Appleby died?”

“Yes, fallen at the Battle of the Somme. Miss Daisy took it awful bad. I had it from the Dame that Miss Daisy was working for something called ‘Intelligence’ and that she went behind enemy lines. She sent back stories that the men in charge were all taken by the shadows and van Drood was running things.”

I was going to ask something about van Drood but Helen spoke first. “Do you mean to say that Daisy was a spy?” Helen asked.

“Aye,” Gillie said, his eyes gleaming like emeralds. “One of the best! She sent back reports that saved hundred of boys before she fell silent.”

“Fell silent?”

“Aye,” Gillie nodded solemnly. “She must’ve been caught in the end but they said she never gave up a single name of her fellows.”

“No, she wouldn’t.” Helen bit out the words between clenched teeth. “She was the bravest and best of us. What happened to . . . the others?”

“Mr. Bellows was killed on the Somme trying to drag a young soldier back from no-man’s-land—that’s what they called the bit in between the trenches. Miss Corey and Miss Sharp were running a field hospital when it was bombed. Miss Corey was able to pull Miss Sharp out of the rubble but she was burned something terrible. Miss Corey brought her back to Violet House to mend, but then the fight came here.”

“Came here? But why? What did America have to do with the war?”

“Naught at first. She stayed out of it until the Germans sunk one of her ships. But then, just before we entered the fight, the Germans joined with Mexico and sent great machines over the border. Tanks, they call ’em. Great iron monsters. I know it were the shadows that made them. Then the airships came, raining fire from the sky. They attacked New York—”

“New York!” Helen cried. “How dare they!” But then her outrage turned to fear. “Oh, Gillie, do you know what happened to my mother . . .” Her voice cracked. Helen only ever complained about her mother, but in that instant I saw how much she loved her. I squeezed her hand. I didn’t like how Gillie was looking at Helen.

“I’m sorry, lass. Your mother was so upset at your vanishing she took sick. The doctors’ bills used up the last of her savings. Mrs. Hall—your grandmother, Ava—took her in.” He looked at me, his eyes the deep green

of fathomless depths. “They were both killed in the first bombing of New York.”

“But couldn’t the Order do anything?” I demanded, trying not to picture my grandmother and Mrs. van Beek crushed under the rubble of that marble mausoleum on Fifth Avenue. “They built that machine in the Woolworth Building—”

“Aye, we thought we could protect the city with that gadget, but van Drood was able to worm his way into our ranks and take over the Woolworth Building and use our own weapons against us. And there he sits today, like a fat spider at the center of his web surrounded by the corpses of his prey, ruling over a dead city—”

“A dead city—New York?” I cried, remembering the city in all its varied life from the teeming streets of the Lower East Side to the throngs of shoppers on Ladies’ Mile to the well-dressed promenaders in Central Park. “Is everybody there dead, then?”

Gillie turned to me and I saw something I’d never seen before. His eyes that ranged through every shade of green had turned a milky white as if whatever he was picturing had blinded him. “As good as,” he said. “The ones taken by the shadows do his bidding and live in his towers, but the others—”

Gillie stopped abruptly and cocked his head like Blodeuwedd listening for a mouse. I opened my Darkling ears and heard a low hum that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Gillie leapt up, transformed from old man to agile elf, and extinguished the lamp and stove. He shoved Helen and me both down to the floor. The hum had become a roar like a train bearing down on us. The noise scraped at my Darkling ears like iron claws, silencing even the toll of my inner bell. It was trying to get inside my brain and scoop out everything that made me human. A ghastly white light sliced through the cracks in the roof, crazed beams skittering over Gillie’s nest as if looking for us. I shrank from the light as if its very touch might burn.

Looking up through a gap in the ceiling I saw that something had blotted out the stars. It looked like a giant black crow, razor-sharp claws extended to grab us, beak open to eat us. I squinted against the glare and saw that it was a zeppelin painted like a crow. The searchlights came through the crow’s eyes. “Who . . . what . . . ?” I whispered.

“Scavengers,” Gillie hissed. “They comb the ruins looking for survivors and scrape you clean of everything that made you what you were—hope, love, laughter—and leave a hollowed husk behind, biddable slaves who work in van Drood’s factories.”

“Factories?” I asked. “What kind of factories?”

“Great sprawling monsters full of gears and motors. The workers are chained to their machines and worked until their fingers bleed.”

A vision rose in my head of a dream I’d had when I was a prisoner in Bellevue after the Triangle fire—a hallucination from the drugs Dr. Pritchard gave me—or so I’d thought. In it I was back at the Triangle factory seated at my sewing machine sewing sleeves. When I looked down the long table I saw that the girl next to me, and all the girls at the impossibly long table, were sewing their own flesh to the machines. Their blood filled the long trough in the middle of the table and ran down to the end where van Drood sat, mouth open, drinking the girls’ blood.

I snapped out of the vision. “But why?” I cried. “What does van Drood get out of such a world?”

“He gets his way,” Gillie said darkly, the blank white of his eyes mercifully snapping back to an angry acid green. “When he was a teacher here he had an awful time controlling the girls. They can be right mischievous sometimes, especially when they smell fear on a new teacher. They’d laugh at him and pull pranks, and argue when they didn’t want to do the work. Well now, in this world he’s created, no one ever laughs or pulls pranks or argues. Neither do they love or dream. As for whether he’s happy sitting up there in his tower I can’t say . . . ah, there are the lads!”

Through the mind-numbing hum I heard a sharp whistle. Above the zeppelin two winged shapes appeared. My heart wrenched at the sight. Darklings. They weren’t all dead. Gillie hadn’t said anything about Raven. He might still be alive. But if he were one of these Darklings, he might not be alive much longer. The zeppelin’s searchlights had swung around, trying to catch them in their glare, but the Darklings darted through the air, nimbly evading the scorching light. I had a glimpse of two Darklings—a male and a female—and then the sky exploded in ugly yellow phosphorous that smelled like rotten eggs and burnt feathers. I started to cry out but Gillie clamped his hand over my mouth.

“It’s all right, lass, the Darklings are too quick for the scavengers. Look.” He pointed toward the river where the two Darklings were silhouetted against the sparkling water. The zeppelin was moving toward them. “They’ve led them away. They’ll lead them on a merry chase now, up and down the river. Last month they lured one out to the Shawangunks and crashed it into the ridge. We’ll be safe now for a bit.” Gillie helped Helen up into her chair and turned the stove back on.

“Did the Darklings fight in the war?” Helen asked.

“Aye, some did. Some joined the human armies and others worked in secret to sabotage the enemy. These fellows protect the few of us that are left.” Gillie handed Helen and me our tea in cracked teacups with the Bell and Feather emblem. He poured some condensed milk from a can and started to open a can of beans, but then looked up and grinned. “Och, here comes the rest of our tea now.”

Blodeuwedd had returned with a squirrel dangling limp from her talons. “Thank ye, girl,” Gillie said, taking the squirrel and holding it up in the lamplight. Catching sight of Helen’s stricken face he chuckled. “Or perhaps ye’d rather a biscuit? I have a few left from Miss Hattie.”

“Miss Hattie is still alive?” I asked, trying to imagine the elderly lady living in these conditions. As grief-stricken as I was about my grandmother I couldn’t imagine *her* living on squirrels.

“Aye, she and Miss Emmy take in refugees at Violet House and transmit wireless messages to other outposts of the Order. We have no’ given up yet, lasses, only—” Gillie’s face grew darker. “Only there are fewer and fewer of us holding out and more and more of them. The Dame thinks that van Drood must have found the third vessel and released the last of the shadows and that’s why the war’s gone so bad.” Gillie lowered his voice. “There’s a legend that the last of the vessels contained the most evil of the shadows—the nastiest bits of evil, the ones that drain a person of all hope—and that when they were released the balance between good and evil tipped over to the bad.”

“Mr. Ward told us about something called hope-eaters.” Helen said.

“Mr. Ward?” Gillie asked.

“I think his real name is Aelfweard,” I told Gillie.

At the sound of the name Gillie’s eyes glowed a bright green. “One of the ancient guardians of the vessel! Where did ye lasses come upon him?”

Helen and looked at each other and I proceeded to tell Gillie how we had been led by a lamprite through a tunnel in the earth to the inside of the broken vessel where Aelfweard—or Mr. Ward as Helen insisted on still calling him—lived among the roots.

“One of the vessels right here in the Blythe Wood! Well, I’m no’ terrible surprised after all. I told the Dame years before that the vessels would be near a door to Faerie so the wee folk could watch over it, so why not here? It explains why the shadows were lurking about before ye went missing.”

“That’s what Mr. Ward told us,” Helen said. “He said the shadows were trying to get inside the vessel so they could find clues to where the other vessels were.”

“Clues?” Gillie asked, stroking his grizzled chin.

“Pictures of where they are. Look.” Helen took her notebook out of her pocket. “I drew one. Unfortunately the other one was ruined—” She stopped as she noticed the look on Gillie’s face. “Do you recognize it?” she asked.

“Aye, I think so, only it’s been so long since I’ve seen these hills.” He was tracing the line of the mountains with his blunt fingertips, his eyes turning a soft mossy green. The air inside the hut had turned warmer and softer, too, like a summer day after rain, and there was a scent of heather in the air. As I looked back down at the lines Helen had drawn, they suddenly looked familiar to me, too.

“That picture we saw downstairs of Hawthorn Hall,” I said, getting to my feet. “I think the mountains in the background looked just like that. We can check—”

“Um, that won’t be necessary,” Helen said, slipping the photograph from her pocket. “I took it for, er, a keepsake.”

“But why . . .” I began, but then I looked down at the picture of Hawthorn boys and saw Nathan in the middle of the back row and understood. *Something* had happened between Nathan and Helen last summer.

Gillie poked the photograph with his finger. “Aye, the mountains about Hawthorn. I know them like the back o’ my hand. I came from there—there was a door to Faerie tucked away in those hills.”

“There must be a vessel there,” I said. “If van Drood found it . . .”

“He either let out the shadows in it or found the way to the last vessel,” Gillie said, his eyes burning now like coals. “If only we could have stopped him.”

“Maybe we still can,” Helen said, looking up at me.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“We came into the future because we went through Faerie. If we went back to Faerie . . .”

“It doesna work like that,” Gillie said. “If you went back into Faerie there’s no telling when you’d come out.”

“Gillie’s right,” I said sadly. “The one time I went to Faerie and came out in our own time it was because Raven held the door open for us. But even then we could only come out at the same time, not years before.”

“But that *is* our time!” Helen cried. “This isn’t our time. We weren’t meant to be here. None of this was meant to be—Nathan dead, Daisy vanished, my mother and your grandmother bombed to death, the human race enslaved in van Drood’s factories, Miss Sharp burned, Gillie here living off squirrels! This can’t be how things were meant to turn out.” Helen stood up and stamped her foot, her cheeks flushed pink in the lamplight, blue eyes blazing. “I simply refuse to believe that this is the way things are meant to be.”

I thought of the conversation that Helen and I had been having in the woods before we came upon the trow, when the worst fate seemed to be that I wouldn’t get to go to college. How quickly I’d trade that future for this one. “It’s all very well to rail against our fates, Helen, but that doesn’t get us back. It’s not like a clock we can set to a certain time.”

Gillie’s eyes lit up like a magnesium flashbulb. “Maybe *that’s* what he meant,” he said enigmatically, springing to his feet. “Come on!”

Without waiting for us he scampered down the ladder. Helen, starting after him, glanced back over her shoulder at me. “Are you coming? Or are you going to stay here and brood over your past mistakes? Or maybe you don’t want to go back and have to choose between Raven and Vassar?”

“How did you—”

“Know you had a row with Raven? Please, Ava, you’re as transparent as a water glass. You were brooding last week like a molting hen. Whatever it was, I’m sure you can patch it up when we get back.”

She turned to climb down the ladder and I followed her, thinking that unless I could get back to the week before we fell down that hole I wasn't so sure I could patch anything up.

Gillie was waiting for us at the bottom of the stairs. Although he hadn't brought a lantern, he was surrounded by a greenish glow that I hadn't noticed before. Perhaps in the absence of human company Gillie was reverting further back to his elfin nature. As we followed him down the hall I pictured him leading lost children through the woods and marshes. In a hundred years perhaps that's all Gillie would be—a green bog-light leading children home—if there were any homes left and the whole world wasn't made into van Drood's factory.

At the door to the library, Gillie took out a key from a long chain linked to his waistcoat button and unlocked the door. I hesitated on the threshold, not sure that I wanted to see what had become of the library. This was the room in Blythewood I had always felt safest in, with Miss Sharp tending the fire and making us all tea, Miss Corey poring over her books, Mr. Bellows balancing his teacup on his kneecap and regaling us with his stories, Nathan slouched by the fire, Daisy marshaling her notes and keeping us on task—how could I bear this room without them all here?

But the room was so altered I need not have feared the intrusion of those memories. It looked like a war room. A huge board with a map of the United States covered the table in front of the fireplace. Another with a map of Europe stood against the shelves. Crates of canned goods and ammunition stood on the shelves that had once held volumes of poetry. For a moment I heard Miss Sharp's voice reciting a poem about two lovers on a beach.

*And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night—*

But it was as if the words were spoken by the Miss Sharp who had driven an ambulance in the war only to be scarred in a terrible fire and come home to defend her homeland.

"Now where did I put it?" Gillie was muttering as he dug through the crates, tossing miscellaneous items hither and thither—a can of peaches, a metal canteen, a box of nails. "I wanted to make sure it was safe. He said you might come back and I was to be sure to give it to you."

“He?” I asked as Gillie tossed a pack of cards out of a crate. “Who . . .” But my voice stuck in my throat when Gillie retrieved a red leather jeweler’s box from a crate. “Ah, here it is!”

I knew that box. It was the one Raven had taken out of his pocket the last night I saw him. He had knelt on one knee and held it out to me. My first thought had been, “Oh, it’s too big to hold a ring, he can’t be asking me to marry him.” I’d felt a twinge of disappointment, but when he opened it and there *was* a ring inside I’d felt . . . *scared*. Scared of how much I wanted to say yes—but also scared at what it would mean to marry a Darkling. Would I be giving up my human life? My friends? My future?

“It’s just,” I had blurted out, “I thought I might go to college.”

“You could still go to college,” he said. “I wouldn’t mind.”

“But I don’t think Vassar allows married students.”

“So what you’re saying is you’re ashamed of me.”

“What?” I’d been too dumbfounded to know what to say—and then he had snapped closed the jeweler’s box and snapped open his wings to fly off.

And here was the box again. Had he left it with Gillie to remind me of what I’d lost?

I took the box from Gillie, not sure I could bear to look at the ring Raven had picked out for me—a moonstone surrounded by tiny diamonds—but when I opened the box I found that there wasn’t a ring inside. There was a pocket watch and a note written in Raven’s hand.

Dear Ava,

Perhaps this will be a little more to your liking than a ring. It’s set to our time and will take you back if you go through Faerie again. Just press the stem when you are ready to come back. I will be waiting for you.

6



“WHAT DOES HE mean, *more to your liking than a ring?*” Helen, reading over my shoulder, demanded. “Did Raven ask you to marry him?”

“None of your business!” I snapped, stuffing the note in my pocket. I took the watch out of the box and opened it.

It wasn’t an ordinary watch. Instead of hands, two wings spread out from the center. Instead of numbers, two gold rings circled the face, one engraved with the phases of the moon, the other with symbols I thought I recognized as Darkling numerals. Both rings could be moved. I touched a finger to one of the rings, but Helen cried out.

“Don’t move it! He said in the note that it’s set to our time.”

I stared at the moon—a waning crescent—and the Darkling numeral at the top of the watch. If it was set to a time, it wasn’t one I recognized, but then the Darklings had a different calendar.

“He was clever with clocks,” I said wistfully. “He was always tinkering with them. That’s why he went to apprentice with Mr. Humphreys, and he did fix the clocks at Violet House. But a clock that could bring us through Faerie back to our own time—”

“Damned clever!” Gillie cried. “He told me he’d found a way to make things right again and bring you back. I thought he might have gone daft. He was half mad when you went missing—storming into the Dame’s office, demanding she send everybody out to search for you, blaming me for sending you out in search of the trow, blaming himself for some spat you’d had—”

“Did he say anything about the watch?” I asked, ignoring Helen’s curious stare.

“He said that a Darkling was able to stop time in Faerie when he held the doors open with this wings so there might be a way to lead someone back through Faerie to a particular time. If only that person had a special watch—then he said something else, but . . .” He shook his head and looked away. “It’s a long time ago and I can’t say I remember exactly what. I do remember that he muttered something in Latin.” Gillie looked down at the watch, which I held cradled in my hands as if it were a newly hatched chick. It was ticking faintly and slowly. “Aye, that’s it.” He tapped the face of the watch gently.

I peered down at the watch face. Inscribed in gold between the wings was a Latin motto. *Tempus fugit*.

Time flies.



Gillie wanted us to wait until morning to go back because the woods were dangerous at night, but I couldn’t bear to wait another second. The words Raven had inscribed on the watch had lit a fire in my belly. Time was flying. Each tick of the watch, made all the more maddening because there were no hands moving, moved me further away from Raven.

Helen was anxious to go as well. As we walked across the lawn to the woods she kept up a steady chatter to me and Gillie. “The sooner we go, the sooner we can put things to rights. We’ll find the unbroken vessel before van Drood does and we’ll stop this awful war. Nathan won’t die in a beastly muddy battlefield, nor Mr. Bellows, nor any of those handsome boys at Hawthorn Hall. My mother . . .” Her voice wobbled. “My mother will *not* be destitute and she and Ava’s grandmother will *not* be killed by bombs falling from the sky. Miss Corey and Miss Sharp will live long happy lives together and we’ll visit them at Violet House every Sunday for tea and Daisy and Mr. Appleby will be wed and Cam will fly planes for fun not to drop bombs on people. The world will not be turned into some awful grimy factory and Blythewood *will* be restored. You’ll see, Gillie, we’ll put everything back the way it should be.”

At the edge of the woods Gillie turned to face Helen. “If anyone can put things to rights it’s you, Miss Helen, but I’m afraid I won’t see it. This is my world now and if ye change things it will be as though it never was. I’m glad I’ve gotten to see your face again, and yours, Miss Ava.” He turned to me, his eyes burning like twin beacons in the light. “I’ll leave you here, lasses. These woods no longer belong to me.” He looked at the blasted trees. “But I’ll be watching over you no’ the less.”

I threw my arms around Gillie and hugged him tight, then turned toward the woods, stumbling blindly while Helen said her good-bye. When I opened my eyes, the woods were blurred and two green spots bobbed in the darkness as if Gillie’s eyes had been burned into mine—or as if he really was still with us, leading us home. I knew that home wasn’t behind us in the ruins of Blythewood. It lay through these dark and wasted woods and smoke-filled air and who knew how many other dangers.

For all Helen’s optimistic list of how we were going to set things right, I knew it wouldn’t be as easy as that. We didn’t even know if Raven’s watch would work or if we’d be able to find Faerie. The woods felt barren and empty—all the magic drained out of them. What if the door to Faerie was gone, blasted by the shadow crows and their infernal machines?

I remembered Raven once saying that as the world grew more crowded there might not be any room left for Darklings. Maybe the shadow machines and van Drood’s factories had wiped out the last traces of magic from the world. Even Gillie had seemed to be fading. And if there was no magic left we wouldn’t be able to find our way to Faerie and this was all there would ever be—a ruined world without magic.

“Ava?” Helen said, slipping her hand in mine. “Are we almost there? I’m feeling . . . so very tired.”

I turned to look at Helen, but I could barely see her in the dark. Her face seemed to blend in with the shadows.

I moved closer and touched her face. Her skin felt gritty. I wiped at the grit and a white streak appeared on Helen’s cheek. She was coated with some kind of ash or soot. I looked up and saw that black silt was falling from the burnt trees.

“Ech!” Helen coughed. “It’s all over us. I can feel it in my mouth and lungs.”

Now that she mentioned it, I could taste the soot in my mouth as well. It tasted like ash and rotten meat—the way the trow’s breath had smelled. Bile rose up in my throat and I doubled over, retching the foul black gunk onto the ground. I heard Helen choking beside me, then I felt her hands smoothing my hair away from my face and patting my back.

“Ugh, what do you think it is?” she asked when we both could breathe again.

“I don’t know—some kind of residue from the *tenebrae*, I think. Maybe it’s another way that the shadows have of getting inside us. We have to get into Faerie before it infects us, but I don’t know how to find it.”

I turned around in a circle. The bare trees loomed out of the smoke like gaunt skeletons. One of the photographs from Mr. Bellows’ corkboard flashed in my mind—a terrain of ruined trees rising out of the smoke, bodies twisted in the mud, gunfire lighting up the sky in lurid blasts . . .

As if the image had summoned them, the sky opened up above us. Sulfurous yellow light scythed through the skeletal trees, and the ground shook under our feet.

“The zeppelin!” Helen hissed, grabbing my hand. “It’s come back!”

We ran from the searchlights strafing the ground, but there was no place to hide. All the underbrush had been burned away. The blasted trees offered no shelter. I could hear the zeppelin right behind us, the hum of its engines rattling my teeth, scraping inside my brain. The searchlights skittered beside us. I felt one touch my brow and for a terrible second my mind went completely blank. It was as if I had been erased. Then Helen pulled me out of its path and my mind stuttered back up like a rusty machine just in time for me to see that the light was stretching toward Helen.

I grabbed Helen and unfurled my wings, mantling them over us just as the light reached us. I had no idea if my wings would protect us from the scouring light. I could feel the heat and smell my feathers singeing, but we were still alive. But for how long? How long would my wings keep out the burning rays? How long would our minds be our own? If we were going to be turned into mindless drones I’d rather be dead.

Then suddenly the heat was gone. I felt cool air on the outside of my wings.

“I think it’s gone,” Helen whispered.

“It could be a trap,” I said, parting my wings a fraction and peering through the gap between singed feathers. A Darkling was standing over us, his wings mantled over his head. He was backlit against the glare of the retreating ship, so I couldn’t make out his face—but Helen recognized him right away.

“Marlin?” she said, getting slowly to her feet. “Is that you?”

He lowered his wings and stepped forward. His face was older, lined and scarred, a white streak in his reddish-brown hair, but when he smiled he looked like the same boy who would do somersaults off the Shawangunk ridge. “Helen! Ava! I thought it must be you when I saw the color of those feathers. But I hardly dared hope—it’s been over ten years!”

“We went through Faerie!” Helen cried, and then in a rush, “Oh Marlin, I’m so sorry. If I’d known I wouldn’t see you for so long I’d have never been so awful to you!”

I stared at Helen. So I *hadn’t* been the only one to fight with her boyfriend that week.

“You weren’t awful, just truthful. I only took it so badly because my feelings were hurt. I felt terrible when you went missing. We all did.” He turned to me. “I thought Raven would go out of his mind. He blamed himself.”

“But it wasn’t his fault!”

“You couldn’t tell him that. He said that if you hadn’t argued he would have been with you the day you went missing. It was my fault, too. If I hadn’t been sulking I’d have been keeping an eye on you. We knew something was going on in the woods. The *tenebrae* had been gathering for weeks, taking over whatever creatures they could—trows, boggles, even lampsprites—searching the woods for something.”

“For the broken vessel,” Helen whispered. “We found it that day.” Quickly, Helen told Marlin what we had learned from Mr. Ward. He listened intently, his face grave. Watching him, I could see all the pain he had witnessed over these last ten years reflected in the heavy stance of his body, the lines etched in his face, and the gravity in his eyes. Although I’d caught a glimpse of the carefree boy he’d once been, that boy was gone. When Helen was done he nodded gravely.

“We suspected that the shadows found the third vessel in the summer of fourteen. We’d seen human wars before, but never one like this one.

Humans burrowed into the ground killing each other in the mud and blood. I ferried souls from the trenches and touched the memories of those young men—so much fear and sickness and the everlasting waste of life.” He shuddered. “I couldn’t stand by and just watch. Many of us fought beside the men in the trenches, many Darklings died. Gus . . .”

“Pythagoras?” I asked, remembering the shy bookish Darkling. “He fought in the war?”

Marlin chuckled. “Gus became quite the explosives expert. He and your friend Dolores blew up many a bridge and munitions factory. They were both killed in the battle of New York. So were Buzz and Heron and Sirena.”

“And Raven?” I asked.

Marlin shook his head. “Raven vanished before the war. He said he knew where you had gone and that he thought he had a way to get you back. But to tell the truth, he’d gone a bit crazy after you disappeared. He spent hours at Violet House talking to Uncle Taddie, tinkering with clocks. When he disappeared—well, I was afraid he might have taken his own life.”

“Raven would never do that!” I said. “He left this for me.” I took the watch out of my pocket and showed it to Marlin. “He left a note saying that if I went back to Faerie it could bring me back to our time.”

Marlin looked at the watch skeptically at first and then with a creeping flash of hope. “And if you did get back—”

“We’d set everything to rights,” Helen said. “We’d find the unbroken vessel before van Drood and stop the war.”

Marlin smiled at Helen. He lifted his hand and tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear. “I hate to let you go again, but if you could do that . . . well, it would be worth even *that* sacrifice. I would do anything to change these last ten years. When I think of what a witless fool I was . . .” He made a disgusted sound and shook himself. “Well, there’s no hope for that. I’d better get you two to Faerie and be quick about it. The door’s been getting smaller and harder to find, choked up with this infernal soot. Master Quill thinks it will soon close for good. Let’s hope it hasn’t yet.”



We walked the rest of the way in silence, Marlin leading the way, alert for trouble. Helen kept her head down, her face closed and thoughtful. I would have liked to ask what had happened between them, but I couldn't very well with him right there. I could guess, though, that it had something to do with what had happened with Nathan in Europe. Had she come back sure that she loved Nathan not Marlin? But then why had she been sniping at Nathan every chance she got and acting so miserable?

Then again, I was in love and I hadn't been acting so happy either. Maybe love didn't lead to all that much happiness in the end.

I'd arrived at this gloomy thought just as we reached an obstacle—a thorny tangle that blocked the path. "We'll have to go over," I said to Marlin. "We can fly and one of us can carry Helen—or we can all climb," I amended at a sharp look from Helen.

"We won't be going over. This is it—this is the door to Faerie."

"*This?*" Helen asked, peering into the thicket. "But there's no door here, just thorn bushes."

"I told you it was grown over," Marlin replied. "If you crouch down you can see a glimmer of fairy dust through the hawthorns."

I crouched down and peered into the thicket. There was a small opening near the ground but it looked more like a rabbit burrow than a door to a magical realm.

"We can't possibly crawl through there," Helen said, bending over me. "We'll ruin our clothes."

Marlin laughed. "Have you seen yourself in a mirror lately? You look like something a boggle dragged through the marsh. But I can make the opening a bit bigger for you."

I heard a flutter of wings and the thorn thicket began to glow. The tangled branches crept back, making a hole just big enough to crawl through. "I think we can get through, Helen," I said, turning to look over my shoulder.

Helen was standing looking up at Marlin, her face bathed in the glow of his wings, her eyes shining. "I'm sorry . . ." she began, but he placed a finger on her lips.

"You can make it up to me," he said, "if you send a message back to my fool younger self. Tell him not to be an idiot. Tell him not to give you up without a fight."

Helen opened her mouth to say something but Marlin silenced her with a kiss. I turned away to give them privacy, my own eyes stinging as though the thorns had pierced them as I crawled blindly through the hole in the thicket.

7



WHEN I'D BEEN to Faerie before it had been a beautiful place of green lawns, wildflowers, and lavender skies. The place I found myself in now didn't look anything like that. I emerged from the thicket onto a bare, windswept rocky plain under a bruise-colored sky. *A darkling plain*, I thought, remembering Miss Sharp's poem, *swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight*.

This plain was swept with grit and the keening cry of the wind whistling through scorched trees and rocky outcrops that looked like they'd been built as forts to withstand an invasion—and failed.

"What happened here?" Helen asked, coming to stand beside me.

"It looks like it was sacked. I didn't think Faerie could be invaded. Shadow creatures can't get in here."

"*Something* got in here and wrecked the place. Do you think anyone's still here?"

I looked doubtfully at the barren heaps of rocks. "I don't know. We should look for survivors." I was thinking of my mother and our teachers Miles Malmsbury and Euphorbia Frost.

"What if whatever destroyed this place is still here?" Helen asked. "Maybe we should just use Raven's watch to go back. If we can stop van Drood from finding the third vessel maybe this won't happen."

What Helen said made sense—and it was what I wanted to do. Raven had written that he was waiting for me. I wasn't quite sure what that meant—how could you wait in a moment in time? *Where* exactly was he waiting?

—but I knew that every fiber of my being ached to go to him. But as I lifted up his watch I heard a wail coming from the stand of burnt trees at the edge of the plain. I took a step in that direction but Helen put a hand on my arm to restrain me. “We don’t know what it is, Ava. I think we should leave—”

Another wail came from the woods—a long drawn-out cry that reminded me of the sounds that the old Italian and Greek women on the Lower East Side would make at funerals and wakes. Only I recognized this voice. I shook off Helen’s arm and strode over the rocks to the woods. As I came closer I made out figures among the trees: willowy white women, their arms raised and swaying like windswept branches, their long loose hair floating like leaves tossed in a gale. One of the women had long red hair and green eyes.

“Mother!” I cried, running now. Her head snapped around at the sound of my voice. It *was* my mother. She had survived, even if she looked thinner than when I’d seen her last and her clothes were torn and covered with soot. Her green eyes were huge in her starved face—and frightened. Could she be frightened of me?

But she was running toward me, not away. She met me on the edge of the woods and grabbed me by both arms and held me at arm’s length although I struggled to embrace her. “Avie, dearling, you mustn’t come closer!”

“But why, Mother, aren’t you glad to see me?”

Her eyes widened and filled with tears, but her grip didn’t waver. “I’ve hoped and prayed that you survived the Great War, but you won’t survive long here, dearling. There’s a contagion that is taking us all.” She looked back over her shoulder at the swaying women. One at the center was moving less and less. She was covered with soot from head to foot; even her hair and skin were the color of ash.

“What happened here?” I asked. “I thought the shadows couldn’t cross over into Faerie.”

“So did we. But once van Drood opened the third vessel, the hope-eaters pressed in on us here in Faerie. The darkness spread like a mold or a virus, killing the grass and the flowers, the trees . . . and then the fay. First the smaller delicate ones—the lampsprites and boggles—but then even the trows and goblins. They all fell to the contagion. Only those of us who were

human were immune—and the changelings—but now even the changelings have succumbed.”

She turned her head back to look over her shoulder. The woman in the center had stopped swaying. She was arrested in a posture of supplication, her soot-covered arms raised to the sky, darkening and hardening as I watched until she was indistinguishable from the trees surrounding her—

Which weren’t trees.

They were changelings frozen into the stunted, twisted shapes of blasted trees. I looked back at my mother and saw with horror that the same soot streaked her arms and stained the hollows beneath her eyes. “Come with me,” I said. “I have a watch that will take us back to a time before all this happened. Come with me.”

She shook her head. “Even if I could pass back into your world I wouldn’t take the chance of spreading this contagion. But if you can go back . . .” She smiled, the movement spreading fine cracks in her brittle skin. “Perhaps you can change the course of events and keep the creeping shadow out of Faerie. He’s waiting for you there, isn’t he?”

“Yes, Raven is waiting for me. He left me the watch.”

“Then you’ll be all right. Go back to him now, dearling, before it’s too late.”

“We’ll make this right, Mother, I promise.”

She lifted her hand to stroke my face. “I know that if anyone can it will be you—and your friends.” She looked over my shoulder to where Helen had come to stand behind me. “But promise me one thing, dearling.”

“Anything, Mother,” I cried, my tears blurring her face.

“Don’t make the mistake I made. Hold on to the ones you love. If you can’t change our fates—take the ones you love and run as far as you can.”



Helen led me away from my mother, my eyes so blurred with tears I stumbled over the rough ground. I remembered how hard it had been to leave her once before in Faerie but it was a hundred times worse leaving her in this desolate place.

“We will make this right,” Helen said firmly. “We will stop van Drood before he can spread his foulness everywhere.”

I nodded, too overcome to talk, and took the watch out of my pocket. It was ticking faster, as if it were an animal whose heart was racing in this awful place—or as if it were running down. What if the foul soot was clogging the mechanism? Even a magic watch might not run forever. What if we were too late?

My hand trembling, I held up the watch and depressed the stem.

The ticking stopped. My heart stopped with it. Everything stopped. The keening wind, Helen's breath, time itself. Raven had found what Helen had asked for: a spell to stop time. But what if it kept us here—and now—for all eternity, trapped in this ruined place?

Then the watch began to move. The gold wings spun clockwise, then counterclockwise, then lifted up from the watch face. Gears and cogs whirled inside, reshaping the watch into something else. I watched in amazement as before my eyes the watch changed into a mechanical bird with gold wings that rose into the brightening air. I heard Helen gasp. The drear gray air of ruined Faerie had turned into a shimmering iridescent rainbow, like the skin of a soap bubble expanding in the sun and then—

Bursting!

The shock of the explosion knocked us off our feet. I barely had time to grab Helen's hand and then we were flying backward, speeding through time as if we'd been shot out of a cannon. Surely no one could survive this. Poor Raven. He had tried his best. I hoped he never knew that he'd blown us to bits.

We hit the ground so hard my teeth clicked together and I bit my tongue. I could feel my bones rattling—but at least I still *had* bones. I opened my eyes and saw Helen's face, her blonde hair wild, her blue eyes wide as saucers—but alive! And she was pointing to something, her mouth working to form a word.

I snapped my head in the direction she pointed. A marble statue stood on the top of a hill above us. It looked like a statue of Atlas holding up the world, arms straining against a terrible weight, neck tendons standing out, legs braced. Only this Atlas had wings stretched out holding back invisible walls. Had Raven left this statue here to hold the door for us? I struggled to my feet, my legs weak as a newly hatched chick's, pulling Helen up with me, without taking my eyes off the statue. Blue veins stood out in the marble just as if they carried blood. The face was carved so finely I could

make out the shadow of eyelashes on downturned eyes and the tracks of tears on the face and beads of sweat standing out on the forehead. The marble was so smooth I couldn't help but reach my hand out and lay it on the bare straining chest . . .

Where a heart beat.

"Raven!"

The eyelids flickered, scattering the white dust that held them down, lips parted, cracking the silt of time that lay over him, trying to form a word.

"Guh."

"He telling us to go through," Helen said. "He can't let the door close until we're on the other side. We can squeeze through under his wings."

Just barely. When Raven had held the door for me once before, he had been standing. He may have started out standing this time but the pressure of holding open the door had brought him down to his knees. It was crushing him. How long had he been here? Hadn't he brought us back to the moment when he opened the door? I didn't have time to figure it all out. Only when we were through the door would he be able to let go. I pushed Helen through the gap under his left wing—the right one was nearly crushed to the ground—and then crawled through after her, wriggling flat on my belly.

As soon as I was through I turned over and faced Raven. On this side of the door his back was covered with the green dust of pine pollen. He might have been a tree stump, the remnant of a once great oak slowly disintegrating back into the forest floor. I wrapped my arms around his back and pressed my face against his neck, my lips to his ear.

"You can let go," I said. "I'm here now."

He shuddered, a convulsion so violent I thought he might break apart as he fell backward into my arms. I held on to him as tightly as I could, unfurling my wings and wrapping them around him, repeating over and over again, "I'm here now, I'm here now," as he shook and shook. Helen sat nearby, her arms wrapped around her knees.

"Run to Blythewood and get help. Tell them to send to Ravencliffe for Wren." If anyone could heal Raven it would be his mother, Wren, who had tended to his wounds after he'd been tortured by van Drood.

Helen looked at me so wide-eyed I thought she'd lost her senses traveling back through time, but then she asked, "Are you sure we're back in our own time? Why does Raven look like he's been holding the door for a hundred years?"

I looked around the woods, which were green and full of birdsong. "I think we've come back to a time before the airships destroyed the woods —"

Before I could finish we heard bells ringing—the bells of Blythewood—all six of them! Helen's face brightened. "I'll go get help!" she said, getting shakily to her feet, but then her voice changed. "Um . . . Ava, I think we'd better take Raven with us and get out of here as fast as we can."

"Why?" I looked up and saw that she was looking up at the treetops, which were bristling with spiky black shapes. Shadow crows perched on every branch, their hard bright eyes fixed on us.

"I . . . think . . . Helen's . . . right." Raven bit out each word as if his throat had turned to stone. He was struggling to his feet, his arm clamped around my waist. I tightened my grip on him and rose slowly. The crows cocked their heads in the identical angle, but they made no move to fly at us. Helen came to Raven's other side and slid her arm around his waist, taking on his weight even though I could tell by her limp that her leg must be bothering her. Together we began walking toward the sound of the bells. Above us the crows fluttered from branch to branch, keeping up with our slow progress but not attacking us.

"Watching," Raven said to my unvoiced question. "Since you went . . . always . . . watching."

"For the way into the vessel," Helen whispered. The crows cawed as if they had heard and understood her.

"I think we'd better wait until we're inside before we talk about that," I said.

We'd come to the edge of the woods. The lawn was green as the day we left, the flowers as bright, and the castle of Blythewood standing whole and golden in the afternoon light. Helen sighed at the sight. I, too, felt relieved, but as we crossed the lawn I felt that something was different. Now that the bells had ceased the school was eerily silent. No girls played hockey in the fields or sat on the lawn gossiping. The glass doors to the library, which

Miss Corey always threw open on fine days like today, were closed and shuttered. In fact, all the windows were shuttered.

When we were halfway across the lawn, the front door burst open and something pink hurtled out like a flying shuttlecock. A shuttlecock whooping like a banshee. It flew at us so fast I was afraid Raven would be knocked down, but Helen got in between and met the flying ball of pink with equal force.

“Daisy!”

“You’re back you’re back you’re back!” Daisy sang, spinning Helen around in a circle. “I knew you’d come back. I knew Raven would get you back!” She aimed herself at Raven but Helen held on to her.

“Yes, he did, and it’s half killed him. Someone needs to send to Ravencliffe for his mother to tend to him—and someone needs to do something about these crows. They’ve followed us from the woods.”

“They’re always around now,” Daisy said with a baleful look at the dozen crows perched on the garden hedge. “But all they do is watch. We have to keep the doors and windows shut or they get in and peck at our hair and make a foul mess. They started the day you left. Maybe now they’ll go. Where did you go?”

“We fell into a hole and met—”

“Many interesting people,” I cut in, “but we really shouldn’t talk about it here.” We were only a few yards from the door now. Beatrice and Dolores were standing on either side of it, their bows drawn and their eyes on the crows. Miss Sharp appeared in the doorway with her nurse’s bag. At the sight of it I remembered the photograph of her standing in front of her ambulance surrounded by soldiers. And then I thought of her being burnt in the airstrike. But her face was unmarked—and here was Mr. Bellows, whole and sound, waving his dagger in the air to chase off the crows, only I was picturing him charging with a bayonet into no-man’s-land to save one of the boys from Hawthorn Hall. I looked into Daisy’s face and I saw her being tortured to give up her cohorts’ names, her mouth clamped in silence. *None of those things have happened*, I told myself, but still I could see those fates overlaid on their features like shadows cast through time and I knew that I would see them until I changed that future.

“We must talk to Dame Beckwith right away,” I told Miss Sharp as she helped me bring Raven up the stairs. “I know what van Drood is trying to

do and we must stop him before it's too late."

"There's time enough for you to tell us when you've rested and healed," she said. "You've been gone so long—"

"How long?" Helen demanded, looking from Daisy to Miss Sharp and around the circle of friends who had closed around us to usher us safely into Blythewood. And then she looked to Raven. "Didn't you bring us back to the same time we left?"

"Helen!" I admonished. "Raven saved us!"

"I couldn't," Raven said. "I could only bring you back to *my* present. It took me a while to think of it—and then to figure out how to do it—and then to make the watch . . ."

"How long?" Helen asked again.

"Not so very long," Daisy said. "Let's see, you left in September . . ." She began counting on the fingers of one hand and then the other.

"Just over nine months," Miss Sharp said. "The term ended last week—only your friends didn't want to leave in case you came back. Today is June eleventh."

We'd missed our senior year—all the classes and exams and cocoa parties and midnight feasts and dances and hockey games and even our own graduation. I thought Helen would throw a fit, but instead she looked at me, her eyes icy. "Good. We're not too late. We've got seventeen days before they kill the archduke."

8



ONCE WE WERE inside and the door was closed, Miss Sharp gave out the orders. “Bea and Dolores, take the boat to Ravencliffe to get Wren. Rupert, help me get that boy to the infirmary. Lil, take the girls into the library.”

I could see her on the battlefield, barking out orders to her nurses. When Mr. Bellows picked up Raven in his arms I could see him carrying the wounded back from no-man’s-land. I blinked away the images and protested. “I want to go with Raven.”

“Raven will be tended to.” It was Dame Beckwith, hurrying toward us through the Great Hall, sunlight pouring through the stained-glass windows bathing her in crimson. I saw her standing in the ruined school holding a dead girl in her arms, her face and arms streaked with blood. “We need you and Helen in the library *now*! Raven told me earlier today what to do if you came back . . .” Her face softened as she watched Mr. Bellows carrying Raven upstairs. “So you see, it’s his orders I’m following. Won’t you do as I ask?”

I nodded and let myself be led through the Great Hall and into the classroom hallway. I glanced at the intact trophy cases as we went—there was Daisy’s plaque for the Latin prize and Dolores’s for best essay. I looked at Helen and she nodded. She was thinking the same thing—we hadn’t imagined the nightmare future. What we’d seen was real. And we had to stop it.

As we passed Mr. Bellows’s room I heard a fluttering sound, as if a bird were trapped inside. I glanced in and saw the big wall map slapping against

the wall in the breeze—only there wasn't any wind because all the windows were shuttered.

"We'll need that map," I told Dame Beckwith.

She jerked her chin at Miss Corey, who went to take the map off the wall. We waited for her at the door to the library while she took a key from her pocket to unlock the door.

"Since when do you lock the library?" Helen asked.

"Since the *tenebrae* started trying to get in," Miss Corey replied.

As she unlocked the door I heard her muttering something under her breath. Latin words. *Venite, amici*. As I stepped over the threshold I felt a jolt of energy. I was so relieved to see the library looking the same that I didn't mind. A fire crackled cheerfully in the fireplace; a china teapot and mismatched cups gleamed on the table, piles of books stacked haphazardly beside them. Helen sighed and sank down in the rocking chair by the fire. Daisy put the kettle on the hearth and spooned tea into the pot and then went to look for a tin of biscuits. Miss Corey moved stacks of books and laid the map out on the table. As I looked down at it certain names leapt up at me as if they'd been branded in fire—Verdun, Ypres, Amiens, Paris. I looked away—into Dame Beckwith's face.

"Something terrible is coming, isn't it?"

"How do you know?" I asked, playing for time. I hadn't realized how hard it would be to tell our friends what the future held.

"Emmaline Sharp has been having premonitions, only they're very scattered."

Poor Miss Emmy. Miss Sharp's aunt was a chime child like me, only she was able to tell the future. I hated to think of that sweet old woman visited by portents of death and destruction—her own home firebombed, her niece burned and scarred. I started to speak, but Dame Beckwith raised her hand.

"Drink your tea first. Collect yourself. Raven said you'd be worn out from the journey."

I took the cup from Daisy and sipped the hot sweet tea. She'd put in sugar, as we'd been taught to do to counteract shock. I thought I'd need all the sugar in the West Indies to get over the shock of traveling to the future and back. After a few sips, though, I *did* feel better. Not quite well enough to tell our story yet, though. I had a few questions first.

“You say that Raven spoke to you *this morning*?”

“To Gillie and me, yes . . . ah, here’s Gillie now.”

I turned to see Gillie standing in the doorway, turning his soft hat in his hands, his green eyes simmering. “Aye, the lad said he’d have you back. He gave me something . . .”

“A red box with a watch inside.” I felt a prickling at the back of my neck and had the strangest feeling that I was watching *myself* from the future. “Leave that box where it is, Gillie. You already gave it to me.”

Gillie nodded. “Aye, the lad said that even if he were back today it would be longer that he—and you two—were gone. That he was going to a place where time stood still.”

“So even though Raven opened the door for us today he’d really been holding it the whole ten years we were gone?” Helen’s eyes were wide with amazement—and pity.

“Or longer.” It was Miss Sharp, who’d come in with Mr. Bellows behind Gillie. She held up a hand as I started from my chair. “It’s all right, Ava. Wren and Marlin are with him. They say he’s suffering from Time Freeze. It’s what happens when a Darkling tries to hold open the door to Faerie for too long. He enters into a realm of ‘timelessness that contains all time.’” Miss Sharp wrinkled her forehead, her blue eyes clouding. “There’s no way to measure how long Raven was holding the door because he was outside of time, but they say it’s as though he’d been holding the door for eternity—”

“Eternity!” I cried, appalled. “Are you saying he suffered an eternity to get Helen and me back?”

Miss Sharp smiled. “Yes, it’s quite romantic—”

“It’s not romantic,” Miss Corey broke in. “It’s *heroic*! Raven didn’t just save Helen and Ava, he’s saved all of us. He’s given us a chance to avert the terrible future that Emmaline has been warning us about.”

“But can that be done?” Mr. Bellows asked. “Can we change the future? Can any of us change our fate?”

I looked up at Mr. Bellows. He was standing close to the fire, the reflection of the flames dancing on his face, but what I saw were rocket bursts lighting up his face as he crawled through the mud across the battlefield. I didn’t know how to answer him. But Helen did.

“Of course we can. We’re not pawns or van Drood’s shadow puppets. We can change our fates, or why else were Ava and I able to come back?” She looked around the table where our teachers, Dame Beckwith, Gillie, and Daisy had all come to sit. It wasn’t the glare of rockets that lit their faces, but the glow of fellowship. I had an image of the first knights of the Order, men and women who had joined together to rid the world of evil. A great and deadly power was arising in our world—I could feel its presence looming outside the castle walls—but we had come together to defeat it.

“Helen’s right,” I said. “We can change the future. We have to.”



Helen and I told our story, taking turns, from the moment we encountered the shadow-ridden trow, through our meeting with Aelfweard, to finding the ruins of Blythewood. It was hard to tell them about the blasted school. I saw Dame Beckwith’s jaw clench, and Gillie swore in Scots under his breath.

“How could we have let it happen?” Mr. Bellows cried, slamming his fist on the table.

“You were off fighting in France,” Helen said. Intercepting a look from me, she added, “Before Mr. Bellows left he kept the clippings from the war on his corkboard . . .” She told our friends of their exploits without, I noticed, any mention of the brutal fates they had met. *Why tell them?* I knew she was thinking, and I agreed. Instead we shared what we’d gathered about the causes of the war.

“An assassination in the Balkans?” Mr. Bellows mused, stroking his chin. “Professor Jager has reported from Vienna that the Austro-Serbian conflicts have been fueled by shadow-ridden players, but how on earth could *that* have started such a huge war?”

We explained to them how it progressed across Europe and then the Atlantic.

“I can see the Germans moving across France,” Mr. Bellows remarked, studying the map. “Our intelligence agents report that Germany has been devising a military plan along those lines for decades, something called the Schlieffen Plan, but I’m surprised the French and the Brits weren’t able to stop them. It’s as if . . .”

“They had help,” Miss Sharp said, stabbing the map with one of her hairpins.

“Gillie—future Gillie,” Helen explained, “told us that you all believed that van Drood had found and opened the third vessel. He released the shadows and turned the tide of the war.”

“But how did he find the third vessel?” Mr. Bellows asked.

“I think I know,” Miss Corey answered. “I’ve been working with Mr. Farnsworth and Master Quill on transcribing *A Darkness of Angels*. We’ve been trying to figure out what was on the missing page—and we think it might have been the story of the original vessels, which Dame Alcyone heard from one of the vessel guardians. We don’t think she would have given away the location of the vessels but we found a reference elsewhere that the vessels were hidden near the doors to Faerie. We think van Drood figured out from the story that there was a vessel in the Blythe Wood. Mr. Farnsworth thought that one of the vessels was at Hawthorn so he went there to warn them.”

“He was right,” I said. “The drawing Aelfweard showed us looked like Hawthorn Hall. Did Mr. Farnsworth find the vessel there?”

Dame Beckwith and Miss Sharp exchanged glances. “We don’t know,” Dame Beckwith answered. “We haven’t had any word from Hawthorn since Mr. Farnsworth and Nathan arrived there in January.”

“Nathan?” I could tell Helen was trying to keep her voice steady. Only a Darkling’s ears would pick up on the tremor in it. “He’s at Hawthorn Hall now?”

“Yes,” Dame Beckwith answered, her clenched jaw betraying her own struggle to appear calm. “After you girls went missing he exhausted himself looking for you in the woods. I was afraid he would suffer a nervous collapse. I even thought of sending him to the hospital in Vienna where Louisa is, but then at Christmas he suddenly came up with the idea of finishing the year at Hawthorn. I was surprised, since he’d hated the place when I sent him there three years ago.”

“Complained that they made him run bare-chested over the moors and fed him gruel,” Mr. Bellows said with a fond smile on his face. “They do, you know! Makes a man of you!”

Daisy blushed as if the image of Mr. Bellows running bare-chested over the moors was too much for her. “Nathan told me that it was time to live up

to his heritage.”

“I wonder what he meant by that?” Helen said, furrowing her brow.

“He meant that it was high time he began acting like a knight of the Order,” Miss Corey said, slapping her hand on the table. The teacups chimed in their saucers like miniature bells. “It’s time we all started acting like knights and ladies of the Order. We’ll go to Hawthorn Hall and find the vessel. Either it’s whole and we’ll defend it against van Drood or if it’s broken it will lead us to the unbroken vessel and we’ll defend that.”

“That’s all very well and good, Lillian,” Miss Sharp said, laying her hand on her friend’s arm. “But if we all go tearing off to Scotland we’ll lead van Drood straight to the vessel. Why else does he have his crows watching us? He’s waiting for us to lead him to the vessel.”

“Vi’s right,” Mr. Bellows said. “We’d be playing right into his hands.”

“But we can’t just sit around doing nothing!” Miss Corey cried.

“What we need,” said Gillie, “is to make it look like we’re doing one thing while we’re doing another.”

Everyone looked at Gillie. “Yes,” Mr. Bellows said, “but how . . .”

“I know who could help—” Daisy began, but was interrupted by a knock on the door. It was Marlin.

“How’s Raven?” I demanded, getting to my feet.

“He’s better—and asking for you.” He looked from me to Helen. “I’ll show you up—”

“I know the way to the infirmary,” I said, passing him in the doorway. “You stay here. Helen’s got a message for you.”

I ran out before Helen could stop me, a laugh burbling from my lips, the first shred of happiness I’d felt since . . . well, if you counted the time we’d been gone, a decade.



That happiness lasted as I raced up the stairs of the North Wing. Yes, there were dangers looming all around me—shadow crows watching the castle, a war on the horizon—but my friends and teachers were alive! Blythewood was intact! I knew that working together we would find a way to avert disaster. I had been given a second chance to save the world I loved—and a

second chance to fix things with the boy I loved. A boy who had proved his love by waiting for me through *eternity*. Was any girl ever so lucky?

My exuberance was tempered when I reached the fourth floor and stopped, breathless, outside the open door to the infirmary. Raven was lying on a narrow cot beside a window, the shutter cracked open so that a wedge of sunlight fell across his face. It bleached his skin the same white as the sheet pulled high over his bare chest. His still, unmoving chest. I was seized with the fear that Marlin had been wrong—Raven wasn't better; he was dead.

"He's resting." Wren stood up as I came into the room. "His heartbeat slowed when he was standing inside the door. It will be a little while before it catches up with regular time."

I clutched my own chest, unsure *my* racing heart would ever slow down. "But he's going to be all right?"

Wren smiled and put her arm around me. She had the same crease in her left cheek when she smiled as Raven, only hers was deeper. All the lines on her face had grown deeper since the last time I'd seen her. Nine months wasn't that long in a Darkling's time span, but the time spent watching her son search for me had aged her ten years. "He'll survive, but . . ." her smile faded. "I would not like to see that heart broken again."

I gulped, my mouth suddenly dry, and began to assure her that I had no intention of doing that, but Raven's voice broke in.

"Stop scaring Ava, Mother. She'll run back to Faerie."

"I'm not running anywhere!" I cried, stepping toward the bed. Wren's arm slipped off my shoulders. She gave my arm a final squeeze before she retreated from the room. I sat down on the edge of the bed gingerly, afraid to jar him.

"I'm not made of glass," he said, moving over to make room for me—and trying to hide the wince of pain from the effort. I settled myself closer and straightened the rumpled covers over his chest, my hand lingering on his warm skin. *Alive, alive!* my heart sang. He might still look like a marble statue, but he was alive. Then, embarrassed that I was actually stroking his bare chest, I moved my hand away. He snatched it in his and pressed it against his chest above his heart.

"You'll have to wait a second but . . . ah, there, feel it beat? I think it's beating faster now that you're here."

I blushed, my own heart skittering out a dozen beats to his one steady thump. “I think I can wait a few seconds, after you waited an eternity for me.”

“Eh.” He shrugged, a smile quirking his lips. “It went fast. I spent it thinking about what an idiot I’d been.”

“You? What are you talking about? I was the idiot. It’s just that you took me by surprise and all the girls had been talking about going to college —”

“You *should* go to college,” he cut in. “And do all the things you want to do—have adventures, see the world—so you can choose which world you want to live in. I should never have rushed you. I’ve learned some patience since.”

“I don’t want to see the world and have adventures,” I said, my eyes stinging. “I only want you.” Then to prove it I leaned down and kissed him. His lips met mine with a rush of heat that burned straight through my skin. He gathered me into his arms—those arms that had held back time for me. We had kissed before but this felt different. He felt different. Older. Sometime in the eternity he’d stood inside that door he’d stopped being a boy and become a man. He was pressing me against his chest with so much force I thought he might crush us both. I wanted to be crushed together, made one, to crawl back into that crack between the worlds for eternity—

Then his heart pounded and time began again. He pushed me back a few inches and looked into my eyes. “That was worth waiting an eternity for,” he said. “I can wait a little longer. My mother and I heard a bit of what you all were saying downstairs. Your world needs you right now. It needs the Darklings, too. Marlin has gone back to Ravencliffe to speak with the Elders. We’ll need to join forces to stop this war and defeat Dood. You’ll need to go to Scotland and find that vessel.”

“Can’t you go with me?” I asked, wishing my voice didn’t sound so childish.

He smiled and stroked my hair, but his touch felt different now. As if he were holding himself back.

“I *will* go with you. We can keep the shadows from following you and make sure you and your friends are safe. But you have to be with them now. After, if we can stop what’s coming . . .” His voice trailed off and his eyes

slanted toward the window. A crow had landed on the ledge, blocking out the light.

I sprung to my feet and rapped my hand against the glass pane to scare it off. It cawed and smoke poured out of its gullet. I hit the glass again and it flapped its wings, rising slowly into the air. I turned back to Raven to assure him that whatever we had to do I'd be ready for him at the end, but his eyes, following the crow's flight, were distant. As if he'd gone someplace I couldn't follow.

9



I LEFT RAVEN to rest, passing Wren in the hallway coming back with a basin of water, bundles of herbs, and towels.

“You should bathe and rest, too,” she told me. Her smile was kind, but it made me feel like a child being sent to bed. I didn’t need to rest, I grumbled all the way back to my room in the South Wing. But apparently I did need to bathe, as I gathered from the wrinkled noses of my roommates when I reached my room. I let Helen and Daisy herd me into the hall bathroom, where they unceremoniously stripped off my muddy clothes and dunked me into a tub. I probably would have drowned left to myself, but I was scrubbed and then bundled in a Turkish robe and trundled off to bed like a truculent infant—which is how I slept into the next day.

The sun was already low over the mountains in the west when I woke up. My hair, when I checked in the mirror, was sticking out sideways because I’d slept on it wet and my face was scored with creases from my bedclothes.

“Oh good, you’re up,” Helen said brightly, bustling into the room with a tray. *She* looked rested and neatly coiffed, her blonde hair done up in a becoming Gibson Girl pouf, her white shirtwaist tucked neatly into her skirt, her cheeks and nose rosy.

“Raven—” I began.

“Is fine,” she said, putting the tray on the bed and plopping down next to it. “Wren and Marlin took him back to Ravencliffe this morning but he’ll be at Violet House this afternoon for the meeting. That was impish of you,

by the by, to say that about Marlin's message. You don't think I'd actually tell him he'd been an idiot when clearly I was the idiot." She smiled brightly as she poured my tea.

"Then you've patched things up with him?" I asked.

"Yes. I told him I'd just been nervous about all the responsibility of being a Diana—do you know they got Gerta Haybrook and Lucy Worthington to replace us?"

Ignoring Helen's attempt to change the subject, I said, "But I thought the reason you argued with Marlin was that something happened between you and Nathan over the summer."

"Whyever would you think that?" Helen asked, blinking her bright blue eyes at me—only they weren't quite as bright as usual.

"Because you were swiping at him at every opportunity."

"That was because he acted a perfect cad all summer, pretending to be fond of me when clearly if he cared a fig for either of us he wouldn't have run off to Scotland while we were still missing."

"But that happened *after* . . ." I began, but then I realized that Helen was trying to distract me and her eyes *were* bloodshot. And her nose was distinctly red. She'd been crying. "Helen, if it's Nathan you love it's not fair to Marlin to pretend otherwise."

"I'd be a fool to be in love with Nathan Beckwith!" Helen got up so abruptly that the plates shivered on the tray. "And I'm not a fool. Why are *you* so interested anyway? Are you in love with Nathan?"

"Of course not!" I said, putting down my teacup. Tea sloshed over the rim into the saucer. "I love Raven."

"Then why did you turn him down when he asked you to marry him?"

"Raven asked Ava to marry him?"

We both turned to find Daisy standing in the doorway.

"Yes, but . . ." I thought back to last night, my face going hot as I remembered the intensity of our kiss. But then I searched through the rest of our conversation for any mention of getting married. All he had said, though, was that we could wait. "But he changed his mind while I was gone. Now if you'll excuse me, I should get dressed. Are we all meeting? Or have I managed to miss that, too?"

"We're meeting at Violet House at four o'clock," Daisy replied. "The aunts are making tea."

“Of course they are.” I was glad that some things hadn’t changed while I was away, but even the prospect of tea at Violet House couldn’t quite make up for my suspicion that I’d somehow missed my chance with Raven—and that it might be a long while before I had another.



Dame Beckwith, Miss Sharp, Miss Corey, and Mr. Bellows were already in the carriage when we got to the drive. “We won’t all fit,” I told Daisy and Helen. “You two sit inside and I’ll ride up front with Gillie.”

I was climbing up onto the driver’s box before they could protest. I didn’t want to endure any more questions about Raven—and I knew that Gillie would be a restful companion.

I’d forgotten about the crows.

As we drove toward River Road I heard a rustle of wings above us in the trees. I looked up and saw that the sycamores were black with crows, so many on each branch that they jostled each other for room.

“Won’t they follow us to . . . where we’re going?” I whispered, too afraid that they’d understand if I said *Violet House*.

“Not if these lads have any say in the matter.” Gillie jerked his chin up to the sky above the tree line. The sky there was black, as though a storm were approaching, even though the day was fine and sunny. As it moved closer I saw that it was a storm with wings.

“Darklings, hundreds of them! I didn’t know . . .”

“That there were that many at Ravencliffe? There weren’t. They’ve been gathering, bringing reports of shadow activity from all over the world, looking for a way to help. Watch.”

The Darklings swept down toward the trees, startling the shadow crows into flight and then herding them toward the river. Gillie clucked his tongue and urged the horses into a fast trot. As we swung onto River Road I watched the mass of shadow crows and Darklings casting a shadow over the river, a shadow shaped like the zeppelin I’d seen in the future. I shivered at the memory and Gillie patted my hand.

“Don’t worry about those lads, they know what they’re about. We’re lucky to have them. Without the Darklings, the castle would have been

overrun by those foul creatures months ago. And we have you to thank for bringing the Darklings and Order together.”

“Oh, I don’t know that I can really take credit for that, but Gillie,” I said quickly before he could argue with me, “there’s something I want to ask you. When Raven came and gave you that box, he told you something about the watch inside.”

“I didna tell you that,” Gillie objected.

“No, not yesterday, but in ten years you will, only you won’t remember exactly what he said. So I was wondering, since it was only the day before yesterday, if you remember what he said.”

We’d come to the turn that led into the town of Rhinebeck. Gillie had to slow down the horses, which he did with a lot more *whoas* and *softly theres* than he usually required to direct the well-trained, docile horses. At last when we were trotting along Main Street he answered me.

“He said that if a person had this special watch he could not only stop time, he could go back and change his worst mistakes. ‘A watch that could give you a second chance,’ he said.” Gillie looked at me. “I wondered what mistake he wanted to change.”

“I do, too,” I said.

For the rest of the drive to Violet House I wondered if the mistake Raven had wanted to go back and change was asking me to marry him. Only he hadn’t been able to go back far enough. As I stepped from the carriage onto the stone mounting block in front of Violet House I wondered if we had gone back far enough to change the future.



Miss Sharp’s uncle Taddie met us at the door with a broken flowerpot full of violets and a poem.

*Whitehorn and Elfwood
Say the bells of Blythewood.
The girls who went astray
Have come back another day!*

“He’s been practicing that all morning,” Miss Harriet said with an indulgent look for her brother. “Put that broken pot down, Taddie, and give the girls the posies you made for them.”

Taddie produced two bouquets from the deep pockets of his rumpled jacket without putting down the broken flowerpot.

“Thank you, Uncle Taddie,” I said, inhaling the sweet perfume of the violets. “We’re happy we found our way back.”

I remembered that Uncle Taddie himself had gotten lost in the Blythe Wood when he was young and that he’d never quite been the same. It was the general opinion of the Order that he’d lost his wits, but when Raven came to board at Violet House he’d discovered that Taddie knew a lot about his father’s clocks that proved helpful to the Order—and this had improved Taddie’s state of mind. As we stepped into the lavender-and- yellow-tiled foyer, all the clocks in the house began to chime in unison. Although they each played a different tune, the melodies combined to produce a harmonious sound that made me feel safe—and for good reason. Thaddeus Sharp, Sr., had designed them for just that purpose.

As we entered the conservatory, a slight young woman in a yellow dress came in from the kitchen carrying a tray of cakes and sandwiches. It took me a second to recognize Etta Blum. She’d changed from the frightened little girl I’d first met at the Triangle factory to a poised Blythewood girl.

“Etta!” I cried. “I didn’t know you were here. I thought all the fledglings had left for summer vacation.”

“They have,” Etta said, putting down the tray to give me a hug, “but Miss Hattie and Miss Emmy asked if I wanted to spend the summer here with Ruth.”

As she spoke her sister came in from the kitchen laughing at something Raven had just said. She greeted me with a smile but also a winsome look in Raven’s direction. I was pretty sure she had a crush on Raven, and I could imagine that in the year Helen and I had been gone she might have entertained notions of consoling him for my loss. But then she gave me an enthusiastic hug and I felt guilty for suspecting her of wanting me gone.

Raven was looking at me uncomfortably, though, but that might have been because his parents were sitting stiffly on a wicker settee shaded by a huge aspidistra. He was dressed in a smart pinstriped suit, his hair combed neatly back, a gold watch fob sparkling from the button of his waistcoat. Raven himself looked more like a prosperous young watchmaker than a

Darkling, but the two creatures rising from the wicker settee would never pass for human.

“You remember my parents,” he said, a tight uncomfortable smile on his face. “Merlinus and Wren.”

I nodded, looking up at the tall silver-haired man and woman on either side of Raven.

“Merlinus and I are happy that you have been restored from Faerie,” Wren said formally as if we hadn’t just seen each other yesterday. I had the feeling that she was making the speech for Merlinus’s benefit.

“We’d have never gotten back without Raven,” I said.

“No, you wouldn’t have,” Merlinus said without smiling. “No other Darkling would have dared hold open the door for so long. It’s strictly forbidden.”

“And terribly dangerous,” Wren said with a reproving look at Raven. “He could have been killed.”

“I-I never meant for him . . .” I stammered nervously. No wonder Raven looked so uncomfortable. He’d broken Darkling law and risked his life for me. His parents must hate me.

“Damned brave of the chap,” Mr. Bellows said, blundering into the fray and slapping Raven on the back.

“Yes,” Dame Beckwith said, coming to stand between Mr. Bellows and me, her large gray eyes resting on the Darkling Elders. “We owe your race a great debt of gratitude—for Raven’s brave deed and for your protection against the shadow crows this year.”

“We have signed accords with your Order,” Merlinus said, bowing to Dame Beckwith. “It is in both our own interests to fight against the shadows. But we must find a way to do it that does not break our laws—”

“What good are our laws if we all die?” Raven cried. “You can wager that Drood is not obeying any laws.”

“If we rush into this rashly we will play into his hands!” Merlinus roared.

“And that is why we are here today to plan,” Miss Sharp said, inserting herself in between Dame Beckwith and Merlinus. “But first, my aunts have prepared a lovely tea for us.” She gestured toward the tea table, which was piled high with plates of sandwiches, scones, buttered bread, and cakes. Miss Harriet was perched on a high chair with a teapot poised above a

violet- patterned cup. Plump Miss Emmaline sat beside her slathering clotted cream and jam on a scone. Etta and Ruth bustled back and forth from the kitchen bringing more trays of baked goods. The aroma of tea and butter wafted up from the table like a harbinger of peace and civility. “Can’t we all sit down together and talk this through?”

Merlinus began to speak, but Wren laid her hand on his arm and his face softened. “My son has told me that this coming war will take the lives of so many humans that all the Darklings in the world will not be enough to save their souls. He tells me that Faerie itself will perish in its wake. It is true that he broke our laws to bring these girls back, but if by doing so we are able to avert that terrible future, then I will not waste what we have learned. I will be honored to sit down at your table.” He bowed low to Emmaline and Harriet and I saw Wren exchange a relieved look with Raven.

“Oh good,” Miss Emmaline said, holding up a plate. “I knew you would. Won’t you have a scone?”



“Do you take one lump or two?”

“Try the Victoria sponge.”

“Is this oolong?”

For the first twenty minutes we didn’t talk of world affairs at all. There were sixteen of us crowded around the tea table—and two extra chairs. I asked Miss Emmaline if I should move the chairs away to give us more room, but she tilted her head to one side and said, “Their train has been delayed at Poughkeepsie but they should be arriving just about . . .” She tilted her head the other way and held up her finger. “Now,” she said as the doorbell rang.

Etta jumped up to get it, followed by an excited Taddie singing, “Whitehorn and Elfwood say the bells of Blythewood . . .” They came back with a dwarf in a three-piece checked suit, and a tall turbaned Hindu.

“Mr. Marvel!” Helen cried, spewing scone crumbs. “Mr. Omar! I didn’t know you were coming.”

The tall Indian man bowed to Helen. “Your friend Daisy informed us of your recovery, for which I thank the invincible goddess Durga—”

“And told us you were in want of a con man,” Kid Marvel finished, pumping Helen’s hand and then mine.

I looked at Daisy. “*You* called Mr. Omar and Mr. Marvel?”

“Gillie said yesterday that we needed to make it look like we were doing one thing while we were really doing another. Isn’t that what Mr. Marvel helped us do last year at the Hellgate when we rescued Ruth?”

“Youse all comported yerselves like professionals,” Kid Marvel said, winking at Miss Harriet, who was refilling his teacup. “When we got the call from Miss Daisy here I says to Omar, if them kids need help again I’m on board.”

“And I remarked to my esteemed colleague Mr. Marvel that it would be an honor to assist the *garuda* and her friends.” He bowed to me and I blushed at the ceremonial name—that of a winged goddess from Hindu mythology—that he’d bestowed on me.

We made room at the table for Omar and Kid Marvel. While Kid Marvel loaded his plate with sandwiches and cakes, Omar asked me to tell exactly what had happened. The table fell silent as I told our story—from encountering the trow in the woods to falling into the hole and meeting Mr. Ward inside the vessel. Even Taddie, who was still clutching the same broken flowerpot and had been speaking in rhymes all afternoon, quieted down to listen, although he occasionally played a tune on the teacups with his spoon, and he grew so excited when I described meeting Mr. Ward that he jumped up and ran from the room shouting, “Whitehorn and Elfwood say the bells of Blythewood!”

“You’ll have to excuse Taddie,” Emmaline said. “He had an unfortunate experience in the Blythe Wood when he was young. Go on, Ava dear.”

I had used Taddie’s interruption to take a sip of tea and prepare myself to tell the rest of the story. Still, it was painful to describe the ruins of Blythewood once again. I was glad Gillie wasn’t there as I told of the shattered windows, the molten bells, and the airship that emitted a white light that scoured the inside of your brains and left you an empty-headed cog in van Drood’s infernal factories. When I came to the things we’d seen in Mr. Bellows’s classroom I looked at Helen and she saved me.

“I don’t think we need to go into the details. We’re here to change those futures and perhaps it would be best if we didn’t go into the personal fates of . . . of those here.” Her eyes fell on Miss Sharp and then Daisy with such

grief that everybody at the table must have guessed what she meant—except for Daisy, who was busy pouring tea for Mr. Omar.

“I agree,” Miss Emmaline said. “I’ve often had to decide whether or not to share what I’ve seen of the future, and sometimes felt it was best not to. And as Helen says, these fates will change if we are successful. I believe that the reason my visions have been so blurry is that the future is changeable.”

“What’s important to know,” Mr. Bellows said, slapping his knee and upsetting the teacup he had balanced there, “is that van Drood must have found the third vessel and released the last shadows, causing this horrific war, a war that reached across the world . . .”

“A world war,” Miss Corey murmured, taking Miss Sharp’s hand. She had seen how Helen had looked at her beloved, and it had frightened her.

“A war that reaches into more than one world,” Wren said. “Tell us what you saw in Faerie, Ava dear.”

Grateful for that “dear,” I described what Helen and I had seen in Faerie. When I got to the part about my mother, my eyes blurred and I had to stop. I felt Raven’s hand slip into mine under the table and squeeze. I took a sip of tea and described the deadly soot that had crept over everything.

“Shadows infiltrating Faerie,” Wren said, her voice hoarse. “It could mean the end of all hope and beauty in this world.”

“How do you mean?” Miss Corey asked, the marks on her face standing out clearly. Last year Miss Corey had learned that she was a changeling. The marks came from when she had been transformed into Lillian Corey. I didn’t know how the teacher, who had been raised to distrust and hunt the fay, had assimilated the knowledge. There was a note of challenge in her voice now. “I mean, I know now that the fairies aren’t *all* evil, but would the world really be worse off if they were gone?”

“Lil—” Miss Sharp began.

“It’s all right,” Wren said. “Miss Corey asks a good question. You Blythewood women”—she smiled at me—“are refreshingly direct. What you may not know is how the fairies contribute to this world. The beauty they bring to the flowers in spring, the rainbows they cast, the dew they weave into the grasses at dawn, the soft spring breezes they blow when winter seems dreariest . . .

“Have you ever,” she asked, looking around the table, “felt oppressed by grief and worry?” Her eyes came to rest on her son, and I realized how hard it had been for her to watch Raven grieve for me, and then her eyes traveled to Dame Beckwith and locked onto her shining eyes. “So weighed down by fear for someone you love—a son, a daughter, a lover, a friend—that you can barely lift your eyes up off the ground? And then, just when you feel there is no hope, a soft breeze touches your face, carrying with it the smell and feel of spring, and you lift up your face to welcome the air’s touch and somehow your burden is lightened. You know all is not lost. You resolve to make things better. You have hope.”

Dame Beckwith dashed a tear from her eyes. Miss Corey and Miss Sharp held hands. Mr. Bellows cleared his throat. Omar murmured something that sounded like a prayer.

“Well, that spring breeze in winter is the gift of the fay. Elf-kissed, we call it. They bring hope where there is none. They bring beauty in the midst of sadness. Without the fay, your world would be a bleak place. If we don’t stop van Drood from releasing the last shadows, the world will be without hope . . . and a world without hope . . .” She shuddered. “Is not a world *I* would want to live in.”

“We’ll go to Hawthorn Hall to find the vessel,” Mr. Bellows said, banging his fist on the table. The teacups chimed in their saucers.

“But the crows will follow us, and we’ll lead van Drood straight to the vessel,” Miss Corey pointed out.

“We’ve got to distract the boids while you girls take off,” Kid Marvel said.

“My people can scare the crows away,” Merlinus said, “but not for very long. If even one escapes and follows you to Scotland we’ll be doing more harm than good.”

“We have to find a place to trap the crows,” Miss Sharp said.

“But how . . . ?”

“But where . . . ?”

Discordant voices rose in the conservatory. It reminded me of when the clocks had tolled out of sync. But then one voice shouted above the others.

“Whitehorn and Elfwood say the bells of Blythewood!”

It was Uncle Taddie, upset by all the dissension. We all stopped to look up at him.

“Whitehorn and Elfwood say the bells of Blythewood,” he repeated, and then, having gotten our attention at last, finished the rhyme, but differently from how he had before. “There lies a vessel deep in the May, to gather the shadows and hide them away.”

“Taddie dear,” Miss Harriet tutted, “you’re overexcited. Go pick some posies for our guests.”

“Wait a minute, Auntie,” Miss Sharp said. “I’ve never heard Uncle Taddie say that rhyme before. Will you say it again, Uncle Taddie?”

Beaming for his niece, Taddie repeated the rhyme.

“Hm,” Mr. Bellows said, “Whitehorn is another name for Hawthorn.”

“So is May,” Dame Beckwith said.

“So a vessel deep in the May—” Miss Corey began.

“Means a vessel buried in Hawthorn,” Daisy said.

“Like the one we found!” Helen said. “And Elfwood—”

“Is Aelfweard,” I finished, standing up and moving closer to Uncle Taddie. “That time you got lost in the woods, Uncle Taddie, did you fall in a hole and meet a man named Aelfweard?”

Taddie bobbed his head up and down. “Yes, yes, Mr. Elfwood! He showed me his pictures and told me . . .” Taddie’s face creased with confusion. “He told me many things, but then on my way back I got lost in the tunnels and everything got all jumbled.” He finished with a sad look on his face. Emmaline patted his hand.

“I think I know what happened,” I said. “Those tunnels cross through Faerie and go in and out of our time. Uncle Taddie must have gotten lost in time on his way back from the vessel. No wonder he’s—”

The clocks began to chime and the confusion on Taddie’s face vanished. “Out of time!” Taddie cried out. “Yes, yes, the clocks have helped me remember. Mr. Elfwood told me that if the shadows bothered me I should send them all back to him. Even a broken pot can hold a few flowers.” He held up the broken flowerpot he’d been carrying around all afternoon.

“Do you mean we can trap the shadows in the broken vessel?” Raven asked, putting his arm around Taddie’s shoulders.

Taddie beamed at Raven. “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you.” He gave his sisters a reproachful look. “Now can I have my tea?”

10



“I DON’T KNOW why we have to play bait,” Helen complained, tugging at her kid gloves, “while Daisy gets to run through the woods in buckskin.”

“Daisy *did* come up with the plan so it’s only right that she gets to choose what part to play in it.” I snatched Helen’s gloves away to keep her from shredding them. “And she can’t very well climb trees in skirts.”

We were standing at the front door to Blythewood beside our luggage. Our New York City addresses were prominently displayed on tickets hanging from our trunk handles. Helen was dressed in her best traveling outfit of robin’s-egg blue jacket and skirt, matching reticule, and a straw bonnet adorned with a jaunty feather—one of Marlin’s, I suspected.

“I feel like a trussed-up goose standing here waiting to be attacked by those filthy birds.”

I looked up at the sycamore trees lining the drive. We’d only been standing here for ten minutes and already they were thick with crows. The plan was for Helen and me to wait for Gillie’s carriage, obviously dressed for a journey, long enough that the crows assembled. Three nights ago Raven and Marlin had found Aelfweard and talked to him about trapping the crows in the broken vessel. The guardian had been willing to help if it meant protecting his fellow guardians. Everyone wanted to play their parts. Kid Marvel had worked out the plan with Daisy, who then insisted she should be stationed in a tree to watch our progress. Omar had taught our teachers a stronger mesmerism spell and was standing by to orchestrate the

mesmerizing of the crows. The Darklings were ready to herd the crows into the vessel. Cam—

“Look, there’s Cam now!” Helen pointed to the sky where the sun caught the canvas wings of Cam’s aeroplane. “Now that’s an exciting role,” Helen said. “I’d like to fly an aeroplane.”

“Helen, you’re terrified of heights,” I pointed out.

“Marlin’s cured me of that,” Helen said, stroking the feather in her hat. “I want to do something useful, not stand around and wait for people to do for me.”

I stared at Helen, who had spent her whole life being waited on by servants. But instead of pointing that out, I squeezed her bare, cold hand. “I know. I hate waiting while our friends are putting themselves in danger, too. But I have a feeling there will be plenty for us to do in the days to come. Right now, though, our job is to smile at Gillie and fuss over the placement of those hatboxes of yours. How many hats *are* you taking?”

Helen cracked open one of the boxes a half inch and I saw it contained a biscuit tin of Nathan’s favorite raspberry biscuits.

“You know they have biscuits in Scotland,” I pointed out in a whisper. “In fact, these biscuits come from England . . .”

“Sh,” Helen cautioned, jerking her chin toward a crow that had landed on the pediment above the doorway. Another joined it as the door opened and Dame Beckwith came out with Mr. Bellows. Miss Corey and Miss Sharp followed behind them. They all gathered around us, hugging us and saying their good-byes, Mr. Bellows bursting into an exuberant farewell speech. Although I knew it was all part of the game, I felt my eyes stinging with tears. I pictured the drive filled with girls leaving for holiday, heard the shouted farewells and promises to write, and realized this could well be my last leave-taking from Blythewood. Who knew when I’d be back—or even if the school would still be standing if we failed? As we got into the carriage, the bells began to ring. They played the changes I’d heard the first day Gillie had driven me up the drive—a tune to ring us home.

At the sound of the bells, the crows on the tower took flight and dived toward the carriage. Before they could alight, our teachers and Dame Beckwith withdrew their daggers and brandished them in the air. The diving crows veered away from the flashing gems on the daggers and circled over our heads. At the same moment, the Darklings swooped down from the

trees, driving the crows from the branches into the maelstrom of circling crows.

“Now!” Miss Sharp cried to Helen and me.

I was so mesmerized by the spinning crows that Helen had to grab my hand and pull. Then we were running across the lawn toward the woods. I looked back over my shoulder in time to see the circling crows break away as Miss Sharp stumbled to the ground. She did such a convincing job of her fumble that I nearly cried out at the sight of her falling under all those crows, but the crows weren’t bothering about her. They made a beeline for Helen and me.

“Hurry!” Helen shouted. “We can’t let them catch us!”

Catch us? Weren’t they just supposed to be following us to see where we were going? What would they do if they caught us?

There was no time to think about that. As we entered the woods, the crows were at our backs. Oily wings brushed against my face, sharp beaks nipped at my neck. Through a blur of wings I saw Helen batting at the crows with her blue reticule. Then a much larger winged creature swooped down and beat the crows away. This time I had to grab Helen’s hand to get her to quit staring at Marlin—dashing as he looked, wings flexed, hair flying, sword in hand—and run. I spotted a white notch in a pine and made for it, weaving in and out of the slim trees. Raven had blazed the trail to Aelfweard’s vessel. All we had to do was follow it and keep ahead of the crows. The Darklings were on either side of us making sure none of the crows got away. I caught a glimpse of tawny leather jacket and blue denim trousers—Daisy’s “field outfit”—as she climbed through the trees directing the Darklings. I could hear the drone of Cam’s plane above, making sure none broke free and left the woods. I felt as though Helen and I were being driven through a chute like cows to slaughter. The crows felt it, too. They were squalling, sensing the trap but powerless to escape it.

I made the mistake of looking back and saw that the crows had merged into a seething black mass, boiling like a wall of smoke hurtling toward us. At the center of that mass a face was forming. It was the face I saw in my nightmares: Judicus van Drood. On the surface he looked like any prosperous middle-aged man, his black hair streaked with silver, his long aquiline nose flared in disdain, but when I looked into his black eyes I saw

a terrible emptiness there, and when he opened his mouth smoke gushed out along with the words I heard in my head:

Where are you running, Ava? Do you think you can hide from me? Wherever you go I will follow and watch. Do you think I didn't see you come back from Faerie terrified of what the future held? You know that the tide is turning to the dark. You know that I will find and release the last shadows. The world will be mine. Why not join me now? Nathan already has.

I stumbled at Nathan's name but Helen caught me.

"You're lying!" I screamed out loud. Helen shot me a quick startled look, but only pulled me to my feet and dragged me forward. Van Drood's laughter burred in my ears.

Your disappearance was the last straw for my son. He ran off, but soon he'll join me and become a shadow master in his own right. You could join him. You know you care more for him than that winged monster. Don't make the mistake your mother made. Align yourself with the winning side.

I closed my mind to van Drood so he couldn't read my thoughts. Van Drood didn't know where Nathan had gone—so he still didn't know where the other vessels were. We had to keep him from finding out.

Something sharp tore into my arm. I thought it was a crow, but it was only a thorn. We'd come to the hawthorn copse. The vessel was near. I could make out the ring of white-flowered bushes, and at the far end a black mouth yawned—the cave that led to the mouth of the vessel. Helen and I were supposed to run to the opening and then at the last moment feint to either side. Darklings stood guard, ready to herd the crows into the cave. I recognized Buzz, one of the Darklings who had been in our Fledgling League. When one of the crows tried to break free of the rest he stepped in front of it and swatted it with a baseball bat and cried, "Score!"

"Stop showing off, Buzz, and make sure none of these creatures escape." Raven shouted.

"Right behind you, chief!" Buzz cried, saluting Raven. He stepped back into line to funnel the crows into the vessel.

Raven stood at the end of the line near the mouth of the cave, ready to pull me to safety. But I knew suddenly that my safety would mean nothing if I didn't make sure all the crows were trapped. I sprinted forward, unfurling my wings to give me speed, and hurtled into the mouth of the

cave. The echo of a hundred crows filled the darkness. Ahead of me I spied the faint glimmer of the opening, lit by Primrose. I dove for it, plummeting straight down. I saw Aelfweard's startled green eyes as I skimmed the bottom of the vessel. He held open his arms and the shadow crows melted as I flew up, battling through the crows to fly out. But there were too many of them. I'd never get through. I'd be trapped inside the vessel with the shadows—but that was better than van Drood finding out where the last vessel was.

Then someone grabbed my hand and pulled.

I popped out of the narrow-necked vessel like a cork out of a champagne bottle at the same instant that the last of the crows dove inside—or the last but one. As Raven and I fell to the cave floor—and Omar stepped forward to seal the opening—one crow flew out. Raven dove for it, throttling the creature with his bare hands. It turned into ooze dribbling through his fingers, dripping into the vessel. Omar barked a command in Hindi and a flash of light exploded in the opening. When the light faded, the vessel was sealed with a thick, viscous substance that looked like wax. Omar grabbed Raven's hands and examined them front and back, like a headmaster checking for dirty fingernails.

"I don't believe you're contaminated, but it was close," Omar said.

"What were you doing?" Helen cried, rushing into the cave and grabbing me by the shoulders. "That wasn't how we planned it!"

"I had to make sure they were all trapped. I could hear van Drood's voice."

"So that's why you screamed 'You're lying.' What was he saying?"

"Ugly, awful things to get under my skin," I answered. "Nothing worth repeating."

"He almost *did* get under my skin," Raven said, holding up his hands.

"Come on," Helen said. "Let's get out of here."

As she drew me out of the cave she looked back at the sealed vessel. "It doesn't seem right leaving poor Mr. Aelfweard with those monsters," Helen said.

"The estimable Mr. Aelfweard has dedicated his existence to guarding the shadows," Omar said. But then in a different tone of voice, he added, "But no, it does not feel right. I'm afraid there may be many things we will be called upon to do in the coming days that do not *feel right*."



The boat was waiting for us at the Ravencliffe boathouse. It was the *Half Moon*, which Nathan had liberated from the Astors' boathouse to take down the river to the Hellgate last year. I half expected to see Nathan at the helm. Instead, Pythagoras was steering the boat.

"Gus!" Helen exclaimed—a bit too brightly I thought. I wasn't the only one who'd pictured Nathan at the helm. "When did you learn to sail?"

"Nathan taught me before he left," Gus answered. "It's really all a matter of physics, sailing is. Nathan bought the boat from the Astors before he left and gave it to the Darklings."

"Nathan did a lot of things before he left," Helen grumbled under her breath. "Except bother to leave a note for us in case we came back."

The hubbub created by Daisy's arrival, breathless and beaming, carried on the shoulders of a crew of Darklings, smothered Helen's remark. Daisy was full of the adventure of her "reconnaissance mission" as she called it. "A few of the crows broke off to follow Gillie but we rounded them up," she told us, her eyes shining. I had an image of her suddenly, in black trousers and jersey, stealing into a French chateau in the dark of night, her heart pounding with excitement. Would she miss getting to be a spy if we averted this war? I wondered. Would life back in Kansas City with Mr. Appleby be dull after all this excitement?

"I'll fly overhead and watch for stragglers," Raven said, "and meet you in the harbor." He took off with only the briefest look in my direction and I turned back to Daisy, who was explaining the movements of our friends.

"Kid Marvel has his crew watching the piers for any sign of shadow activity," Daisy said. "They'll signal if it's clear for Miss Corey and Miss Sharp to board. Agnes and Sam Greenfeder will meet them there."

I was relieved that Agnes and Sam would be watched over. When I had sent a message to my grandmother, I'd been afraid that she would object to me running off to Europe without even coming to New York to see her after I'd been gone all year, but she'd written back to say she was relieved I was safe, understood that coming to the city might compromise my "mission," and was proud I had "comported myself like a Hall." My relief had been tempered by a pang of disappointment that she hadn't insisted on seeing me off. But then she'd offered to send her personal secretary, Agnes Moorhen,

and her private lawyer, Samuel Greenfeder, to act as chaperones, and I knew that no gesture could mean more to my grandmother than sending Agnes—and there was no one I'd rather have “chaperone” me on our voyage.

I settled onto a bench beside Daisy while Helen busied herself with ropes and sails, gamely following Gus's orders, and Marlin raised the mainsail.

“Have you all been going sailing together this year?” I asked Daisy, watching the smooth coordinated efforts of our friends.

“Nathan thought we ought to patrol the river looking for you,” Daisy said. “In case . . .”

“In case Helen and I had drowned? Those must have been dreary excursions.”

“Yes, although I think it did Nathan good to be out on the river. He was in a terrible state after you two disappeared. I ran into him once coming out of the woods at dawn, sticks and leaves in his hair, mud and grass stains all over his trousers. He looked like one of those green men carved in medieval churches that Mr. Bellows showed us pictures of. When I asked him where he'd been, he stared at me as though he didn't know who I was and then he said, ‘To hell and back.’” Daisy shook her head. “I was afraid that he'd gone daft—like Uncle Taddie did after he got lost in the woods. In fact, he started spending a lot of time with Taddie.”

“Did he?” I asked, trying to remember if Nathan had ever spent time with Uncle Taddie before.

“Yes, and then he stopped talking to anyone. Dame Beckwith was sick with worry for him. We all were. Some of the girls . . .” she lowered her voice, “started whispering that he was shadow-ridden.”

I glanced at Helen to make sure she wasn't listening, but she was on the prow with Marlin, pointing out landmarks on the river. We were passing Storm King, the steep mountain from which Dutch sailors believed giants hurled down treacherous winds. I heard Helen laugh at something Marlin said.

“Do you think he was?” I asked.

Daisy didn't answer right away. She didn't do anything as obvious as look around or lean over to whisper, but when she did talk she pitched her voice low and pretended to be showing me her map of the city.

“I followed him once . . . er, well, maybe a few times. Because I was worried about him. I saw him go into the Wing & Clover. That wasn’t so surprising—I’d smelled liquor on his breath many times—but when I looked inside I saw him talking to a man. He was a distinguished-looking gentleman—too distinguished for the Wing & Clover—tall, gray hair, wearing—”

“An Inverness cape?” I asked, feeling cold inside.

“Yes,” Daisy replied. “What I really noticed about him, though, was his cigar.”

“His cigar?”

“Yes. He was holding a cigar. And smoke was coming out of his mouth, but”—Daisy stabbed her finger at the map and I noticed her hand was trembling—“the cigar wasn’t lit.”

“Van Drood,” I said. “Did Nathan look scared or angry?”

“No, he looked . . . mesmerized. Like one of the crows today. I’m afraid the girls might have been right. And if they were . . .”

“Then Nathan might be looking for the vessel in Scotland for van Drood. And we might already be too late.”

11



IT WAS A perfect day for sailing—sunny with a brisk breeze blowing from the north, pushing us along with the retreating tide toward New York Harbor. The wind made me want to unfurl my wings and glide up above with Raven and wash away what Daisy had told me about Nathan. I could believe that van Drood was lying, but Daisy was a sharp observer. If she was worried about Nathan . . .

“We have to get to Hawthorn Hall as soon as possible,” Daisy said after a long silence.

“Even if we’re heading into a trap?” I asked.

“Even if,” she answered, and then because Marlin and Helen had come back and we were entering the harbor we left off the subject. The harbor was full of boats—little tugs and great big barges, sleek yachts like ours, and two or three great ocean liners lined up at the piers.

“There,” Marlin said, pointing at a great oceangoing vessel, “that’s the ship you’re going on.”

“Isn’t it beautiful!” Daisy exclaimed.

“*She*,” Helen corrected. “You call a ship *she*. And yes, she *is* beautiful.”

Helen’s voice held more dread than admiration, though. I didn’t blame her. Two years ago her father had died on the *Titanic*. She had been a beautiful boat, too. I knew because I’d ridden on her in a vision, seen her collide with the lethal iceberg, and heard the dying cries of her passengers as she sank in the icy Atlantic. I shivered now even though it was a warm summer day.

"I'm sure it will be all right," Daisy said. "I mean, what are the chances of two boats sinking so close together?"

I smiled at Daisy and agreed it seemed improbable, but then most people didn't know that van Drood had summoned an ice giant to sink the *Titanic* because he wanted to steal the book *A Darkness of Angels* from Mr. Farnsworth, who had been bringing the book to me. So if van Drood found out what ship we were on now . . .

"No, not very likely at all," I said, figuring to myself that even if van Drood knew we were on board this ship he'd have no reason to sink it, because he wanted us to lead him to the vessel. "I'm sure she won't sink. What's her name?"

"Oh, she has a pretty name," Daisy said. "She's called the *Lusitania*."



As we got closer we saw that the *Lusitania* was already pulling away from the pier. "We're too late!" Daisy cried. "She's already leaving!"

"Not to worry," Raven said, touching down on the deck of the boat. "Kid Marvel and his crew diverted the shadows long enough for Agnes and Sam and your teachers to board. We can take you girls on board after the ship has left the pier."

"Won't people notice us landing on deck?" Helen asked.

"Everyone's on the pier side waving good-bye. We'll land on the other side and use our wings to cloak you," Marlin said, holding out his hand to Helen to help her climb on his back.

"Oh! Your wings can make us invisible?" Daisy asked. "You know, that could be very useful."

"You'll need to be cloaked so people don't see you in that getup, Daze," Helen said, eyeing Daisy's trousers with disapproval.

"This is what I wear helping on the farm back in Kansas. They're called blue jeans."

"Yes, but you're not in Kansas anymore, Daisy. I hope you packed more appropriate attire for the voyage."

"Just because I wasn't born in Washington Square doesn't mean I don't know how to dress, Helen van Beek . . ."

“Are they really arguing about clothes while the fate of the world hangs in the balance and the shadow crows are nipping at our heels?” Raven whispered in my ear.

“No,” I replied, shivering at the way his breath felt on my neck. “Helen’s actually jealous that Daisy is engaged and Daisy—well, I’m not sure what Daisy’s problem is.”

“Maybe she misses her fiancé.”

“I suppose that might be it,” I said, studying him. His eyes were restlessly scanning the horizon. “I know how that feels. You’ve barely said a word to me since I got back.”

“I’ve been busy planning how to get you and your friends safely delivered to this ship!” he objected, his eyes snapping to mine as sharply as the mainsail snapping in the wind.

“Are you sure you haven’t been avoiding me. Since . . . well, since we kissed that first day it’s like you don’t want to be alone with me. Are you angry that I hesitated when you asked me to marry you?”

“No! I’m angry at myself for rushing you. I don’t want to make the same mistake twice. I’m trying to give you . . . room.”

I laughed and took a step closer to him, unfurling my wings and mantling them over us. I felt him shiver as my wings touched his and felt his wings flex to join mine so that we were enclosed in a shelter of our wings. It was suddenly very warm without the wind buffeting us. “What if I don’t want room?”

I laid my hand on his chest and felt his heart beating. It still beat slower than an average heart—or maybe it just felt that way because my heart was beating too fast. He cupped my chin with his hand and tilted my face up to his, his lips only inches from mine.

“Then we’ll find a place together somewhere when all this is done, but until then . . . this will be our room.” His wings tensed, his feathers interlacing with mine so that we were locked inside a vaulted space ribbed with our own hollow bones and glazed with the stained glass of our feathers, red and black intermingled. A chapel made from our bodies. Then he closed the remaining space between us and pressed his lips to mine. They tasted of salt from the sea air he’d been flying through, like the whole ocean surging over me in a wave . . .

Then his wings drew back and he was gone, flying into the sky. I ached to follow him. Daisy was at my side, saying something I couldn't follow at first. I had to grasp the deck rail to steady myself.

“. . . Marlin took Helen aboard so you're to take me.”

I blinked at her, then blushed.

“Did you, er . . .”

“See what you and Raven were doing?” she asked, her lips twitching as if she were trying very hard not to smile. “No, it was like you both vanished. Those wings of yours really are very useful. I assume you were, er, conferring on strategy.” She lost the battle and grinned at me. “I wish I had a cloak of Darkling feathers. There's no telling what I could do with it!”

We said good-bye to Gus and Dolores, who were going to meet up with Beatrice and follow on another ship and join Professor Jager in Sarajevo to stop the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. I carried Daisy up to a secluded part of the deck near where Helen and Marlin had landed but far enough away that they would have a chance to say good-bye to each other. I noticed Daisy giving the two of them a wistful look and thought about the squabble she and Helen had just had.

“Are you sad about putting off your wedding and being separated from Mr. Appleby?” I asked.

Daisy sighed. “He was very understanding about me wanting to take a grand tour with my best school friends, but I . . . I felt bad about having to lie to him. I suppose it will always be like this.”

“Maybe you could see about him being made an honorary knight of the Order,” I suggested. “Like Sam Greenfeder.”

“Oh, I'd hate for Ignatius to know about our secrets,” Daisy said, and then, as she registered my surprised look, added, “You see, Ignatius is such a good, straightforward man. He believes that people are basically as good as he is and that the world is a just and fair place. I'd hate him to know about the shadows.”

“But wouldn't you like him to know about lampsprites like Featherbell?” I asked, naming the lampsprite Daisy had befriended our nestling year.

“Not if it meant he had to know about the shadows, too. Maybe if we defeat the shadows I'll tell him.”

I tried to return her smile without thinking about what Gillie had told us about Ignatius Appleby dying in the war. That wasn't going to happen, I reminded myself, not if I could stop it.

Helen joined us after Marlin flew off. "Shall we go find our cabins? I do hope our luggage arrived. I'm going to change even if it's not what's done the first night. I suggest you two do as well."

"What do you mean *not done*?" Daisy asked.

Helen explained shipboard etiquette to Daisy as we walked around the promenade to the starboard side of the ship. "Mother and I sailed on her the summer before our first year at Blythewood. We had a suite on the top deck, where the most desirable ones are. Do you think your grandmother got us a suite? Oh look, this is the writing room."

We peeked inside a spacious room lushly appointed with rose-colored carpets and curtains, mahogany chairs and writing desks, and gray-and-cream brocade walls, all crowned with a glass dome. A few women sat alone writing or talking quietly in pairs.

"That's where the women sit after meals," Helen said, dragging us away before anyone could take note of our disheveled appearance. "The men gather in the smoking room. Oh, here's the music room." We looked in through a window at an even larger and grander salon. It had a jade-green carpet with a yellow floral pattern and an enormous green marble fireplace. The barrel-vaulted skylight was made of stained-glass panels, each one representing a different month of the year.

"Look, there's Mr. Bellows!" Daisy cried, rapping on the window and waving.

Mr. Bellows looked up and clapped the shoulder of the man he was talking to, who turned around. I almost didn't recognize Sam Greenfeder in his checked three-piece suit and stylish hat. He'd grown into a mature man since the morning three years ago when as a young law student he'd flirted with my friend Tillie in Washington Square Park and then later helped the factory girls escape from the roof of the Triangle factory onto the roof of the law school building where he'd been attending class. I saw him lean over to say something to a slim woman in a navy-and-cream striped traveling suit and a straw hat crowned with a yellow plume. Then Agnes Moorhen was flying across the jade-green carpet, her freckled face

beaming. She threw her arms around me first and then pulled Helen and Daisy into a group embrace.

“Thank the Bells you made it aboard! When we didn’t see you at the dock we were afraid you hadn’t gotten away. Lillian and Vionetta said you’d get here.”

“Are they on board, too?” Helen asked, looking around the lounge.

“Yes, but Lillian felt seasick so they went straight to their cabin. They’re in second class—Vionetta insisted it would look strange for two schoolteachers to travel first class. But you should see the suite Mrs. Hall ordered for you girls. You probably want to go there now—”

“Yes!” Helen said. “Please. Is our luggage there? Daisy really has to change.”

Daisy crossed her eyes at Helen, but concurred. “People *are* staring at me and it will compromise our mission if we draw too much attention.”

Agnes waved her hand to show us the way, but before I turned to follow I saw Daisy looking back at Mr. Bellows. “Is Mr. Bellows in second class as well?” she asked.

Agnes snorted. “Rupert? No, he says he gets seasick below deck. Sam and I are up here, too, but only so we can keep an eye on you girls. We’ll all be dining together tonight, Vi and Lillian as our guests.”

“Good,” Daisy said. “We’ll be able to discuss strategy.”



For all her disregard of “fashion” Daisy squealed when she saw our suite. “It looks like the pictures of Versailles Mr. Bellows showed us when we were studying French history!”

“I believe it was modeled on the Petit Trianon,” Helen said, “but it only has two bedrooms . . .”

“Ava and I can share, can’t we, Ava?” Daisy asked, dancing into a lavish rose-and-gold bedroom. “There are two beds—oh, look at these clever built-in drawers!”

“Do you mind sharing with Daisy?” Helen asked. “Marlin asked if I could meet him later and it would be easier . . . er, if I didn’t have a roommate . . . unless *you* needed your own room . . .” She faltered, face pink, and began fussing with the lock of her trunk.

“What would I need my own room for—oh!” I colored. “You don’t mean . . .”

“Honestly, Ava, you’re so old-fashioned. Darklings have different ideas about these things. They don’t always wait until marriage when a couple has pair-bonded. But if you don’t need a room to yourself . . .”

“No!” I said a bit too vehemently.

“Good,” Helen replied, without looking at me. “If you don’t mind I’ll take the first bath. My hair takes longer to dry than yours.”

It was true I’d kept my hair short since most of it had burned up in a fire two years ago, but I thought Helen’s reason for locking herself in the suite’s only full bathroom was to keep me from asking more questions about her relationship with Marlin. Questions like, was she pair-bonded with him? And what exactly did it mean to be pair-bonded?

Flustered, I went into Daisy’s and my bedroom and splashed water on my face in the half bath and then decided to wash my hair at the sink and take a sponge bath. When I came out, cleaner and cooler, I found that Daisy had unpacked both our trunks and laid out a dress for me.

“I thought you’d like the green one; it brings out your eyes. I’m going to wear my rose silk. Ignatius says it brings out the color in my cheeks.” She held up a pink empire waist gown with a white lace overlay.

“That will look pretty on you, Daze,” I told her, thinking that she didn’t need a pink dress to bring out the color in her cheeks; they already shone with excitement.

Twenty minutes later I felt my own cheeks burning as I stood at the top of the grand staircase leading down into the first-class dining room. I hadn’t been anyplace so lavish since Georgiana Montmorency’s debut ball at her Fifth Avenue mansion. The stairwell was decorated in frosty white plaster and gold leaf like a fancy wedding cake. Bosomy pink-cheeked girls in green flowery bowers looked down from the stained-glass dome. Below us women in bright satin dresses surged through the dining room like tropical fish. For a moment I had the impression that they *were* tropical fish and that we were underwater. I closed my eyes to steady myself—and instead saw a horrible vision of the ship sinking to the bottom of the ocean.

“Are you thinking of the *Titanic*?” Helen asked, laying a gloved hand on my back.

I looked at her and noticed that her skin was pale against the midnight blue satin of her dress. “Yes, I suppose I am,” I said. “But this isn’t the *Titanic*.”

“No, and the Darklings are flying guard to make sure we’re safe,” she said with a determined, brave smile.

I smiled back and followed her down the staircase. She didn’t need to know that the image I’d had of a sunken ship hadn’t been of the *Titanic*; it had been of the *Lusitania*. I’d been having these visions since we came back from Faerie, shadows of the future. Perhaps the *Lusitania* sinking was part of that future that we were going to stop. I banished the image as we found our table and greeted our friends.

Sam Greenfeder and Mr. Bellows leapt to pull out our chairs—and then both laughed when they realized that the chairs, bolted to the floor and designed to swivel, could not be pulled out. Daisy practically elbowed Helen out of the way to sit next to Mr. Bellows. Helen sat between Miss Sharp and Miss Corey and began asking them about how they were *managing* below deck. I sat between Agnes and Sam.

“I hear my grandmother has hired you as her private lawyer,” I remarked to Sam when we’d all been seated. “She must think very highly of your abilities.”

“Samuel scored the highest on the bar of his class,” Agnes enthused. “But he took the job because Mrs. Hall has agreed to fund all the pro bono work he wants to do for the labor unions.”

“Really? My grandmother is supporting the labor unions?”

“Oh yes!” Sam said. “Your experience at the Triangle has made her an adamant supporter of labor reform laws.” Sam went on to list the reforms that had been passed and the ones he was working on, which included shorter workweeks, child labor laws, and safer working conditions.

“None of this will matter, though,” Miss Corey said, “if we don’t stop van Drood from finding the third vessel.”

The mention of van Drood’s name cast a sudden pall over the dinner table. The forkful of *Supreme de Sole Palace* I’d just put in my mouth turned to paste. As if by prearranged signal we all put down our forks and leaned in.

“We still haven’t had any word from Scotland . . .”

“Do you think it’s in Scotland . . .”

“Professor Jager reports increased shadow activity in Vienna . . .”

“Our intelligence in Belgium also says . . .”

“What if we’re too late?”

A chime brought all the whispers to a stop. Mr. Bellows struck his silver fish fork against his crystal wine goblet three times. “We must not give in to panic. We are taking what steps we must. Dolores and Bea are on their way to Vienna to join their father. Lillian and Vionetta will debark at Fishguard and go on to Paris to confer with the Order in France and Belgium. Agnes and Sam and I will go with the girls to Hawthorn Hall to find out why we haven’t heard from them and locate the vessel there. A Darkling guard will watch each party and ferry messages between us. If each of us does his or her part, then we will surely succeed. Now—the orchestra is playing my favorite waltz. Would any of you young ladies care to dance?” He looked around the table. “Daisy?”

Daisy turned the color of her dress and nodded mutely.

“Well,” Sam said, slapping his napkin on the table, “I’m not one to be outdone. Miss Moorhen, would you join me on the dance floor?”

Agnes looked at Helen and me. “I don’t think we should leave the girls.”

“I think the girls will be well taken care of.” He looked over my head with a sly smile. At the same moment I felt a hand touch my bare shoulder. A tremor ran down my spine, threatening to unleash my wings from their hiding place beneath my dress. I turned and looked up to see Raven and Marlin in smart black evening coats standing beside the table.

“Might we be so bold as to ask the young ladies to dance?” Marlin asked, bowing to Miss Sharp.

“For Bells’ sake!” she declared. “Do before Helen bursts a corset stay. She’s been kicking my shins tapping her foot to the beat for the last five minutes.”

Helen glared at Miss Sharp but quickly smiled when Marlin held out his hand for her, and she swiveled out of her chair so quickly I thought she might be the one to sprout wings as they joined the couples on the dance floor. Raven looked down at me, one eyebrow raised. The moment I put my hand in his I felt myself rising weightless to my feet as if we were underwater. We floated across the dining room to the liquid strains of the Blue Danube waltz.

"I didn't know you'd be on board the ship," I said as we swept past a beaming Daisy and Mr. Bellows.

"Did you think we'd roost like albatrosses in the rigging?"

I blushed. "No—"

"We've taken third-class accommodations, nothing so fancy as your suite, but it will do to keep an eye on things."

"And are you finding anything to keep an eye on?" I asked, noticing the way his eyes were roving over the bare shoulders of the women on the dance floor.

"Rats," he answered.

I shuddered. "Rats?"

"There are always rats on a ship but I'm afraid these creatures might be shadow-ridden."

I shuddered again, the image of a shadow-ridden rat even more disgusting than the garden variety.

"Don't worry. Marlin and I are hunting them down."

"Is that why you're staying in third class? I thought it might be . . . well . . . Helen said . . . she seemed to think Marlin might . . ."

I stuttered to a stop and Raven stared at me. "What are you trying to say, Ava?"

"Nothing, it's just, well, Marlin and Helen seem to be getting along very well."

Raven tilted his head, clearly perplexed. "They do. I only hope Helen's not trifling with him."

"Trifling? Helen's not some flibbertigibbet!"

"She's not? It hurt Marlin's feelings when she went off to Europe with Nathan. He might seem like a carefree clown but he's not. He liked a Blythewood girl before and she toyed with him."

"Really? I didn't know that. Who was it?"

"He's never said. I didn't even know about it until last year. He only met her a few times and then she stopped coming to see him without a word of explanation. He thinks she was only playing at liking him—as an adventure of sorts—and was scared off when she realized he was getting serious about her. It hurt his feelings terribly. I'd hate to see that happen to him again."

“Of course,” I said, relenting. “I *do* think Helen really cares for him and that it’s better that Helen’s with Marlin.” Seeing that Raven was confused I blurted out, “I’m afraid Nathan might be shadow-ridden.” I told him what van Drood had said to me in the woods and what Daisy had told me on the boat.

“If he is we could be walking into a trap. Perhaps one of us should go ahead and scout out Hawthorn Hall.”

“We don’t know for sure—and it would be dangerous for you and Marlin to split up—and besides, I don’t want you to go!” I said in a rush.

Raven tightened his grip on me and waltzed me out an open door to the promenade. He quickly whisked me into a secluded alcove between two lifeboats. “I don’t want to go either.” Then he kissed me. So hard I felt the boat swaying beneath us and wondered if this is what it would feel like to drown. When he let me go he looked into my eyes. “I was afraid that *you* might love Nathan.”

“No—at least not in *that* way. But I do love him as a friend, and if van Drood has taken control of him I’ll fight to free him.”

Raven’s arm around my waist tightened, his eyes grown fierce. “I will fight to save him, too—because you care about him.”

“Thank—” I began, but Raven touched his fingers to my mouth, silencing me.

“But if he can’t be saved and he poses a risk to you, I won’t hesitate to kill him.”

12



I DIDN'T TELL Helen what Raven said; I didn't dare. Besides, I barely saw her the rest of the voyage. Raven and I spent our nights flying over the ocean, scouting for ice giants (although it wasn't the season for them) and sea monsters. Really, it was an excuse to stretch my wings and be with Raven—and avoid paying attention to what time Marlin left Helen's room.

If Daisy noticed that I was out all night and Marlin was sneaking in and out of Helen's room, she didn't say anything about it. She spent her evenings in a corner of the writing room, head bent over maps and train schedules with Mr. Bellows, planning the quickest routes between Hawthorn Hall and the other possible locations for the third vessel. "So we can marshal our forces quickly when we need to," she said at dinner one night.

"Daisy has a keen brain for military strategy," Mr. Bellows remarked. "She'd make a fine general."

"Let's hope she gets to use her skills in more peaceful pursuits," Miss Sharp remarked, her gaze resting gravely on Daisy.

Although I was anxious to get to Hawthorn Hall to find out what had happened to Nathan I was sorry the night that Raven and I, flying guard, spotted land.

"Ireland," Raven said. "Shall we have a look?"

We flew over rugged cliffs and sleeping fishing villages clinging to the rocky shore like barnacles and green hills swathed in mist. Deep in the

hollows of these hills we passed a stone circle where tiny creatures danced. A few lifted their heads to watch our passing.

“Cluricaunes,” Raven said. “The Elders tell us that the hills of Ireland used to be full of them, but it looks like there are only a few left.”

The cluricaunes, who resembled small wizened men and women, stared up at us with looks of amazement and wonder that made me think that their elders must have also told them of the days when Darklings filled the skies.

We flew farther east and landed at a lighthouse on a rocky headland jutting into the sea. Raven stood at the parapet looking east. At first I couldn’t see what he was looking at, but then I made out a faint flickering light far out across the sea. “What is it?” I asked.

“A signal from St. David’s Head in Wales,” Raven answered. “In the old days that’s how we communicated across great distances. There was a system of watchtowers along the coasts. This lighthouse, called Hook Head now, was built at the site of one of the old watchtowers. There was one across the sea in Wales at St. David’s Head. There’s nothing but rubble there now, but someone has built a bonfire. It’s a signal.”

“Meaning what?” I asked, hugging myself against the sea wind.

“Meaning danger,” Raven replied. “Come on, we need to get back to the ship. We’ll reach port in Fishguard today. We have to warn the others.”

Raven took off into the air, wheeling west on the sea wind, but I lingered for a moment looking east, where the sun was just coming up, giving me my first glimpse of Britain. As the sun rose, the coastline was limned with orange light, as if a thousand watchtowers had been lit warning of disaster. What good did it do to warn our friends, I wondered as I took flight, when we were heading there anyway?



We landed at Fishguard later that afternoon. The stop had been added to the *Lusitania*’s route so that passengers could take the Great Western Railway directly to London and then on to the Continent. Miss Sharp and Miss Corey would travel as far as London to consult with the Order’s office and then on to Paris. We had told them about the watchtower signal on St. David’s Head and they had promised to take every precaution. Still, as I watched them walking down the gangplank to shore, arm in arm, Miss

Sharp's violet plume waving bravely in the stiff wind, I felt a rising apprehension. I knew it made sense for them to be stationed on the Continent so they could reach the third vessel more quickly once we'd learned of its location, but I didn't like the feeling that we were splitting up. I liked it less when Helen clutched my arm and pointed to something in the water. I looked down and saw something swimming from the ship to the pier. I watched, horrified, as black shapes oozed out of the water and slithered up the piles onto the pier. Rats. Giant black rats with red eyes. And they were following Miss Corey and Miss Sharp.

"We have to tell them—" I began.

Before I could finish Mr. Bellows leapt onto the dock and raced toward one of the rats. He kicked it into the water while another snapped at his heels. A woman passenger screamed and a couple of sailors came running to beat the rats away. They drove them back into the water—or at least most of them. I saw one slink into the crowd behind the coach that Miss Corey and Miss Sharp were taking to the train station. Mr. Bellows ran to the window of the coach and spoke to Miss Sharp. She nodded and squeezed Mr. Bellows's hand, then waved to us, her face set in a determined expression as Mr. Bellows spoke to the driver. The driver snapped the horses' reins and the coach took off in a rush. I couldn't see any rats following, but the pier was so crowded it was hard to tell.

Mr. Bellows came back up the gangplank, wiping his face with his handkerchief. "Blasted creatures!" he swore. "I don't envy them if Vi gets a hold of them, though. She and Lil will be all right, and that's less to follow us when we debark."

We stood on the deck watching the pier to be certain no one—or no *thing*—boarded the ship until it was time to embark again. Agnes and Sam went below to pack and Daisy went with Mr. Bellows to "strategize" while Helen remained with me on the deck watching the coast of Wales slip by.

"Poor Mr. Appleby," Helen remarked. "I'm afraid Daisy might be changing her mind about him."

"What do you mean? Why would she change her mind about Mr. Appleby—oh, you don't mean . . . Mr. Bellows! But he's our teacher . . . and he's *old*."

Helen laughed at how flustered I'd become. "Not so old. He's not even thirty. My mother was trotting out prospective husbands for me that were

twice his age. And he's not our teacher anymore. We've graduated—or at least Daisy has. You and I are apparently dropouts—”

“I know Daisy has always had a crush on him but I can't believe Mr. Bellows would think of her that way,” I cut in.

“Then you haven't been paying attention,” Helen remarked. “You've been too busy flying every night with Raven.”

I was about to point out that she'd been busy herself with Marlin, but I found I didn't really want to enter into a discussion of what *exactly* she had been doing every night. I felt suddenly as though everything was slipping away from me—as quickly and inexorably as the coast of Wales as we steamed steadily north. My friends seemed to be moving on without me, leaving me behind. As if to confirm my feeling, Helen left me to go pack. I stayed alone on deck, watching the green hills of Wales slip in and out of the fog. From one headland I thought I saw smoke coming from a rocky tor and wondered if it was another of the old watchtowers that Raven had told me about.

The fog grew thicker as we steamed into the mouth of the Mersey toward Liverpool. I could barely make out the coast at all. It was unnerving, as if the land we'd been traveling to had vanished. The ship and harbor were hushed, the only sound the mournful wail of foghorns and the clatter of buoy bells, which grew louder and more frantic as we steamed into port, as if they were warning us of some obstacle ahead. My skin turned icy in the clammy fog. I was sure that we were steaming into some danger. The bells were so loud—

Because they were inside my head. They were my bells, my warning system for danger. We were going to run into the rocks. I had to warn the captain—

But before I could shout an alarm the ship shuddered under my feet and lurched violently to starboard and I was thrown to the deck. We'd struck something—or something had struck us. As I tried to get to my feet there was a second jolt. I smelled smoke and, looking up, saw flames licking the great smokestacks. The ship was listing so far to starboard that I couldn't get to my feet. I could hear screams and sailors shouting orders.

“Lower the lifeboats!”

“Abandon ship!”

“We've been torpedoed!”

Torpedoed? Off the coast of England in peacetime?

I crawled over the deck on my hands and knees, trying to find something I could brace myself against—and then I felt a hand on my arm pulling me up.

It was Helen, staring at me, her blue eyes wide with alarm.

“Helen, thank the Bells! We have to get to the lifeboats. We’ve been torpedoed. Where’s Daisy?”

“I’m right here,” Daisy said, laying her hand on my arm. She was wearing a candy-striped dress and a hat with a cerise feather. “What are you talking about, Ava? The ship’s perfectly fine. We’ve docked in Liverpool. Our trunks are already being brought ashore. It’s time to go.”

I stared at her and Helen and then looked around us. The deck had righted itself and passengers were calmly taking their leave of the ship, walking down the gangplank to the crowded pier. There were still tatters of fog wreathing the smokestacks—but no smoke.

“S-something hit the boat! It was g-going down!” I cried.

“You must have imagined it,” Helen whispered, gripping my arm and steering me away from the crowds. Some of the debarking passengers were staring at me. “The ship is fine. Mr. Bellows is waiting for us on the pier. Agnes and Sam went to get a taxi to take us to the train station. Come on, Ava. It’s time to go.”

I nodded mutely and allowed myself to be led down the gangplank, Helen and Ava on either side of me, their arms linked firmly through mine as if I were an escaped mental patient they were afraid might make a run for it. I was trembling, the plank unsteady beneath my feet. I was glad when I stepped onto the pier, although my legs still wobbled like jelly.

“There’s Rupert with the porter,” Daisy said, unhooking her arm from mine. “I’ll tell him to bring the coach around.”

“Rupert?” I said to Helen.

“I told you,” she replied, and then, in a gentler tone, “Are you feeling better now?”

I nodded. “I think I had a vision of something that’s going to happen in the future.”

“Let’s hope it’s the future we change,” Helen said, looking up at the ship we had just left fondly. “I’d hate to see anything happen to her. It was lovely voyage, wasn’t it?”

I looked up at the great ocean liner, recalling its beautiful gilt rooms and stained-glass domes and the moonlit nights I'd spent flying over her with Raven. "Yes," I said, thinking we might not pass so peaceful a week ever again, "it was." But as we turned to join Mr. Bellows—*Rupert*—and Daisy I felt quite sure that I'd never set foot aboard the *Lusitania* again.

13



I LET DAISY and Helen shepherd me through the crowds on the pier, into a coach where Mr. Bellows, Sam, and Agnes waited, and then out again through the crowds at the train station. I still felt unsteady on my feet (“Takes a bit to get your land legs!” Mr. Bellows said, slapping me on the back) and *blurry*, as if the fog in my vision had gotten inside my head. My ears were stopped up, too, as if I’d been swimming and had gotten water in them. *As if I’d drowned like the passengers on the Lusitania.*

I shook my head to clear the voice out of my head.

“Stop doing that!” Helen hissed. “People are staring at you.”

I looked around the enormous station to see if Helen was right, but the faces of the people rushing past us to catch their trains were a blur. Helen kept a grip on my arm as we were swept into the crowds. I spotted Agnes’s bright yellow feather in the crowd ahead of us. She waved at us and shouted that she’d go ahead and save us seats. When we boarded the train we found Daisy in a compartment arguing with a portly gentleman who wanted to take our seats.

“I simply must sit with my sister and her companion,” Daisy explained, looking into the man’s small, fat-creased eyes. “We’re taking her to the asylum and she’s most unpredictable.”

The stout man lurched away, mumbling something in a thick accent, his eyes clouded over.

“Daisy, did you mesmerize that man?” Helen asked.

“Did you just tell him I was crazy?” I demanded.

“He was being so difficult!” Daisy cried, stamping her foot. “Here, Rupert will want to face forward—he gets motion sickness otherwise—and by the window. Agnes and Sam will sit in the middle. Ava, do you want the other window seat? You’re looking rather green. Perhaps the air will do you good.”

“I’ll be fine,” I said, sinking into the seat nearest the door to the corridor and next to Sam, who was reading a Liverpool newspaper. I glanced at the front page and saw an illustration of a scary-looking man with bat-like wings leaping from the roof of a building onto a terrified-looking girl.

“What is that?” I asked, shuddering at the image.

“There’s been a sighting of Spring-heeled Jack in Liverpool,” Sam said with the gleeful smile of a boy. “I used to read about him in the penny dreadfuls.”

“Me too!” Agnes said, leaning across the compartment to peer at the story. “He used to give me nightmares. He had claws of steel and red glowing eyes, and spit blue and white flames into his victims’ eyes. He snatched girls from their beds. Of course he’s just a legend.”

“Are we quite sure of that?” Mr. Bellows asked, taking the paper from Sam. “Many of the legendary figures that spring up in crowded cities turn out to be creatures from Faerie.”

“That doesn’t look like a creature from Faerie,” Daisy, who’d taken the window seat across from Mr. Bellows, objected.

“No, it looks like a shadow-ridden man,” Agnes said. “But I agree with Rupert. These city myths—*urban legends*, I suppose you could call them—deserve a deeper study. Take the Hammersmith Ghost . . .”

As they argued back and forth over the provenance of creatures like Spring-heeled Jack, the Hammersmith Ghost, and something called the Hedley Kow, I closed my eyes. Helen put a traveling rug over my lap. Soon the rocking of the train lulled me into a fitful slumber plagued by dreams of sinking ships, fat oozing rats, and bat-winged men with red eyes and metal claws. When I opened my eyes I saw snatches of the sodden countryside flashing by the rain-streaked windows. I turned away from the windows to look toward the compartment door. Those windows were covered with frosted glass so that the figures that passed in the corridor were indistinct and shadowy—

Shadow creatures, I thought with a start, *tenebrae*. Had we been followed? Were we leading van Drood to Hawthorn Hall? Or was he already waiting for us there with Nathan?

I thought I should ask Mr. Bellows or Agnes to go out into the corridor to check—but before I could I was lulled once again into an uneasy slumber. When I woke next the compartment was dark. Daisy was asleep with her head on Agnes's shoulder. Mr. Bellows was leaning against the darkened windowpane, his head nodding on his chest, a boyish lock of hair falling over his forehead. Helen was right, I thought, he was really very young. Too young to lead soldiers into battle—too young to die in war.

I looked from him to Sam, who had fallen asleep with the newspaper over his face. The flickering lights from the corridor flashed over the garish illustration of Spring-heeled Jack, making it look as if he were moving with the jerky motions of the moving pictures I'd watched in the nickelodeon. That's where I had seen Spring-heeled Jack before. He was one of the mustachioed villains of the penny melodramas I had watched back before I knew there were worse terrors in the world. But surely he was only what Agnes had called him—an *urban legend*.

I closed my eyes and started to fall asleep again but a scratching sound startled me awake. I opened my eyes. The sound was coming from outside the window. A branch must have brushed across it, only I didn't see any trees outside . . .

There it was again, a dreadful *scritch scritch scritch* like fingernails dragging across a chalkboard. And were those scratches I saw on the glass? I stood up, stepping over Sam's and Agnes's feet, and leaned across the sleeping Daisy to look more closely. No, it couldn't have been a tree that made the sound. We were traveling across a desolate moor lit fitfully by a cloud-cloaked moon. But there was a scratch on the pane above Daisy—a long jagged line extending from the upper right-hand corner down to the lower left.

A dark shape fell over the glass—a shape like a bat hanging upside down—

With burning red eyes.

I started back, screaming, and fell over Agnes's feet. The malevolent red-eyed creature grinned at me. Then it held up a metal claw and scratched a long gash into the windowpane, drawing an X across the first scratch. The

glass shattered, spraying shards over Daisy. Mr. Bellows started awake, as did Sam and Agnes and Daisy, who stared up at the creature in horror. Daisy opened her mouth to scream, but before she could the creature reached in, grabbed her, and pulled her out of the compartment.

I screamed Daisy's name and lunged for her. I caught one of her feet—Mr. Bellows caught the other—but she had loosened the laces of her boots for the trip and they slipped off her stocking feet. I fell back holding a boot, but Mr. Bellows was quicker. He stuck his head out the window, turned around, and vanished upward. I heard Helen scream.

"They're on the roof!" Sam cried. "Come on—there are ladders at the end of each car. Agnes, go to the front of this car, I'll go to the back. We'll surround the devil."

"I'll go with Agnes!" I cried.

"And I'll go with Sam," Helen said, following me out into the corridor.

I turned to her. "If you're knocked off the roof you'll be killed, but I can fly. You should stay here."

Helen looked like she was about to argue, but when I opened the door between cars and she saw the spindly ladder and the tracks flashing beneath the gap between cars, she turned white.

"P'raps you're right, but Ava"—she squeezed my arm—"get Daze back. I'll never forgive myself if you don't."

I wondered what Helen had to forgive herself for as I climbed the ladder, but that thought was driven out of my head when I got to the roof of the car. The bat-winged man with the fierce red eyes held Daisy in the center of the roof, his long razor-tipped claw poised at her throat. Mr. Bellows and Sam stood at the rear end of the car with daggers brandished. Agnes held her dagger in her hand. I withdrew my dagger and unfurled my wings in an angry snap.

"Unhand her, you fiend!" Mr. Bellows roared.

"If you come any closer I'll slit her pretty little throat." He spoke in a high, mincing falsetto that would have been funny if it weren't so . . . *horrible*.

"You're surrounded, Jack," Mr. Bellows said in a low growl I barely recognized.

The red eyes swiveled around the roof of the speeding train car. "Two blokes what look like clerks and two Alices—by the time you make your

first move the girl and me will be sitting down to tea with the queen at Buckingham Palace.”

“What do you want with her?” Mr. Bellows demanded. “She’s just a girl.”

Spring-heeled Jack regarded Daisy with mock surprise as if he’d picked up the wrong brand of biscuit at the grocer’s. “Say, you’re right, she *is* a girl. A pretty one at that.” He stroked her face with a pointed claw that drew blood. Mr. Bellows swore and lunged forward but Sam held him back. “Don’t worry, mate. That’s not what I want her for. There’s a bloke willing to pay good money for this girlie.”

“Van Drood,” Agnes whispered.

“Aye, that’s his name.”

“We’ll give you twice what he offered,” Sam said.

Jack laughed, an abrasive cackle that made me feel like a cheese grater was rubbing against my bare skin. “He’s not a bloke I’d like to cross, mate.” The red eyes seemed to burn hotter and I realized he was afraid. This *monster* was afraid of van Drood. And van Drood wanted Daisy, which meant Jack wasn’t going to make good on his threat to kill her.

Before I could give myself time to think about it, I flexed my wings and flew at him, but he sprang off the car, carrying Daisy, and landed on the next car. I flew after him, sure that I could fly faster than he could jump, but it was as if his feet were made of India rubber. Each time he touched down on the train roof he sprang up again like a jack-in-the-box. And we were running out of train. If he sprang to the ground with Daisy she might get hurt. He was on the last car and not letting up. As he got to the edge of the last car he looked over his shoulder and cackled his grating laugh—and then pushed Daisy over the edge.

I screamed and dove for her, but she was snatched up before I could catch her. Thinking it was another of van Drood’s henchmen I hurtled straight for the creature—and ran right into Marlin. We all tumbled to earth, rolling over and over the prickly ground. We came to a stop in a field of heather. A winged shape landed next to me and peered into my face.

“Are you all right?” Raven demanded.

“I’m fine,” I said, patting my skirt to pull it down over my knees. Daisy was struggling to her feet.

“I’m going after him,” Raven said to Marlin. “You get the girls back to the train.”

“I can get us back on the train myself,” I said, ruffling my wings to make sure I hadn’t broken any feathers in the fall. A few floated loose but otherwise my wings felt sound.

“Good,” Raven said. “Then take Daisy. Marlin and I will give chase to that demon.”

But Marlin insisted on seeing us back to the train, which was lucky since I had lost so many feathers I couldn’t fly properly at all. If the train hadn’t stopped at a station we might never have caught up to it. Sam and Agnes were standing on the platform. Mr. Bellows was pacing up and down. “Thank the Bells!” he swore when he saw us. “I was afraid you’d all been killed. Are you all right, Daisy? Did that monster hurt you?”

Daisy, who’d put up a valiant front since we’d crash-landed in the heather, suddenly burst into tears and rushed into Mr. Bellows’s arms. Agnes hugged me while Sam grasped Marlin’s hand and leaned in to whisper something in his ear.

“What do you mean?” Marlin demanded, pulling back from Sam and staring at the others. “Where is she?”

“That’s just it,” Mr. Bellows said, looking mournfully at Daisy and me. “We don’t know. When we got back to the compartment she was gone. We’ve searched the whole train. We even hoped she was with you—but clearly she’s not. I’m afraid Spring-heeled Jack was the distraction.”

“For what?” I cried, although I’d already guessed.

“For the real kidnapping,” Agnes said, squeezing my arm. “Helen is gone.”

14



“HE CAN’T HAVE gotten far with her,” Marlin said. “I’ll fly over the countryside—”

“And we’ll hire a coach and search the surrounding villages,” Agnes said.

“We’ll go with you,” Daisy said.

Agnes shook her head. “You two should go to Hawthorn Hall and you should go with them, Rupert. We have to find out what’s happening there and find the vessel. When we’ve found Helen we’ll send word with Marlin and Raven.”

And if they don’t find her?

I couldn’t give voice to that fear, and there was no time to argue about who should go where. The train whistle was blowing. I turned to Daisy. “If Helen were here she’d want us to go on to Hawthorn Hall and find out what’s happened to Nathan.”

I thought I saw Marlin flinch but he stiffened his jaw and spoke firmly. “Exactly. You three go on. I’ll send Raven as soon as we know something.” Then he took off, his wings beating up the dust on the deserted railway platform.

Sam went back on the train to get their luggage while Agnes made Mr. Bellows promise to look after Daisy and me. “Mrs. Hall wouldn’t like me leaving them,” she fretted.

“My grandmother would understand you were doing your duty to the Order. Find Helen. . . .” My voice wobbled and I had to bite my lip to keep

from crying. “We’ll find the vessel.”

The conductor blew the warning whistle again and Mr. Bellows ushered Daisy and me back onto the train. We turned and watched Sam and Agnes walking away, Agnes’s yellow feather bobbing in the still dawn.

“They’ll find her,” Daisy said, squeezing my hand. “Marlin won’t rest until he does.”

I nodded, my throat too sore to form words. I knew Daisy was right. Marlin wouldn’t rest until he’d found Helen, but I couldn’t help feeling, as I followed Mr. Bellows and Daisy back to our compartment, that the brave crew we’d started out with had been sadly diminished and that that was exactly what van Drood wanted.



We had to switch trains in Edinburgh for a train to the Borders.

“You two should get some sleep,” Mr. Bellows commanded when we were settled in our new compartment. “I’ll keep watch.”

He sat upright across from us, alert and anxious, one hand on the hilt of his dagger, the other gripping his arm rest, braced to spring at any intruder from the corridor or window. I knew he blamed himself for being asleep when Spring-heeled Jack took Daisy. Just as I blamed myself for leaving Helen behind.

“I can’t sleep knowing that Helen is in van Drood’s hands,” Daisy said. But after a few minutes she slumped against my shoulder and started to snore. I smiled at Mr. Bellows, and his rigid jaw muscles relaxed a millimeter, then tightened again. I sighed and looked out the window, meaning to keep watch this time. I watched the blackened stone buildings and cobblestoned streets of Edinburgh pass by and then we were traveling past hills covered with yellow flowers. I asked Mr. Bellows what they were, hoping to distract him by calling on his botanical knowledge, but he only said “Gorse” and lapsed into a silence as stony as the streets and houses of Edinburgh.

We passed hillsides covered with yellow gorse and fields dotted with sheep and farms and little villages with cobblestone streets and whitewashed cottages. The morning fog died away for a brief spate of sun, which was extinguished by a violent thunderstorm that came rushing at us

across a purple moor like an angry bull and then settled around the train. The rainy afternoon wore at my resolve to stay awake. I must have fallen asleep, because when I opened my eyes again the sky had cleared to a brilliant lavender spread across a rocky mountainous landscape. I glanced across at Mr. Bellows, who was sitting in exactly the same pose of alertness. Only his face had softened a fraction as he looked at the landscape.

“See that pile of rocks in the distance?” he said, pointing out the window. I craned my neck to look and saw a lonely tower jutting up from a rugged ridge. “That’s Duntuath. It’s a—”

“Broch,” Daisy murmured. “I remember from your lecture on the Iron Age. Brochs are Iron Age forts. Duntuath means the north fort.”

“Always my most attentive student,” Mr. Bellows said, smiling for the first time in twelve hours. “We always called it the auld tooth. We knew we were almost there when we saw it. The school’s on the next ridge—there!”

For a moment all the stress and fatigue fell away from Mr. Bellows’s face and I could picture him as a schoolboy in short pants and braces. I looked past him out the window and made out the silhouette of a castle standing against the purple sky.

“It looks like Blythewood,” Daisy said, “only . . .”

“Older and in less repair,” Mr. Bellows finished for her. “Hawthorn Hall was standing before the first knights and ladies of the Order joined. The laird of Hawthorn Hall built Blythewood for the sisters of Merope and formed the first school. The knights continued to live in the old keep, and after Blythewood was removed to the States it was kept as a school for the training of boys.”

“It looks a bit . . . *lonely*,” Daisy said, drawing her lap rug up. “And cold.”

“Oh my, yes!” Mr. Bellows said proudly. “None of your fancy amenities like indoor plumbing or central heating. We bathed in the loch and wore our overcoats to bed. It was wizard!”

I’d never heard Mr. Bellows sound so happy. “I wonder if any of the old masters are still there. There was Old Cruthers who used to cane you if you got your declensions wrong and Mr. Chippendale—Old Chippie—who would give his crusts to underweight boys . . .”

Mr. Bellows went on reminiscing as the train descended into a wooded valley. The woods grew darker and denser as we went deeper into the valley, the trees growing so close to the tracks that branches scratched against our windows with a sound that reminded me uncomfortably of Spring-heeled Jack's metal claws. I caught glimpses of shadowy shapes flitting between the trees—foxes, I supposed from their pointed ears and long tails, only they were bigger than any foxes I had seen before.

"Are there wolves in Scotland?" I asked, interrupting a story involving someone named Squinty stealing biscuits from the headmaster.

"Oh no," Mr. Bellows assured me. "Not for years. Though this is the Hawthorn Wood we're passing through, and like the Blythe Wood it has some creatures in it that aren't quite of this world."

"Because there's a door to Faerie here?" Daisy asked.

"There was, but the Order cleaned out all the fairy creatures a hundred years ago—only, well, there was always talk that some still survived in the deepest part of the woods. One of my mates, Flinty, lost a wager once to the school bully and had to spend the night in the woods, and he said the woods were full of boggles and ha'nts and wisps."

"Oh, are wisps like lampsprites? I'd love to meet one."

"No, you would not. . . ."

I kept a wary eye on the woods as Daisy and Mr. Bellows discussed varieties of Scottish fairies. It wasn't the fairies that I was worried about, it was the *tenebrae*. This was, after all, where the bell maker's daughters had been chased by shadow wolves.

"Duntuath, next station, Duntuath!"

"That's us," Mr. Bellows said, springing to his feet, all the pent-up tension of the long train ride released. He plucked our bags from the overhead compartment, his happy expression fading when he saw Helen's valise.

"I'll take that," I said, grabbing the bag. "I can carry both hers and mine. Helen will have our heads if we don't guard her wardrobe."

"She'll be back and demanding where her hats are before we know it," Daisy said in a strained, chipper voice. "I believe she's packed six."

I laughed and started to explain what the hatboxes really contained—and then had to put down one of the bags to find my handkerchief when I thought of telling Nathan what had happened. *If* Nathan was still here and *if*

he wasn't shadow-ridden. Now that we were almost at Hawthorn Hall I felt frightened at the prospect of seeing Nathan. What if he were in van Drood's thrall? What if I'd lost him as well as Helen? I didn't think I could bear it.

"You're tired," Daisy said, reading my thoughts, "and that makes everything look bleaker. Even if Nathan is shadow-ridden, the news that Helen has been taken will knock him back to his senses. You wait and see."

I nodded and returned Daisy's brave smile, but as I followed her off the train I thought that it might well have been Helen disappearing last fall that had driven Nathan to the shadows in the first place.



The village of Duntuath did nothing to revive my spirits. Although the sky had been clear from the train, a light rain was falling in the village, as if it always rained there.

"Hm, there was always a coach waiting at the station for us, but of course no one knows we're coming. There's bound to be a coach for hire at the tavern . . . ah, there it is—the Bells. It looks just the same as in my day. We used to sneak in when the masters were on holiday." Mr. Bellows chuckled. "I remember one time Buffles had too much ale. . . ." Mr. Bellows told the story of Buffles and the too much ale while we crossed a muddy street to a low half-timbered building from which a wooden sign painted with a faded picture of a bell swung crookedly in the wind. The shutters were drawn—as were, I noticed, all the shutters on all the houses on the street.

"It looks like everyone's gone on holiday," Daisy remarked.

"Well it *is* the summer term," Mr. Bellows said. "There were always a few lads who stayed on at the school because they didn't, er, have homes to go to or they needed to earn extra money doing chores over the holidays. It was ripping fun, actually, because we had the whole place to ourselves and could go exploring."

"You didn't have anyplace to go on the holidays?" Daisy asked.

Mr. Bellows turned pink and pushed back a lock of hair that had fallen over his forehead. "Just an aunt in Hartford, and it hardly seemed worth the fare to travel back for the summer. Ah, here we are. Same bells over the door. Good old Bells! I remember once Buffles rigged up a horn to toot

when the door opened—gave the locals quite a start, I'll tell you. They chased Buffles right out of town with pitchforks!"

The opening of the door set off a jangling that sounded more like rusted tin cans clanking together than bells. It roused the attention of all the occupants of the tavern—three men seated at the bar, two beside a smoking fire, and an aproned innkeeper standing behind the bar. I wouldn't say they looked startled, though. They turned slowly to regard us with deep suspicion and animosity.

"I say, good man," Mr. Bellows addressed the innkeeper loudly in an accent I didn't recognize. "Would you be so good as to rustle up some tea for the ladies and a pint of your best ale for me? We've had a long journey and a cold one." He ended with a wink for one of the gentlemen at the bar, who shifted on his stool, releasing an odor of peat and sheep manure.

"Do we look like a tea room?" the innkeeper demanded.

"Ha ha, no, of course not. I'm familiar with your fine establishment from my schooldays at Hawthorn Hall."

"Have ye come from the school then?" the sheep farmer asked.

"Oh no, I graduated years ago. We're on our way there now. These two ladies are students at Hawthorn's sister establishment in America. Perhaps you've heard of it—"

"I wouldna be taking the lasses up Hawthorn way," the sheep farmer growled. "There's been strange goings-on up there."

"Always were," one of the men by the fire said. "My mam always said to stay clear of the place, that it was full of ha'nts and boggles."

"Aye," the sheep farmer agreed. "And 'tis worse of late. Even the masters cleared out before term ended this year. Couldn't get clear of the place fast enough."

"Is there no one at the school, then?" Daisy asked. "You see, our friend was there and we haven't heard from him in a while."

"No one's heard aught from the school since Hogmanay," the innkeeper said.

"But that's New Year's Eve! Surely there's been some communication from the school since then," Mr. Bellows demanded.

The innkeeper shook his head. "The grocer's boy won't make the trip no more on account of the ha'nts. But there are still some lads up there, runnin' wild like since the masters left. Ian MacGregor says they raided his

sheep pen last month. Called the sheriff but he couldna get no one brave enough to go up to the Hall.”

“I’m sure Nathan wouldn’t steal anyone’s sheep,” Daisy said indignantly.

“It would be against the Hawthorn Hall code,” Mr. Bellows said, drawing himself up.

“Can we hire a cart to take us to the school?” I asked, thinking that I wouldn’t put sheep stealing past Nathan if he were hungry enough.

“If you’re willing to drive it yerselves,” the innkeeper said. “And will pay for it outright. I canna expect to see ye again if you’re bent on gang to Hawthorn Hall.”

“I can guarantee that you will see us again,” Mr. Bellows said. “I’d hardly take my students there if I couldn’t. But if you insist that I lay out the full amount as a surety . . .”

The innkeeper named a figure that raised Mr. Bellows’ eyebrows and which I guessed from the snickers by the fireside was far more than the going rate for a horse and cart. Mr. Bellows began to accept the price but Daisy broke in to argue that “in Kansas you could buy two horses and a team of oxen for that price!” She bargained the innkeeper down and got him to throw in a hamper of steak and kidney pies, Scotch eggs, something called bannocks, and a dozen pints of ale.

“Those boys will be hungry,” she said as we followed the innkeeper around to the stables.

“Not if they’ve been stealing sheep,” I replied. “But I could murder a steak and kidney pie.”

“I wonder why the masters would all go off and leave the boys alone,” Mr. Bellows mused while Daisy helped the innkeeper hitch the old gray workhorse—whose name, Daisy learned, was Nessie—to the cart, stopping twice to insist that he replace a frayed bit of tack. “It’s not according to the rules.”

“I have a feeling that nothing we’re going to find from here on out is according to the rules,” I said.



Mr. Bellows wanted to drive the cart, but when it became clear that he'd never driven one Daisy took over.

"We need you to be the shotgun messenger," Daisy said, smartly snapping the reins and urging Nessie forward.

"Shotgun messenger?"

"The guard on a stagecoach who keeps an eye out for bandits. My father was a shotgun messenger for Wells Fargo. He taught me to shoot his twelve-gauge," she said proudly, then added under her breath, "I wish we had one now."

I did, too.

Within a few minutes of leaving the village of Duntuath the narrow track was engulfed by forest. Oak and beech trees towered over us, their leaves dripping water onto our heads. The ground was thick with underbrush—a thorny bush starred with white flowers—and patches of fog.

"It doesn't look like anyone's used this road in months," I said.

"It only goes from town to the hall," Mr. Bellows replied. "In fact, it's supposed to be the original track that the bell maker's daughters took from their father's foundry to the prince's castle to deliver the seven bells—"

"And were waylaid by shadow wolves instead," Daisy said in a hushed whisper.

"Yes, but as I said before, there haven't been any wolves in this area since—"

His words were cut off by a high-pitched howl from the right side of the track. Nessie's ears twitched and Daisy crooned softly to calm her—or perhaps to calm Mr. Bellows and me. We had both drawn our daggers at the sound.

"It's probably just someone's setter—"

An answering yip came from the left side of the track and then another yip and howl from the right. I stared into the woods but the fog was too thick to see through. Daisy snapped the reins to urge Nessie forward, which wasn't really necessary as she was now bolting down the track at a speed I wouldn't have thought the old nag capable of.

"How far to the end of the woods?" Daisy cried to Mr. Bellows.

"Not far now—just past this sharp turn."

The turn was indeed a sharp one. Daisy tried to slow Nessie but the horse was too panicked by the howls of the wolves to heed her driver. I

didn't blame her. They were all around us. I could hear them running through the underbrush, slipping in between the trees like wraiths. As we came around the curve I glimpsed a shape springing from the fog toward Daisy. I unfurled my wings and, dagger in hand, sprung from the cart to meet it midair.

But all I met was air—then hard ground. The shadow wolf had vanished midair, leaving me to crash on the ground.

I tucked my wings in and rolled but I got tangled in thorns. I heard Nessie's sharp, high whinny, Daisy's scream, Mr. Bellows's swearing, and then the splintering of wood. I tore my wing from the thorn bush and rolled to my feet. The fog was so thick I could barely make out the toppled cart—but then there was Daisy, standing by Nessie's head, dagger in hand. Mr. Bellows grabbed me and drew me in close.

"Form a triangle," he barked. "Close together, facing out, daggers up."

We stood, our shoulders touching, braced for the attack, straining to make out each footfall. They were circling us, closing in for the kill. I counted six, seven, eight . . . too many for us to take on ourselves.

Then a howl split the dense fog. It felt like a dagger splitting my brain in two, like an abyss opening up inside my chest. Others joined it, deafening and maddening.

"They're trying to frighten us," Mr. Bellows whispered.

"No," Daisy said. "*They're* frightened."

"What do they have to be bloody frightened—?" Mr. Bellows began, but then a ball of fur exploded out of the fog. Mr. Bellows lunged for it and thrust a dagger through its heart. It landed with a thud at my feet. I looked down—and noticed that its throat had been cut.

"Something's killing them," I said.

Another wolf backed out of the fog, snarling at something in front of it. It lunged into the fog—then fell back, a spear plunged into its throat. A shape loomed out of the fog, tall and shaggy and . . . *blue*.

"Trows!" Daisy squeaked.

"Quick!" Mr. Bellows cried. "While they're killing the wolves make a run for it. I'll stay here and fight them off."

But it was too late to run. Blue creatures were dropping out of the trees. They had wolf heads and furry legs and necklaces of bones dangling on their bare chests. They were yipping like wolves and shaking their spears at

us. They'd scared the shadow wolves away, which only made them more frightening. But I was tired of being frightened. I picked the one who looked like the leader—the one with the biggest spear making the most noise—and hurled myself at it. We landed in a thud, my dagger at its throat. Its wolf's head fell back and two pale eyes stared up at me out of a blue-streaked face.

“Ava?” it said.

“Nathan?”

15



THE POINT OF a spear pressing against my ribcage brought my attention away from Nathan. I looked up from him into a wide blue face framed by a wolf's-head hood.

"Stand down, Bottom," Nathan bit out between gritted teeth. "She's a friend . . . at least she *was* a friend."

"Are you sure, Becky? It's got wings."

Bottom? Becky?

"Yes, I can see her wings, but remember how I explained that the Darklings weren't all bad?"

"Oi, what about these two?" Another one of the blue demons prodded Daisy with a spear. "Are they Darklings, too?"

"Leave her be, Collie. That's Miss Daisy Moffat and if I'm not mistaken she could take you in a fair fight."

Collie, who beneath the fearsome blue paint and wolf's hood looked all of ninety pounds and not older than fifteen, gave Daisy a wary look, at which Daisy bared her teeth and growled at him. Collie jumped back two feet into a third blue warrior—a tall lanky lad with red curly hair escaping from under his wolf's hood.

"Geroff, ye dunderheaded berk. If yer gang to do a bunk do it away from me."

"I'm not running away, Jinks," Collie cried. "Becky says they're all right."

"Then why's it still on top o' him?" Jinks asked.

“Yeah,” Nathan groaned. “Why’s it still on top o’ me?”

“Oh!” I shifted my knees off Nathan’s chest, drawing my wings in, and got up slowly, keeping an eye on Bottom’s spear. I offered a hand up to Nathan but he ignored it and got up on his own, brushing dirt off his torn ragged trousers and wolf cloak as if he were adjusting a fine bespoke suit.

“Gentlemen, I’d like to introduce Miss Avaline Hall, Miss Daisy Moffat, and Mr. Rupert Bellows of the Blythewood School.” He performed the introductions with a bow and a flourish. “Ava, Daisy, Mr. Bellows, meet Henry Higginbottom the third, Clyde Collingwood, and James Jenkins of Hawthorn Hall.”

We nodded warily to each other, then Daisy broke the awkward silence. “Why are you painted blue?”

“Keeps the shadow things out,” Collie said, thumping his skinny chest.

“Aye,” Jinks said, “Mr. Farnsworth thinks that why the Picts did it.”

“Mr. Farnsworth is here?” Mr. Bellows asked.

“Back at the castle,” Nathan replied, “where we ought to be heading. It’s getting dark—and no amount of blue paint in the world can keep out the shadows after dark.”

“We’ve got to bring Nessie,” Daisy said, stroking the horse’s head.

Nathan stepped toward the cart to examine the damage that had been done in our fall. “We’ll unhitch her and come back for the cart tomorrow.” He turned to look at us. “Is this all of you, then? I’ve been expecting an expedition from Blythewood but I’d have thought you’d bring reinforcements. I suppose Helen had more important things to do.”

Daisy, Mr. Bellows, and I looked at each other, none of us wanting to be the one to tell Nathan what had happened to Helen, but at last Daisy did.

“Van Drood’s got her. It’s all my fault. Spring-heeled Jack used me as a distraction. . . .” She spilled out all the details of the ambush on the train, ending with the assurance that Raven, Marlin, Agnes, and Sam had all gone after her. “They’re bound to find her!”

I couldn’t judge the color of Nathan’s skin under the blue paint, but I could see his jaw clench and his hand squeeze Nessie’s rein so tightly that the gentle horse whinnied. “They’d better,” he said between gritted teeth. “Come on, then,” He led Nessie through the trees. “Before you lose anyone else of your rescue party.”



As we walked through the woods Nathan recounted the events of the last few months at Hawthorn Hall.

“Mr. Farnsworth and I noticed that something was off as soon as we arrived. The masters had instituted some rather odd rules—dodgy even for Hawthorn.”

“They had us cutting down trees in the forest,” Bottom complained.

“And scrubbing the bloomin’ cellars on our hands and knees,” Collie added.

“And they whipped us,” Jinks noted.

“And sent us to bed without our supper,” Bottom concluded in an aggrieved tone. At Daisy’s insistence, he was carrying the hamper full of food, sniffing appreciatively at the smell of steak and kidney pies.

“It became clear to Mr. Farnsworth and me that all of the masters had been taken over by the *tenebrae*.”

“All of them?” Mr. Bellows asked.

“Yes—and they were using the boys to look for something.”

“The vessel,” I said. “Did they—?”

“No. The headmaster grilled Mr. Farnsworth when he arrived. He wanted to know what he’d done with *A Darkness of Angels*. But Mr. Farnsworth wouldn’t talk so they locked him up and tortured him.”

Daisy gasped.

“That’s when I organized the boys in a revolt.”

“That was very brave of you,” I said, my eyes filling at the thought that I’d ever thought Nathan might have been taken over by the shadows.

“Yes,” Mr. Bellows said. “Er, what did you do with the masters?”

“Chased them off,” Collie exclaimed in a high, excited voice. “You should’ve seen them run.”

“Some wanted to string ’em up,” Jinks said. “But Becky forbid it. Said they’d been men once—”

“And might be men again,” Collie finished.

“Yes, well,” Nathan murmured. “It might not have been the wisest choice. As soon as they were gone we were besieged by shadow creatures—crows on the battlements, rats in the cellars, and wolves in the woods.

We've been trapped here, unable to get out or send a message. I figured that Blythewood would send someone eventually."

"Helen and I only got back a few weeks ago," I said guiltily. I went on to explain what had happened to us. Nathan listened in silence as I described the ruined Blythewood and the war that had ravaged Europe and then the United States.

"Blimey!" Bottom swore. "You're saying we Brits didn't stand up against the Bosch? But we're pledged to aid France."

"We'd never stand idle while France fell!" Collie cried, his voice cracking. "I'd go to war myself!"

"It was the work of the shadows—and van Drood," Nathan said. "Before the masters fled I had a look at some of their papers—letters to uppity-ups in the governments of England, France, Austro-Hungary, Germany, and Russia. A network of influence spun by van Drood to enable the *tenebrae* to take over the world. We must stop it!"

"We will," Mr. Bellows said, patting Nathan on the shoulder. "But first we must find where the second vessel is."

"That won't be a problem," Nathan said. "I know where it is."

"You do?" I asked, feeling the first stirring of hope.

Nathan turned his head and looked at me. Against the bright blue paint on his face his eyes looked pale as water, washed clean of emotion and impossible to read.

"Yes," he said, looking away from me and jerking his head toward something in front of us. I followed his gaze. We'd come to the edge of the woods. Across a grassy field rose a steep cliff covered with thorny brambles. Steps carved out of the rock led up to a stone castle. The last light of the sun turned the old stone walls the soft gold of buried treasure. "It's there," Nathan said, "buried in the hill under Hawthorn Hall. The castle was built up around it to protect the vessel."



Nathan led the way up the steep steps so fast that, trying to keep up with him, I had difficulty catching my breath enough to talk. It would have been easier to fly up to the castle, but when I flexed my wings Nathan shook his head.

“Don’t do it. We’ve got archers in the battlements and meurtriers—those are the arrow slits in the walls—”

“I know what a meurtrier is,” I snapped, folding back my wings. “I heard the same medieval siege lecture in Mr. Bellows’s class as you. But I don’t want to talk about that. I want to talk about Helen.”

“What’s there to talk about? I’ll get her back from van Drood if it’s the last thing I do.”

I grabbed Nathan’s arm and made him look at me. “You love her, don’t you?”

Nathan glared at me as though I’d accused him of a crime. “What of it?” he finally snapped. “She was none too happy with my declaration. I remember her exact words: ‘Nathan Fillmore Beckwith, you idiot, why have you gone and ruined everything?’”

“*That’s* why she came back from Europe upset?” I said.

Nathan shrugged my arm off and kept climbing. “I didn’t know that my feelings would be such a burden to her. I always thought . . . that well . . .”

“She had feelings for you?”

“Yes. I hate to admit it but I took her for granted. She was always tagging along behind me, like a little sister, only . . .”

“Not like a sister entirely.”

“No. So when you came along . . .”

In the places where the blue paint had rubbed away his skin turned red.

“You thought you fancied me?”

He groaned. “Do we really have to go over all my mistakes?”

“It wasn’t a mistake,” I said gently. “I-I thought . . . well, I fancied you, too, only then . . . well, now . . .”

“You love Raven. I understand. And Helen loves Marlin . . .”

“But that’s just it. I’m not sure . . . I mean, she *likes* him, and when she found out you’d gone . . .” I left off, realizing that I didn’t want to tell Nathan about Marlin coming to Helen’s room on the ship.

“She went back to him,” Nathan said. “Well, maybe that’s for the best. Only I wish he’d taken better care of her. But if you think I won’t do everything in my power to get Helen back even if it’s to deliver her into Marlin’s arms, you’re dead wrong.” He glared at me, daring me to object.

“That’s not what I think at all!”

“Good. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to make a ridiculous sound.”

“What?”

He sighed. “It’s a signal. These lads, well . . .” He looked back at Collie, Bottom, and Jinks with an expression of fondness I’d rarely seen on Nathan’s face. “They’ve been raised on all these outlandish tales—Peter Pan and Rudyard Kipling. They love signals and codes and nicknames—as if it’s all a game. Don’t get me wrong—they’re good lads and brave, only I wonder sometimes if their innocence won’t be their undoing.”

For a moment the setting sun turned the blue paint on Nathan’s face to red streaks and I saw him on a field of war leading men into battle, his eyes filled with a terrible pride and sorrow. Then the red light was extinguished and his face was in shadow.

“At any rate, if I don’t caw like a crow right now the sentries will assume you’ve taken us prisoner and pour boiling oil from the machicolations.”

He pointed up to a projection in the battlement wall and then he cupped his hands around his mouth.

“Ca-caw, ca-caw, ca-caw.”

Collie, Bottom, and Jinks joined in the noise, adding some fillips of other bird sounds and flapping their arms up and down. They looked so ridiculous—*humans pretending to be birds always do*, Raven had once told me—that I couldn’t help bursting out laughing. Daisy did, too. Mr. Bellows joined in the flapping and cawing, looking happier than I’d ever seen him. Nathan was right, these were good lads and brave—and far too young to go to war.



We crossed a drawbridge over a dry moat filled with thorn bushes—the same hawthorn shrubs that grew over the entire hill—and under a raised portcullis. Looking up, I saw buckets poised on rafters and smelled . . . *bacon*.

“That’s your boiling oil?” I asked. “Bacon grease?”

“All we’ve got,” Bottom replied. “Gives me an appetite whenever I’m on sentry duty.”

“You’ve always got an appetite,” Collie said, not unkindly. “I’ve seen you sopping your bread in the boiling oil.”

“Lads, now’s not the time,” Nathan pointed out as we emerged into a wide courtyard. A line of six boys dressed in a motley combination of school uniform, plaid kilt, and tattered fur stood with bows drawn, arrows trained on us.

“Stand down, lads,” Nathan said, “these are friends from Blythewood.”

A tall young man wearing a plaid kilt, crested blue serge blazer, and feather-topped beret stepped forward and saluted Nathan. “Just following your own orders, sir. Everyone back from the field must undergo observation, sir.”

“Yes, that’s right, Kingsley.” Nathan turned to us. “They have to check that none of us are shadow-ridden. Just step up and stand still . . . it won’t hurt a bit.”

Daisy looked at Mr. Bellows uneasily.

“I’ll go first,” Mr. Bellows said. Stepping up as if he were part of a military parade he saluted Kingsley. “Reporting for observation, soldier. Do your worst—”

The chuckle emerging from his throat curdled as Kingsley extracted a long steel needle from the rim of his beret. “Stand still, sir, and it won’t hurt.”

“So you keep saying,” Mr. Bellows muttered under his breath.

Kingsley raised the needle to Mr. Bellows’s face while another boy shone a lantern into his eyes. Daisy gasped as the needle touched the corner of Mr. Bellows’s right eye.

“All clear!” Kingsley shouted. “Next.”

“What are they doing?” I hissed at Nathan as Daisy stepped up.

“We call it the Stick and Shine. The needle prick draws the *tenebrae* to the surface of the eye.”

“And if you see a shadow?”

“That’s what the other boys are standing by for. Those arrows are tipped with a poison lethal to the *tenebrae*.”

“Have you caught many?” I asked as Bottom, Collie, and Jinks each presented themselves for examination.

“Er, yes, only . . .”

“Only what?” I demanded as Kingsley motioned for me to come forward.

“You have to shoot quickly to catch the escaping shadow and, well, not all the boys have the best aim.”

I shot Nathan a reproachful look as I stepped up to Kingsley. I was remembering something van Drood had told me—about how the Darklings had been contaminated by the *tenebrae* in that long-ago attack on the bell maker’s daughters. That was why the Darklings couldn’t enter Faerie. What if that contamination was enough to show in my eyes now? I glanced at the line of archers and detected a faint tremor in their shoulders—from holding their bows drawn so long, but also from fear. Fear of being killed *and* fear of killing. It wouldn’t take much for one of them to let loose an arrow. But if I refused to take the test, then I’d look guilty.

I faced Kingsley and opened my eyes wide, trying not to look at the quivering tip of the needle as it approached my eye. I felt the prick in my right temple—and at the base of my spine. It felt like something awoke there—something tightly coiled, unfurling . . .

No! I drove whatever it was back down with the same willpower I used to keep my wings from unfurling. Kingsley’s eyes narrowed as if he’d seen something suspicious.

“What is it, soldier?” Nathan barked.

“Nothing, sir, just . . . nothing.” He turned smartly on his heel and saluted. “All clear, sir. You may proceed from the bailey into the keep. Master Farnsworth is waiting in the tower.”

“Good job, Kingsley,” Nathan said, returning the boy’s salute. “I’ll send relief for you and your boys and order an extra ration for your tea.”

“Thank you very much, sir! Just doing our duty, sir, but the lads will appreciate it, sir.” And then he added to me and Daisy, “Sorry for any inconvenience, misses. Hope you understand.”

“Of course,” Daisy replied. “There are some steak and kidney pies and Scotch eggs and ale in those hampers for you if you like.”

The bailey guards let out a cheer, transforming instantly from fierce soldiers into hungry boys.

“You’ll spoil them,” Nathan remarked as we entered the keep.

It was only after I’d followed Nathan into the tower that it occurred to me that no one had tested him.

16



NATHAN LED US up a narrow winding staircase, Collie, Bottom, and Jinks taking the rear. Every dozen steps we encountered a boy standing guard at an arrow slit, who lowered his bow to salute Nathan and demand a password. The castle was guarded as though it were under siege—which I supposed it was. Only it was besieged by creatures that could slip through cracks and ride inside a human or animal host. I wasn't so sure that boiling oil and arrows would keep out the shadows.

At the top of the tower we came to a wide square room lit by the last lingering light of the day pouring in through a skylight. The tower's builders must have thought that this room was too high up for an arrow or burning projectile to reach. The curving walls were covered by tapestries so old and faded I couldn't make out the figures on them. Across from where we came in there was a long table covered with books and scrolls. As we crossed the room the man sitting behind the table looked up and I recognized Mr. Farnsworth, librarian of Hawthorn. He squinted at us myopically and then fitted a pair of wire-rimmed glasses over his eyes.

"Avaline Hall!" he cried.

I smiled. I hadn't been sure he would recognize me. The last time we'd met he'd been still recovering from his near-death experience aboard the *Titanic* and the meddling of van Drood's henchman Dr. Pritchard. He'd lost his memory of what he'd done with the book *A Darkness of Angels* that he'd been bringing to me. Only by joining him in a vision of the *Titanic*'s sinking had I been able to find out that he'd entrusted the book to my father,

Falco. The vision had restored his memory, but I'd often worried that he might not make a full recovery.

And, indeed, when he got to his feet and crossed the room he walked in a halting limp that reminded me that he had lost all his toes to frostbite after he was rescued from the North Atlantic. His grip, though, when he grasped my hands, despite the two fingers he'd lost on his left hand, was firm, and his gaze was steady.

"Miss Hall, I am so very glad to see you! I was distressed to leave Blythewood before you and your friend were found. But as you can see, I had work to finish here."

He waved his hand at the papers strewn across the long oak table. I recognized the cryptic script and illuminated manuscripts.

"It's *A Darkness of Angels*," I said. "But I thought the book was still embedded in my father's wings."

"The original is—and the transcription is still at Ravencliffe. I wouldn't have dared travel with it again after what van Drood did to the *Titanic* to get it from me the last time. And it was a good thing I didn't have it on me when we got here. The headmaster had me searched—and I had no wings in which to hide the pages."

"But then how . . . ?" I looked at the beautifully scripted and illustrated pages—then noticed that the ink on one of them was still wet and that pots of ink and powdered paint, along with brushes and quills and jars full of flowering hawthorn branches, stood on the table. I looked back at Mr. Farnsworth, who was tapping his forehead.

"It was all up here. Mr. Omar taught me a technique for committing the entire text to memory. I've been reconstructing the book here, hoping that when I get to the missing page I will remember that, too." He furrowed his brow. "At least that's the only way I've come up with for finding out where the other vessels are hidden."

"But I thought you knew where the vessel was," I said, turning to Nathan. "You said it was under the castle."

"Oh, it most certainly is!" Mr. Farnsworth said. "But the entrance to the vessel is hidden in a maze. We know that from the tapestries. Come, let me show you."

He ushered Daisy, Mr. Bellows, and me over to one of the faded tapestries. Collie, Bottom, and Jinks followed Nathan. "The shame of it is

that these have been hanging here for centuries without any of the masters of Hawthorn understanding what they meant.”

“I remember them,” Mr. Bellows said. “We used to use this room to study in, and when I got bored, er, I mean when I needed to rest my eyes, I’d try to make out what was figured in them. Of course they’re so faded that I couldn’t really make out anything, but sometimes”—Mr. Bellows gazed at the tapestries with a wistful look on his face—“late at night when I’d been studying for a long time, I thought I saw the figures in them moving, and I imagined all the stories we’d read of knights and ladies and heroic quests.”

“Oi,” said Collie. “I know what you mean. I sometimes saw a lady looked like my mother—”

“Or a bunch of lads playing cricket,” Jinks suggested, stroking his chin. “That blobby bit up there being the ball.”

“I always fancied it looked like a picnic,” Bottom said with a wistful look.

I stared at the tapestry. The colored threads had become so faded with time that it looked more like a stained tablecloth than a heroic scene. Only the gold threads remained bright enough to make out the vague outline of figures that seemed to flicker and move in the fading light.

“Yes,” Mr. Farnsworth said. “It’s unfortunate they were kept in this room under the skylight; the sunlight faded them. But I’ve discovered that they, like many of our oldest artifacts, are not entirely what they seem to be.” He picked up a glass jar full of gold powder from the table. “It was the gold that gave me the idea. The illuminators of the old books used gold in their paintings, just as the weavers of the tapestry used gold thread. I came across a reference in *A Darkness of Angels* to the type of gold they used: elven gold.”

“Elven gold?” Daisy asked.

“Gold the fay gave them. It bestows a bit of the life of the creator on the creation. These tapestries were woven by the original founders of Castle Hawthorn. They wove elven gold into it so that their story would never be lost even after the sunlight faded the threads.”

I peered at the gold figures in the tapestry. They did seem to glow with a preternatural life and almost to move, but so dimly and minutely that I couldn’t make out what they were doing.

“How?” I asked. “I can’t see it.”

“No, the elven gold has worn thin over the centuries, but if it were revived, then the story would come to life again. And I think I’ve come up with a way to do it. I’ve collected elven gold from the old manuscripts.” He shook the jar and it glowed as if there were trapped fireflies inside.

“Oh, so it’s like fairy dust,” Daisy said brightly. “You think if you dust it on the tapestries the figures will appear again?”

“Yes.” Mr. Farnsworth smiled gratefully at Daisy. “But I only have enough elven gold for one try. I’ve been waiting for the right moment.”

He looked around the room at Mr. Bellows, Daisy, and me, travel-worn and covered with dust, and then Nathan, Bottom, Collie, and Jinks, still in their blue paint. We were a motley crew, I thought, but Mr. Farnsworth beamed at us as though we were the knights of the round table.

“Seven. Yes, I think that’s no accident. And you’ve come on the longest night of the year—Midsummer’s Eve. That can’t be an accident either. I believe it’s time. If you all wouldn’t mind . . .”

“Will it be like the picture shows in Picadilly Circus?” Collie asked.

“Yes, I rather think it will,” Mr. Farnsworth answered.

“Well then, I’m keen to give it a go.” Collie drew a chair out from the table, turned it backward, and straddled it, resting his elbows on the top rung.

“Me too,” Daisy said, grabbing a chair and grinning at Collie. “I’m keen, too.”

“I think we all are,” Mr. Bellows answered. “When can we start?”

Mr. Farnsworth looked up through the skylight. The last light had finally gone from the sky, replaced by a thin crescent moon. “We can start now. I suggest you all take a seat in the middle of the room, facing the tapestries, and stay seated. I-I’m not really sure what will happen.”

I drew a chair out from the long table and placed it between Daisy and Nathan. We formed a circle facing outward. Mr. Farnsworth waited until we were all settled and then approached the tapestry holding the jar of elven gold. I expected him to recite some Latin spell but instead he said, “Well, here goes nothing!” as he tossed the gold dust across the faded tapestry. He walked around the room strewing the dust onto the tapestries. Some of the powder clung to the woven threads, while some hovered in the air like pollen on a spring day. When he was done the atmosphere in the tower

room shimmered, the dust glowing with a dozen shades of gold, from honey to russet to darkest amber. It was like looking through water reflecting a sunset, I thought—pretty, but not all that . . . *illuminating*.

“I don’t think it’s working,” Collie whispered.

Bottom hushed him. “Look at that! I think something moved in the corner bit there.”

I stared through the golden haze at the tapestry. Something flashed in the moonlight—the gold hilt of a sword worn by a richly dressed courtier, a figure that hadn’t been visible a moment ago. Other figures were emerging out of the golden haze—women dressed in long belted gowns woven from cloth embroidered in gold, and elaborate dome-shaped headdresses, young men in embroidered tunics and hose, horses with golden bridles and gold bells braided in their manes and tails, hawks with golden hoods and jesses tied to their feet—a whole procession decked out in gold, all carrying gold caskets, led by three figures carrying three large gold urns.

“The vessels,” I whispered. “Only they’re too small. The one we found at Blythewood was large as this tower.”

As if she had heard me, the woman at the head of the procession turned to me. I gasped, wondering if I had imagined the movement, but I heard Mr. Bellows draw in his breath and Daisy whisper, “They’re coming to life!”

It did appear as if the figures in the tapestry were coming alive. The women’s dresses rustled in an invisible breeze, the men’s swords clattered, a little page stretched his arms and yawned as if awakened from a long sleep. The bells in the horses’ bridles shook and chimed. The woman at the head of the procession smiled at me—and then stepped out of the tapestry.

Behind her, her two companions were lifted by two winged creatures—Darklings!—whose wings were the same red gold as mine. Sparks flew from them as they carried the vessel carriers and their vessels out through the skylight, trailing gold dust behind them like shooting stars. One of the vessel carriers looked back at me, and I recognized Aelfweard. He was being carried to Blythewood, where he would guard his vessel for centuries to come, even after it was broken. And the other guardian—a woman—was being taken . . . where? I had the momentary thought of following her, but then I realized that outside the elven-dusted atmosphere, the phoenix Darklings and vessel guardians would cease to exist.

I looked back at the woman kneeling beside the one remaining vessel—and was startled to see that she was no longer kneeling on the stone floor of the tower room but on a grassy hill and that the vessel had grown. It was now as tall as the woman, its open mouth wide as a pickle barrel. The ladies and courtiers in the procession were carrying their caskets to the vessel and tipping their contents into its wide yawning mouth. Gibbering filled the room as black oily shapes slid into the vessel. *Tenebrae*. The caskets were filled with the evil residue of mankind's worst emotions. I could hear in their shrieks the voices of hatred, envy, and despair.

A terrible sadness filled me, and that black thing at the base of my spine that had risen up before in the bailey rose up to meet it. I saw my mother struggling to feed me in our small, unheated rooms and heard the cries of the hungry and poor on the Lower East Side. I tasted the black laudanum my mother drank and saw her dying. I felt the ache in my back as I leaned over my sewing machine at the Triangle factory and heard the screams of the girls plummeting to their deaths and the wild shrieks of girls burning alive. All of it was rising inside me like a cold black mud bubbling up to swallow me . . .

Then I felt Daisy's hand steal into mine on one side and Nathan's on the other. I swallowed down the bitter taste of mud. The woman kneeling beside the vessel, which had grown enormous and sunk into the ground, was looking at me as if she understood. She waved her hand over the opening and it was sealed with a thick white waxy plug. The ladies and courtiers brought handfuls of dirt and cast them over the top of the vessel like mourners at a grave. The little page came last with a tiny sapling cradled in his hand. He knelt and pressed it into the ground. The sapling began growing at once into a hawthorn tree that burst into white flowers, then red fruit, then turned bare, then flowered again. The tree flowered, fruited, and grew bare again and again and I understood that we were watching the passage of time.

Hundreds of years flew by. The vessel maiden's long curling brown hair turned gray and then she and the other figures vanished back into the faded tapestry and were replaced by others who worshipped at the tree and guarded it. They raised stones around it—towering tors and menhirs like the ones I'd seen while flying over Ireland—but then invaders came and tried to dig up the vessel, so they built a circular wall around the hawthorn tree,

and another and another. They built the walls in a spiral pattern to confuse the invaders, a giant maze, and then they built a tower around the maze. As the walls went up, they merged with the walls of the present castle. We were watching the tower of Hawthorn rise around us.

Outside its walls I could hear the shouts of invaders come to tear the tower down and find the vessel. Flaming arrows shot across the skylight, followed by shrieking shadow crows. The walls of the tower shook as catapults launched missiles. I heard shouts and screams on the stairs. A knight in armor came running into the room shouting, “We’re under siege! We’re under siege!”

I jumped to my feet, my hand on my dagger. Beside me Daisy and Mr. Bellows had risen, too. The knight ran toward us—and right through us. I turned to watch him as he ran to the place where Mr. Farnsworth’s table had been and where now instead a woman sat at a loom weaving a tapestry. She had long curling gray hair and the same eyes as the vessel maiden. The knight cried out to her.

“Lady Aethelena, the vessel has been broken! The shadows are let loose. The prince has been attacked by the shadows and taken over. You must leave now. The Darklings are here to take you away.”

He pointed to the skylight where a winged Darkling was silhouetted against the sky. Beside him stood a girl—a girl I recognized! It was Merope, and the Darkling was Aderyn.

Suddenly I understood. The day that the shadow wolves attacked the bell maker’s daughters in the woods was the day that the vessel beneath the tower was broken and the shadows were let out. Aderyn was clutching his breast because he had just been wounded by the shadow crow.

Lady Aethelena, guardian of the vessel, stood up, a ball of golden thread in her hand. “No, Sir Isumbras,” she said. “The castle must be guarded. Even with the vessel broken we must make sure no one gets inside to find out the location of the last vessel. I myself will guard it—to my last breath and beyond. You must save the bell maker’s daughters.”

“But my lady,” the knight—Sir Isumbras, she had called him—began, his voice cracking. “No one but you knows the way through the maze to the vessel. How will I ever find you?”

She held out her hand, on which she balanced the ball of golden thread. “I will mark my path with this,” she said, “as Ariadne marked the labyrinth

for Theseus. I will cast an enchantment only you”—she turned her face a fraction and I thought that she was looking at me—“and others of good heart and purpose can see, so that someday you can follow me.”

“I will follow you to my last breath and beyond,” the knight said, kneeling at her feet.

I heard Daisy sniff beside me. My own eyes were so full of tears that my vision blurred, the figures of the knight and his lady growing smeary and indistinct. I wiped my eyes—but the figures remained as blurred and faint as faded thread.

“No!” I cried, stepping forward toward the tapestry. I could just make out Aethelena and her brave knight kneeling beside her. The elven gold’s magic had all but run out. The last bit of gold was glowing in the ball of thread she held in her hand.

“How will we find the way now?” Daisy, who had come to stand beside me, asked.

“Look,” Nathan said. He pointed toward the ball of gold thread. As we watched, it fell from the lady’s hand, tumbled out of the tapestry, and unspooled across the floor. It moved as if propelled by a will of its own, across the room and then out the door, where we could hear it bumping down the stairway.

“Quick!” Mr. Farnsworth cried. “We have to follow it before it fades.”

But someone was already following it. Sir Isumbras, pale and faded but still tied to his oath, was following the golden thread as it unraveled. All we had to do was follow him.



NATHAN AND I went first, with Daisy and Mr. Bellows close behind us, and Collie, Jinks, and Bottom bringing up the rear.

“I’ll stay in the tower,” Mr. Farnsworth called, “to guard the tapestry.”

I wasn’t sure why the tapestries needed guarding, but there wasn’t time to ask. Ahead of us I could just glimpse the glowing knight before he made the next turn into darkness. “Quick,” Nathan whispered in my ear. “If we lose him we’ll never find our way.”

“But there only seems to be this one way down.”

“Yes, but once we go below the ground the ways diverge—look—we’re passing the door to the bailey now.”

I glanced to my right and caught the flicker of torchlight from outside where the six boys stood guard. I heard laughter and smelled the steak and kidney pies Daisy had brought from the Bells. My stomach growled.

“At least someone’s getting his dinner,” I heard Bottom complain.

“I brought plenty,” Daisy answered. “I’m sure they’ll save some for us.”

The boys laughed at this as if it were a good joke. I looked back at them, but my eyes, dazzled by the light, couldn’t make out anything. Nathan gripped my arm and pulled me down into a black passage, the only light the faint reflection of Sir Isumbras’s glowing armor.

“Maybe we should grab a lantern,” Daisy said.

“It would only make it harder to see the knight,” Nathan called back to her. “Look, he’s turning into that passage.”

By the glow of Sir Isumbras's armor I could just make out an arched doorway and beyond it a long curving corridor with a half dozen doorways gaping like black mouths. If we'd missed seeing him turn we'd have never known which door he'd gone through. Nor would the rest of our cohorts, who had fallen farther behind. As Nathan and I turned through the door I quickly uttered a blazing spell and marked the doorway with a glowing sigil.

"Capital idea," I heard Mr. Bellows say. "Blaze the trail, Ava."

"Hurray for Ava the trailblazer!" the boys echoed.

My cheeks burned from their praise, but as I hurried through the doorway I felt like I'd been plunged into cold water. I couldn't see Nathan or the knight. I'd lost them both! My heart thudded in my ears—no, that was Nathan's footsteps on the stone floor I heard. I opened my Darkling ears and focused on Nathan's footsteps and plunged forward, feeling like an owl diving for a mouse it hears stirring beneath the snow. I moved so fast I bumped right into Nathan.

"Watch it," he cried. "You almost made me miss it—he's turning again."

Ahead of us Sir Isumbras was following the golden thread through a doorway. In the light of the thread I noticed that the circular passage was wider now and that the cobbled pathway sloped steeply downward. We were descending into the tower's dungeon in wide loops.

"How far down does it go?" I asked Nathan as I slapped another sigil on the doorway and followed him.

"No one knows," he answered. "Sometimes a boy would take a dare and venture into the maze, but he'd never be heard from again."

"That's awful! Don't they try to find them?"

"And lose more boys? What would be the point? Besides, there are the rats."

"The rats?"

"Yeah, the maze is crawling with them. Can't you hear them with those hawk ears of yours?"

I opened my ears and listened. Yes, I did hear something scratching . . . and then something squeak. I heard Collie's voice behind us cry, "There's the blighter, get 'em, Jinks!"

“The boys’ll take care of them,” Nathan said. “They’ll keep them from following us.”

“Following us? Do you think they’re shadow rats?”

“I think the shadows have been waiting for their chance to find the vessel. Didn’t you see those crows on the skylight? They’ll have sent a message to their vermin brethren below ground—there—there’s one now.” Nathan pointed into the dark where I made out two glowing red eyes. “You can always tell them by their red eyes.”

“Shouldn’t we—”

“Leave them for the boys. They’re excellent ratters.”

I hated to turn my back on those malevolent red eyes, but Nathan was already hurrying on. I knew he was afraid of losing the knight but I wished he were at least a little afraid of losing me and the others. I could hear Mr. Bellows and Daisy stop to fight the rats with the boys and worried they’d never catch up with us. I could barely keep up with Nathan and manage to blaze the turnings, but I made sure to mark every time we turned because it had occurred to me that if we did ever find the second vessel and learn where the third vessel was, it wouldn’t do anyone any good if we couldn’t find our way back.

At times I even wondered if Lady Aethelena’s golden thread knew where it was going. Sometimes the path sloped upward. Twice we passed a doorway I had already marked. We’d gone around in so many circles I felt dizzy. I had to close my Darkling ears to shut out all the confusing echoes. I could no longer hear Mr. Bellows or Daisy or the boys. They must have stayed behind to kill the rats and keep them from following us. I could only hope they would eventually follow my blazes and meet us at the vessel. If we ever found it.

“What if the thread is a trap,” I said to Nathan, “meant to lure enemies into the maze and strand them here to die?”

“What a bleak idea, Ava,” Nathan said, turning to give me a wicked smile. “You’re beginning to sound like me. But luckily in this case you’re wrong. Look.”

We’d come down a particularly steep bit, at the bottom of which Sir Isumbras was turning into an arched doorway that was wider than the others. I made out something beyond it—something *glowing*.

As we followed him through the arch my dark-accustomed eyes were dazzled by the light. We were in a domed room ringed with rough-hewn standing stones. In the center of the circle was a small tree covered with white flowers. How could flowers bloom so far below ground, I wondered, and in the dark? But it wasn't dark here. Looking up I saw that the dome was studded with tiny twinkling lights. They reminded me of the electrified lights on the ceiling of the recently opened Grand Central Terminal. Only these lights were moving.

"Lampsprites!" I cried. "Daisy will love to see them."

"Yes," Nathan said, "but I'm not sure that they're so pleased to see us."

The lampsprites did indeed look angry—and *armed*. Each one carried a spear. They were swarming around Sir Isumbras and us.

"Ow!" I cried as one pricked me with its spear. Another one's wings brushed against my face and I heard the word "Sassenach" hissed all around me.

"It means foreign English invader," Nathan said. "I'm afraid that Scottish lampsprites are quite a bit fiercer than their American cousins—and these have been tasked with guarding the vessel."

"We're here to protect the vessel," I called out. "And to find the third vessel before the Shadow Master can."

I felt the brush of a dozen wings against my face and then heard the chime of their agitated voices. "How can we tell?" they cried. "You might be spies!"

"I am here to see the Lady Aethelena," Sir Isumbras said. He was covered by lampsprites, but they didn't seem as angry. They fluttered around him, raising a multicolored dust storm.

"Us too," Nathan said. "Here to see Lady Aethelena—" But the lampsprites only poked at us with their tiny sharp spears. I saw one sniff at Nathan's skin and wrinkle its nose. It came away with a streak of blue face paint on its wings. She reminded me of Primrose.

"Aelfweard sent me," I said, reminded of the guardian I'd met in the Blythe Wood. "He said . . ." I searched my memory for the guardian's exact words. "He said *I am the vessel and the vessel is light*."

Instantly the lampsprites paused in their flight and then fluttered together in a conflagration. "Those are the words . . . but how do we know . . . it might have tortured the guardian."

"I most certainly did *not* torture anyone," I said. I swatted away a lampsprite whose wing dust was seeping down the back of my shirtwaist and making me itch. "Do I look like a torturer? And would a guardian give up his secrets even if I were? And I'm not an *it*, I'm . . ."

"A phoenix!" they all cried as one.

In my anger my wings had unfurled. I could see the glow of them reflected in the lampsprites' faces.

"A phoenix will be sent to save the last vessel!" one lampsprite cried, landing on my shoulder. "You must come at once to see Lady Aethelena."

A dozen lampsprites tugged me toward the hawthorn tree. Sir Isumbras was already kneeling at the foot of the tree. I looked back to see Nathan fending off a small brushfire of sprites, many of whom had gotten his blue face paint on their wings. Perhaps that's why they were so annoyed.

"Leave him alone," I said. "He's my friend and . . . um, my squire."

Nathan looked up, a light flashing in his eyes. The lampsprites stopped harassing him and led him to the tree.

"Thank you, O Great Lady Phoenix," Nathan said with a mock bow, "for sparing your humble squire."

"Oh do shut up, Nathan. I didn't know what else to say. At least they're going to let us in—although I don't see how. The tree has grown over the opening to the vessel."

But even as I spoke I saw that the lampsprites were brushing dirt away from the roots, uncovering a smooth marble slab. Sir Isumbras withdrew his sword and passed it over the slab, reciting some words in a language that I guessed was Old English.

"Do you suppose he's going to plunge the sword into the stone like in King Arthur and his knights—oh!" Nathan's sarcastic remark was cut short by a gasp as the slab slid away of its own volition. *He really does love all those stories*, I thought, as we both crouched down beside Sir Isumbras. Light was streaming up through the opening, lighting up Sir Isumbras's pale, threadbare face with happiness. He bowed down, as if to pay homage to the light, and then toppled headfirst down the hole.

"Well, I guess we may as well follow him," Nathan said, lowering himself through the hole more cautiously.

As I bent down to follow him I recalled that the last time I'd fallen through a hole in the ground I'd wound up ten years later in a ruined world.

But there was no time to consider—I was already falling.

I would have landed flat on my head if Nathan hadn't caught me. "Hell's Bells!" I began, but Nathan hushed me and turned me around forcibly by the shoulders to see—

Lady Aethelena standing in the middle of the room, Sir Isumbras kneeling before her, his head bowed, her hands resting on his shoulders. Gold light flowed from her hands down over his bent back like a waterfall spilling over a stone. It flowed into his armor, making it shine as if it were newly forged, and then into his hair, turning the silver to gold. His shoulders straightened under her touch and when she lifted his head he was a young man once again and his face shone with the light of love.

"Lady Aethelena, at last! I have guarded the tower all these years waiting for a sign to come to you. When the gold thread unraveled I knew it was time."

The lady smiled on her knight. "I knew that you would guard the tower and keep us safe, Sir Isumbras. And that you would someday return to me and lead a phoenix to the vessel."

She lifted her head and settled her wide, kind eyes on me. She was older than the lady in the tapestry, and her curling hair had grown nearly to the floor. I found myself curtsying. Beside me, Nathan bowed. "I'm not sure what being a phoenix has to do with it, my lady, but I have come to find the third vessel and protect it. Nathan and I are from Blythewood, Hawthorn's sister school in . . ." I faltered, not sure what she would know of America since she'd been locked underground centuries before the country was discovered.

"On a great river on the edge of a fairy wood?" she asked, tilting her head and smiling.

"Yes, but . . ."

She pointed to a tapestry hanging on the wall. There was Blythewood standing on the banks of the Hudson River, across from the Catskill Mountains, the Blythe Wood surrounding it.

"But how . . .?"

"The fairies who made the vessel carved their hiding places on the walls. When this vessel was broken the pictures were ruined." She moved one of the tapestries aside to reveal a shattered wall. "But I remembered the pictures and wove them into these tapestries. Of course the castle wasn't in

the original, but I left instructions for the future lady of Hawthorn to build a castle modeled on Hawthorn and have it moved to where the other vessels were buried.”

“The future lady of Hawthorn?” Nathan asked.

“Alcyone,” I said. “Merope’s older sister and founder of our Order. She found your instructions and copied them into *A Darkness of Angels*.”

“I am pleased to know she followed my instructions and that she founded an Order of such brave ladies and knights.” She inclined her head to Nathan.

“And did you leave instructions for her to build a castle near the third vessel?” Nathan asked.

“Yes, only . . .” She frowned. “If your Order doesn’t know of it perhaps she failed.”

“I have watched and listened to the young students of the Order for many centuries now,” Sir Isumbras said, “and I have never heard them mention the third vessel. I believe it fell out of knowledge.”

“A lot fell out of our knowledge,” Nathan said. There was an edge of impatience in his voice that set my skin prickling. “Can we see the picture of where the third vessel is? Even as we speak the Shadow Master is searching for it.”

Sir Isumbras stood, his armor clattering, his hand moving toward the hilt of his sword, clearly disapproving of Nathan addressing his lady in such a tone.

“We don’t mean to be rude,” I said, moving in between Nathan and Sir Isumbras, “but Nathan’s right. Van Dood, the Shadow Master, is preparing for a terrible war. I’ve traveled into the future and seen what will happen if the third vessel is broken. The world will be engulfed in war; the shadows will take over everything. We must find it first and protect it.”

“If we show them where the third vessel is how do we know they won’t lead this Shadow Master to it?” Sir Isumbras asked.

“The girl is a phoenix,” she replied. “She is destined to protect the vessel. I cannot keep its location from her.” She pointed to the wall behind us. “I have woven the location of the place where the third vessel is buried there.”

Nathan turned before me and crossed to the tapestry and swore under his breath. “Another castle by another river surrounded by *another* wood.

How are we supposed to find it from this?"

The scene did look much like the one of Blythewood, only . . .

"This river is much *bendier* than the Hudson, and that castle . . ." I stepped closer. "That castle and the way it's set on the river looks familiar."

"Of course it looks familiar," Nathan said disgustedly, "they all look alike."

"No, this curve of the river is so sharp it practically shuts off the castle in an island, and this curve here upriver looks like a tomb. I've seen this river on a map in Mr. Bellows's room . . ." I closed my eyes, picturing the map on Mr. Bellows's desk marking the sites of battles.

"It's in the Ardennes forest," I said. "I think the river is called the Semois. A battle will take place near it. I'm sure if I saw the map again I could locate this bend."

"The Semois," Nathan said. "In the Ardennes. Yes, I think I could find that. We ought to go." He turned to me, the whites of his eyes looking very bright against the dark blue paint on his face. I turned back to Lady Aethelena and Sir Isumbras. They were gazing into each other's eyes so deeply I hated to interrupt them.

"Um, we really ought to go," I said quietly. "I don't know how to thank you."

Lady Aethelena turned dreamy eyes on me and smiled. "It is I who should thank you. You have brought my knight back to me."

"But is he . . ." I started to ask if he were real or just an image that had come out of a tapestry.

"I wove a bit of our souls into the tapestry," she said, answering my unspoken question. "And now the elven gold has restored him. Will you stay with me, my brave knight?"

"To my last breath and beyond," he answered. He began to bow his head but she caught his chin with her hand and held his gaze. They seemed frozen in time—as if they'd become part of a tapestry again—and I thought of Helen's wish to stop time and how I'd seen my friends crossing the lawn and thought they looked like figures in a tapestry. You couldn't stop time, I might tell Helen now, but there were moments that marked you that were inside you forever. I turned to Nathan, wiping the tears from my eyes, and was surprised to see that his face was wet, too.

“Yes, we’d better be going,” he said hoarsely. “We can climb up these roots.”

I saw that the roots of the hawthorn tree formed a ladder along one wall. “If only we’d known that before we fell!”

“Yes,” Nathan said. “I’ll go first to make sure it will hold.”

I could have told him it didn’t matter if I fell, but I didn’t want to hurt his pride. *Seeing Sir Isumbras has inspired a chivalric spirit in him*, I thought as I watched him climb to the top of the vessel and climb through the opening. When he’d gotten through he turned and looked down at me.

“I’m sorry, Ava,” he said.

“For what?” I asked.

He didn’t answer. Instead he pulled the slab over the top, sealing me inside.

18



I GAPPED OPEN-MOUTHED at the closed ceiling, expecting any second for Nathan to open it back up and reveal that he'd only been joking. He wouldn't really trap me in the vessel and leave me here for eternity. Would he?

I flew up and threw myself at the opening, first pushing against the slab, then pounding on it with my fists, screaming Nathan's name, then scrabbling at the edges with my fingernails.

"It doesn't open from the inside," Lady Aethelena called from below me. "I'm afraid your knight has betrayed you."

"He's not my knight," I shouted back, still pounding on the stone. "He's my friend—at least I *thought* he was my friend!" I shouted the last bit, hoping that Nathan could hear me. But the only answer I got was the mocking echo of my words in the hollow vessel.

Friend, friend, friend . . .

I reared back, beating my wings into a fiery fury, and threw myself at the slab. I hit it so hard that I was thrown backward and landed on the floor of the vessel in a smoldering heap of singed feathers. I drew my knees in and mantled my burnt wings over my head and gave in to the tears. How could I have trusted Nathan? He must have been taken over by the shadows long ago. He'd come to Hawthorn to find the third vessel for van Drood and now he was on his way there. He didn't care if I rotted here.

I felt a cool hand on my wings, putting out the fire and smoothing my ruffled feathers. "I saw the look of sorrow in your friend's eyes," Lady

Aethelena said. "I don't believe he betrayed you lightly."

"What does that matter? He still betrayed me. And now van Drood will get to the vessel first."

"Does your knight possess wings?" Sir Isumbras asked.

I looked up and pushed my hair out of my face. "No," I sniffed.

"Then perhaps you will still be able to catch up with him."

"Can you open the vessel for me?" I asked, sitting up and pointing at his sword. "With that?"

Sir Isumbras shook his head sadly. "The sword only opens the vessel from outside," he said, "but I think you have other friends who have come for you. Listen . . ."

I opened my Darkling ears and heard footsteps coming from above—and voices.

"I'm here!" I shouted, getting to my feet.

"Ava?" It was Daisy calling my name. I wiped the tears from my face and called back to her. "We're here, Ava," I heard Mr. Bellows call, "but we don't know how to open this thing."

"How can they open it without that sword?" I asked Sir Isumbras and Lady Aethelena.

"One of your friends is a knight of the Order," Sir Isumbras replied. "I have seen him from the tapestry. He carries a dagger of the Order that contains the power to open the vessel. Tell him to pass it over the slab while saying the spell for opening. I believe that will work."

"Thank you. I'd better get closer." I spread my wings out to fly to the top, but first I bowed to Lady Aethelena. "Thank you for trying to comfort me, but I'm afraid that Nathan is really lost. I was a fool not to see it."

"One is never a fool for believing in a friend," Lady Aethelena said. "It's that belief that may save your friend in the end . . . and yourself."

I looked from her to Sir Isumbras. Their love for each other had lasted centuries; of course she believed in the power of loyalty. But they were only figures in an old romantic story. That wasn't my story. I bowed to each of them again and flew up to the opening. I shouted to Mr. Bellows to use his dagger and an opening spell. I heard him muttering, "I'm a blasted idiot!" and Daisy murmuring something reassuring. Then Mr. Bellows recited a long Latin spell and the slab slid away. I had to fold my wings to get

through the opening, with Daisy and Mr. Bellows grabbing my arms to pull me through.

“What happened down there?” Daisy asked, clucking over my burnt wings. “Is Nathan with you?”

“Nothing’s down there but a bunch of old wall hangings,” Collie shouted. He and Bottom and Jinks were leaning over the vessel peering inside. I looked over their heads and saw that Collie was right: there was nothing inside the vessel but tapestries, one of which looked newly woven. It depicted a knight and a lady, their hands joined, their eyes locked in an eternal gaze. Lady Aethelena and Sir Isumbras were back in the land of myth and story, I thought as the boys wrestled the slab back over the opening. I almost wished I could have stayed with them.

“Nathan’s gone,” I said. “He trapped me in there. He’s been working with van Drood all along.”

“Blimey!” Collie cried. “I don’t believe it!”

“Nor me,” Jinks said stubbornly.

“There’ll be an explanation,” Bottom insisted, rubbing his eyes. “Becky’s a good chap.”

I sighed. “You’re all as daft as Lady Aethelena. We don’t have time to argue. Nathan’s gotten at least an hour’s start.”

Daisy and Mr. Bellows looked at each other while the boys all gaped at me. “An hour?” Collie said. “You’ve been down there over a week!”



“I don’t understand,” I said for the sixth or seventh time as we made our way back through the maze. “How could I have lost that much time? I wasn’t in Faerie.”

“The vessel was made by fairies,” Mr. Bellows said. “It’s outside human time—at least that’s the best I can figure it out. We’re lucky you only lost a week. You could have lost ten years like last time.”

“What does it matter if we’re too late—and why did you take a week to find me?” I stopped so abruptly that Bottom ran into me. We’d reached the door to the bailey. I sniffed the air, looking for that scent of steak and kidney pie but of course it was long gone. “I left sigils to guide you.”

“They ran out,” Daisy said. “We thought you must have been too rushed to keep marking the way.”

“I marked the turnings all the way to the vessel . . .” I began, but Mr. Bellows had already figured it out.

“Nathan must have erased them so we couldn’t find you right away and he’d have a head start.”

“Which means,” Daisy said, “that Nathan didn’t lose any time in the vessel. The sigils vanished a week ago. He must have erased them and then hid in the dark while we passed him.”

“You could have been lost in the maze forever,” I said, glaring at Jinks, Collie, and Bottom, daring them to try to defend Nathan now, but they only fidgeted awkwardly and looked at their feet. Even they couldn’t come up with a defense for their hero. “How *did* you find the way?” I asked.

“It was Daisy’s idea!” Mr. Bellows said, beaming at her.

“Yeah, Moffy came up with a wizard idea,” Collie said. “She sent lampsprites through the tunnels.”

“Oh, but I couldn’t have done it without you,” Daisy said modestly. “Collie had the idea of attaching strings to their feet and Bottom ran after them—oh d’you remember when Jinks got all tangled up like a maypole?” They all laughed and I felt a pang for the week I’d missed, as much for the camaraderie Daisy—*Moffy*?—had formed with the Hawthorn boys as for the head start Nathan had gotten.

“Yes, wizard, Daisy, well done and jolly good and all that rot. And while you were playing ring-around-the-rosy all week Nathan was racing toward the Ardennes.”

“The Ardennes?” Mr. Bellows asked, the smile vanishing from his face. “Is that where the vessel is?”

“Yes, I recognized it from the map on your desk—in the future, that is. Why? Do you know it?”

“Quite well, actually. I took a walking tour on holiday once with a few chums. The area is crawling with fairies.”

“It would be,” I said. “There must be a door to Faerie near the vessel. If I can see a map I think I can show you exactly where it is.”

“There are maps in the tower room,” Mr. Bellows said, “and Mr. Farnsworth will want to see that we’re all right.”

I raced up the rest of the stairs to the top of the tower, itching to be moving. I'd already lost more time than we could afford. Nathan might already be in Belgium. We found Mr. Farnsworth seated at the long table just as we'd found him a week ago. In another hundred years he'd be a part of the tapestry. He looked up from the book he was reading when we burst in.

"Ah, so you found her! I was beginning to worry—"

"We need maps of Belgium," I said, rudely cutting him off. "The Ardennes forest."

"Ah, the Ardennes, fascinating area. Caesar called it 'a place full of terrors.' And of course some believe it was the inspiration for Shakespeare's Forest of Arden—"

"Yes, fascinating," I said, cutting him off again. "Perhaps I'll write a paper on it one day—if the world isn't bloody blown to bits by the time you give me the bloody map!"

Poor Mr. Farnsworth blinked at me as if I'd gone mad. Daisy came up beside me and put her hand on my arm. "I apologize for Ava," she said, "but we are rather in a hurry. Do you have a map of the Ardennes?"

"No apologies necessary," Mr. Farnsworth said. "I happen to have one right here." He riffled through the stack of documents that lay helter skelter over the table. "It was right here . . . ah! No, that's the Black Forest . . . hm, that's the Forest of Broceliande . . . ah, here it is!"

I nearly ripped the sheet from his hands. It was an ancient piece of parchment with an ink map lettered in antique script with fanciful sketches of castles, stags, and dragons. "Don't you have anything more recent?" I asked, staring at the faded lines of rivers.

"This was drawn by a knight of the Order in the thirteenth century," Mr. Farnsworth replied, drawing himself up indignantly. I think he was more offended that I thought a modern map was preferable to one of his archival discoveries than by my earlier rude behavior. "I think you'll find it most reliable."

I sighed and sat down in a chair that Daisy had brought for me and repositioned the map to catch the light from the skylight. At first glance *all* the rivers looked as winding as the one I'd seen in the tapestry. There was one called the Aisne, and one called the Meuse, and one . . .

“Here’s the Semois. And this castle here looks like the one in the tapestry.”

“Ah, that’s Bouillon. It once belonged to the Order but it was abandoned in the fifteenth century because it was deemed too dangerous to hold.”

“Too dangerous!” Mr. Bellows exclaimed. “The Order abandoned an outpost because it was too dangerous?”

Mr. Farnsworth looked embarrassed, as if he’d personally given the order to retreat. “The woods of the Ardennes were home to a particularly fierce breed of man-eating giants.”

“You mean cannibals?” Collie asked with boyish disdain. “Cannibal giants?”

“Yes. It was considered prudent to beat a tactical retreat.”

“This bend in the river here”—I pointed at the parchment— “that’s nearly cut off from the land. What’s it called?”

“*Le tombeau du Géant*,” Mr. Farnsworth replied. “The tomb of the giant.”

“I saw that on my holiday,” Mr. Bellows said. “It’s a steep hill cut off by the bend in the river so that it looks like an island. The locals say it’s a fairy hill. I rather thought it looked like an Iron Age tumulus.”

“Some of which *were* fairy hills,” Mr. Farnsworth added.

“Perhaps the giants were protecting the third vessel,” I said. “The *last* vessel. Nathan is on his way there now—”

“Nathan’s taken a little detour.” The voice came from overhead. A Darkling stood on the edge of the skylight, silhouetted against the sky. It could have been Aderyn from my vision, but when he spoke again I knew it wasn’t. “We still have time.”

“Raven!” I cried.

He dropped through the skylight and landed right in front of me, his wings spread out over his head like a cloak. I heard Collie and Jinks gasp and Bottom cry, “Blimey, that’s a big ’un!”

“It’s all right,” Daisy said, “he’s a friend.”

I dropped the map and ran into Raven’s arms. He mantled his wings over us and kissed me. When I was able to catch my breath I stepped back and looked up into his eyes. “I was afraid—”

“That I wouldn’t come back? I knew I had to find Helen first.”

“Helen?” Daisy cried. “Have you found her? Is she all right? Where is she?”

“She’s safe enough for now,” Raven told Daisy. “She’s in London. Marlin’s watching her. Agnes and Sam are there, too—in fact, here . . .” He withdrew a pouch from his pocket and gave it to Mr. Bellows. “Agnes asked me to give you this. Nathan’s there, too.”

“Nathan’s there?” I asked. “You mean he went to find Helen? Then maybe he didn’t mean to betray us.”

“I knew it!” Bottom cried. “Becky wouldn’t do a bunk on us. He went to save his girl, that’s all.”

“Yes, I think that was his motive,” Raven said. He looked from me down at the table where I’d dropped the map of the Ardennes. “Is this it—is this where the third vessel is?”

“Yes,” I said. “It’s in Belgium—”

“The Forest of Arden,” Raven said. “Our people tell stories about it. It was a stronghold of the Darklings until the giants drove us out.”

“Giants drove *you* out?” Bottom gawked at Raven.

“They were man-eating giants,” Raven said defensively.

“The whole man-eating-giant legend might have been created expressly to protect the third vessel,” Mr. Bellows said. “Perhaps it will keep van Drood away, too.”

“I’ve met Judicus van Drood,” Mr. Farnsworth said with a shiver, “and I don’t think that even man-eating giants will keep him away.”

“But you said Nathan was with Helen,” I said to Raven. “That means he hasn’t given the location of the third vessel to van Drood.”

“Not yet, but we think he’s using the location of the third vessel to bargain for Helen’s release.”

“Helen’s release?” Daisy echoed. “You haven’t been able to free her?”

“She’s under heavy guard and she’s been mesmerized. Even if we kidnapped her she would still be in Drood’s power. She wouldn’t be the Helen you know and love. She . . .” He faltered, looking uncomfortably from Daisy to me. “You see, she thinks she’s in love. She’s engaged to be married . . . to Judicus van Drood.”

19



“ENGAGED TO VAN Drood!” Daisy shrieked. “But he’s old enough to be her father!”

“No one seems to mind that very much,” Raven said. “Mrs. van Beek appears to be quite happy with the arrangement.”

“Helen’s mother is there?” I asked.

“Yes. She and Helen are both staying at Drood’s townhouse in Belgrave Square. They go out each day shopping for Helen’s trousseau.”

“Can’t you get to them when they’re out?” I asked.

“We’ve tried. Sirena posed as a shop girl at Selfridge’s and tried to talk to Helen, but she kept humming some preposterous wedding tune and nattering on about orange blossoms and lace veils.”

“It’s like the musical mesmerism spell van Drood used on us last year,” Daisy said. “It drives out every thought but the ones he’s implanted. Poor Helen. She always was afraid that her mother would marry her off to some ancient specimen.”

“Is Mrs. van Beek mesmerized, too?” I asked.

“It’s difficult to say,” Raven replied. “She wouldn’t talk to Sirena. She said shop girls should hold their tongues. Sirena overheard her remarking to another lady that her daughter was marrying the richest man in New York. She’s either mesmerized or . . .”

“Seduced by van Drood’s money,” I finished for him. “We have to stop this. Mr. Omar could break the spell.”

“Agnes wired for him last week. He should be arriving in London by this afternoon.”

“But what if van Drood tries to marry Helen before he gets to London?” Daisy asked.

“Marlin would kill him first—or die trying. And then there’s Nathan. He arrived in London two days ago. At first we thought he was there to rescue Helen but then we watched him sit down to tea with Drood. I listened at the window and heard him say he had something Drood wanted —”

“The location of the third vessel,” I said. “That’s why he ran off—to bargain for Helen. Did he give it to van Drood?”

“Not yet. He told Drood he had a map with the location, but it was hidden and that if Drood wanted it he’d have to bring Helen to Victoria Station at noon on June thirtieth.”

“That’s tomorrow,” Mr. Bellows said. It was the first time he’d spoken since Raven had handed him Agnes’s letter, which he’d been engrossed in reading. “Today is June twenty-ninth. I’ve been a fool to lose track of time while we were running around in the maze. Agnes wrote this yesterday, on June twenty- eighth.”

Something about the date pricked at my memory. “Something was supposed to happen . . .” I began.

“The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand,” Mr. Bellows said, holding up the letter in a trembling hand. “Because of your warning the Jagers were there to stop it. They telegraphed to Agnes in London yesterday reporting that they managed to foil three attempts to bomb the archduke’s motorcade. Beatrice convinced the first assassin not to throw his bomb. Dolores mesmerized the second assassin. The third assassin threw his bomb but Professor Jager threw himself at the assassin and the bomb bounced off the back of the archduke’s car and went off under the next car, wounding a number of innocent bystanders, including Professor Jager, but sparing the archduke’s life. They thought they had succeeded. The archduke gave a speech at the town hall, in which he said he saw in the people ‘an expression of joy at the failure of the attempt at assassination.’ Beatrice reports that the archduke looked straight at her and Dolores when he said that. Then the archduke and the duchess proposed to visit the hospital where the wounded from the bombing were being treated, especially because they

wanted to thank Professor Jager. On the way there they took a wrong turn and as they were backing up a man by the name of Gavrilo Princip stepped forward and shot the archduke and then the duchess. They both died.” Mr. Bellows lowered his hand and dropped the letter to the table. “All our plans . . . even with a warning of what was to come . . . and we were powerless to change the course of history.”

“But war hasn’t been declared yet,” Daisy said. “Just because an Austrian archduke has been shot in Sarajevo, surely that doesn’t mean that war is inevitable. It took a while, didn’t it, Ava?”

I tried to remember the newspaper clippings I’d seen—the flurry of war declarations—what had the dates been? “I don’t think war is declared until early August. We still have time.”

“Agnes writes that Sam is talking to his contacts in London. Vionetta and Lillian are working with the Order’s contacts in the French government and the Jagers have gone to Berlin to try to stem the passion for war in Germany. But I’m afraid that all our attempts will be for naught if van Drood finds the third vessel and unleashes the rest of the *tenebrae*.”

“We have to keep Nathan from turning it over to him,” I said.

“And save Helen,” Daisy added.

“Raven and I will fly to London right away,” I said. “Someone should go to the Ardennes to warn the guardian of the vessel.”

“I’ll go,” Mr. Bellows said. “I know the region. I’ll take Daisy as far as London and then catch a train for Brussels.”

“We’ll go along to keep Moffy company and to fight for Becky—and England if need be,” Collie said with a quiver in his voice and so much love in his eyes that my own eyes stung.

“For Becky and Britain!” Jinks and Bottom cheered. We all joined in the second time, even Raven, who whispered to me, “Who’s Becky?”

“I’ll explain later,” I whispered back. “We’d better go.”

As I turned to say good-bye to my friends my vision blurred, and for a moment they all looked as faded and indistinct as the figures in a tapestry. Mr. Bellows looked like a knight, Daisy a medieval lady, and Collie, Jinks, and Bottom like brave squires. I rubbed my eyes, and instead of this bringing my friends into focus, the faded tapestries behind them sprung into vivid life and I saw that we were all there in the tapestry as if we had always been part of the fabric of this story. I blinked my eyes and the

figures in the tapestry faded again into the shadows. Perhaps it had been my imagination. But as I said my farewells to my friends and Raven and I flew out of the skylight, I had the uneasy feeling that the future had already been woven on some great loom, and our attempts to change it would be as fruitless as unraveling time itself.



I caught up to Raven as he sailed over the castle gatehouse. “The others might need our help getting past the shadows to the train station,” I shouted.

“I don’t think so,” Raven replied. “Look.”

He pointed down into the woods. At first I thought the woods were on fire. The ground was covered with smoke. But as I looked closer I saw that the smoke was made of shadowy creatures—rats and weasels and wolves—streaming through the forest. At first the sight made me even more afraid for my friends, but then I noticed that they were all moving *away* from the castle.

“They’re retreating,” Raven said. “Drood has called them off because he knows he has the location of the third vessel within his grasp. He must feel pretty sure of Nathan.”

I didn’t have anything to say to that. That Nathan had stolen the location of the third vessel and locked me inside the second vessel to get Helen back was a little better than thinking he had done it because he was possessed by the shadows. But the end result would be the same if we didn’t stop him. And watching the stream of shadow creatures did little to make me feel better. As they ran, their shapes blurred and blended into each other in a sickening boneless fashion. Rats grew wolves’ tails and weasels lengthened into snakes until they all became one clotted stream of bubbling ooze. I pictured this corrupt tide sweeping over all of England—and, when van Drood had broken the third vessel and they were joined by the hope-eaters, tainting all that was good in the world. How could Nathan have believed that giving van Drood the location of the vessel would save Helen, when it would condemn us all to living in a world of shadows?

At the end of the woods the polluted stream broke up into winged creatures—bats and crows and giant moths.

“We have to hurry,” Raven shouted to me. “We need to outfly them.”

We flew faster, over the village of Duntuath and the Bells, over gorse-covered hills and heathery moors. It felt good to be moving, to be breathing the fresh air. When we reached the sea we banked right and followed the coast south. We passed over an island near the coast with the ruins of a castle atop it.

“Lindisfarne.” Raven said the name softly but the wind carried it to me. “The Holy Island. It was once an outpost of your Order. When it was attacked by Vikings, the Order blamed the Jotuns from the north, but according to our Elders the Jotuns had been taken over by the shadows. It is still a sacred place watched over by the fay . . . look.”

He swept down toward some rocks on the south side of the island. I made out slick shapes lolling in the sun. A dark head bobbed up and blinked up at us, then barked and beat its flippers against the water, and slithered up onto the rocks. As it moved its sleek black coat fell away and a woman emerged, naked and shining in the sun.

“Selkies,” Raven said. “They patrol the coastline.”

The woman waved at us, unembarrassed by her nakedness, only partly covered by her long green-black hair, and called out, “Good hunting, Darklings. I am Roanne of the Merfolk. My folk tell me that the shadows are amassing over Londinium. Be wary and go with the blessing of the Sidhe.”

“Many thanks, Roanne. Tell your folk that the Order and the Darklings have joined together to defeat the Shadow Master, but if we fail there will be a great war. Your folk may want to find refuge in your underwater caves.”

She shook her head, her long lustrous black hair undulating around her like seaweed. “This will not be the first time that our folk have fought in your wars. When the long ships came from the north and again in the great armada we swam out to keep our lands safe. We will do so again if need be.”

Other men and women had emerged from their sealskins to stand beside Roanne. They looked so vulnerable in their bare skin that I shivered to think of them facing an invading army, but then they sent up a fierce shout that made my pinfeathers stand up and bristle and I was glad they were on our side.

As we flew south we saw more seals along the rocks, who barked at us and waved their flippers. They were circling the island of England, preparing to protect it as they had against the Vikings and the Spanish Armada. Their valor cheered me, but it also frightened me to think how much worse this war would be if van Drood unleashed the shadows from the third vessel. We had to stop him!

At the mouth of the Thames we flew inland toward London. I was excited to see the city for the first time, but as we grew closer a fog rose from the river, covering the marshes on either side of the Thames and obscuring everything in front of us. We were flying blind.

"I've read about these London fogs in Mr. Dickens's books," I told Raven, "but I never knew they were *this* bad."

"It wasn't like this when I left this morning. I don't like flying where I can't see, but we can navigate by sound."

"By sound? Do you mean like bats? I'm not sure I know how to do that."

"My father showed me how. Just follow me."

I flew close to Raven, our wingtips touching, and stayed quiet so as not to interfere with his sound navigation. He was tilting his head from side to side, the way I'd seen Blodeuwedd do when she was hunting, but he seemed uncertain and flew more slowly. I opened my Darkling ears and understood why. The fog distorted sounds, making some, like the foghorns on the ships we were flying over, swell to an unbearable pitch and others, like the cry of the seagulls, piercingly sharp. Listening to them all made me feel dizzy. It felt like my ears were filled with water. I tried shaking my head to clear them—and ran straight into a ship's mast.

Raven grabbed my arm before I could plummet to the ship's deck and steered me through a thicket of masts. We must have been near the city for the river to be so crowded with ships, but I still could barely make out anything.

"Let's try getting off the river," Raven said, his voice oddly distorted. "Maybe the fog won't be so bad inland."

Only it was so bad that we flew straight into a stone wall. Raven, flying ahead of me, hit the wall first. This time I kept him from falling. I pulled him up to an open window and we both perched on the stone windowsill to catch our breath.

"I'm beginning to think this isn't a natural fog," he gasped when he could talk again. "I think it was raised by—"

"Droood!"

The harsh croak came from behind us. I whirled around to see who had spoken but except for a few crows the tower room was empty. One of them opened its beak and croaked again. "Droood!" The other crows—there were five more—joined in. "Droood! Droood! Droood!"

I slid my dagger out of its sheath and whispered, "Shadow crows," to Raven.

"No," he said, staying my hand. "They're ravens. They're . . ." He looked around him at the tower we were perched in. "This is the Tower of London and these are its resident six ravens. They protect the tower. Ancient lore says that as long as there are six ravens in the Tower of London England will never—"

"Fall!" One of the ravens cawed. It hopped up onto Raven's knee and squawked again. "Fall! Drood! Fall!"

"What's it trying to say?" Although I'd learned a little about communicating with birds I wasn't as good at it as Raven. "Can you speak to it?"

In answer Raven let out his own raucous series of caws and croaks. The ravens ruffled their feathers excitedly and clamored around Raven, cawing and bobbing their heads up and down.

"They say that Drood raised the fog to keep the Darklings grounded. His crows have tried to attack the tower and kill the ravens but they fought back."

"Would their deaths really mean the fall of Britain?"

"*They* seem to think so and clearly Drood does, too. I've told them we're here to defeat Drood. They say we shouldn't fly, that other birds have warned them that the fog is dangerous to fly in and that their wild brethren have gone to their deaths slamming into buildings. The fog gets into their wings and weighs them down and spoils their navigational skills."

"Then how are we going to get to van Drood?" I asked.

One of the ravens cawed in answer.

"What did it say?"

"He said we should take something called the tube."



The tube turned out to be an underground train system much like New York's subways. We found a station not far from the tower and bought tickets. Raven seemed ill at ease taking the stairs below ground. It must have reminded him of the dungeons under the Hellgate mansion where he'd been kept a prisoner and tortured last year. I squeezed his hand and took over finding Belgrave Square on the map. While we were waiting for the train I studied the map and memorized the route to Victoria Station in case we needed it for tomorrow. I was hoping, though, that we'd be able to get Helen away from van Drood before that.

The train was full of clerks and secretaries traveling home from work. Many were reading newspapers. ARCHDUKE ASSASSINATED IN SARAJEVO, the headlines read. It gave me a sick feeling in my stomach to read the same headline I'd seen in tattered clippings pinned to Mr. Bellows's corkboard in the ruined Blythewood. I overheard a man and woman talking about the assassination. "No need to trouble yer little head over it, luv, that's a far piece from here. A spot o' bother in the Balkans don't have nothink to do with us."

I wondered what these people would think in a little over a month's time when their country was plunged into a war because of *a spot o' bother in the Balkans*. How many of these young men would go off to war to die? How many of these women would lose husbands, lovers, brothers, and friends?

Raven squeezed my hand, guessing where my thoughts were trending. "We'll stop him," he said. "And save Helen."

I squeezed his hand back and then noticed that we'd reached our stop. As we climbed up to the street in a crowd of young men and women I wondered for the first time what I would do if it came to a choice between saving Helen and averting war.

20



WE EMERGED FROM the tube station into a fog so thick that I couldn't see my own hand in front of my face. "How are we ever going to find it in this?" I wailed, just as a stout gentleman with a walrus mustache and a bowler hat hove into view.

"Excuse me, sir!" I shouted. "Can you tell us how to get to Belgrave Square?"

The gentleman stopped with a huff and responded with a series of garbled noises that sounded as if he had swallowed a foghorn. Then he vanished into the fog.

"Did you get any of that?" I asked Raven.

"I've had more intelligible conversations with mockingbirds and they only repeat whatever you say—here, someone else is coming."

A black pram breached the fog like the prow of an iceboat cutting through a frozen river. It was steered by a diminutive woman in a black-and-white uniform and a white frilled cap.

"Excuse me," Raven said, bowing. "Can you tell us the way to Belgrave Square?"

"I could tell you but it wouldn't do you a bit of good in this pea soup," the tiny woman replied. Looking at her closer I saw she couldn't have been much older than me. "It ain't natural, I tells the mistress this morning, and not 'ealthy for Baby's lungs, but she would 'ave me take 'im out for his *exercise* as if it's 'im what's pushing me around the block." She barked a short laugh. "But if you want to get to Belgrave Square without foundering

in the fog you'd best follow me. But be sharp about it, I don't have the time to lollygag all morning."

Raven and I exchanged a look and then jumped to keep up with the baby nurse, who, despite her short stature, was walking at a brisk clip.

"How long has it been like this?" he asked.

"The fog came up this morning before first light. Cook says it rolls in from the river, but I was up giving young sir 'ere his four a.m. and I saw it coming up from across the square—from that 'ouse with all them strange goings-on."

Raven and I looked at each other over the nurse's head. "Is it the house where the American gentleman is staying?"

"Oi, he's not a gentleman if you ask me, though no one ever asks Lizzie what she thinks. I seen all manner of unsavory types coming and going from there at all hours. I'm awake on account of young sir 'ere, so I sees it all. There's men that come to that 'ouse that 'ardly seem like men at all. Shadowy types, if you knows what I mean."

"Yes," Raven said, sliding his eyes toward me. "I think we do."

"Have you noticed a young American girl staying there?" I asked.

"Pretty blonde thing?" she asked.

"Yes. Helen, her name's Helen van Beek and she's my friend."

"Oi, I'm glad to know she's got one. Poor lamb looks like she's being led to slaughter. Every day at four o'clock she takes a turn around the park like clockwork—like *she's* a piece of clockwork. 'Er eyes, what you can see of them through the veil she always wears, glazed over like she's walking in 'er sleep, that 'orrible mother of 'ers clinging on to 'er arm as if afraid she might bolt. I 'ope you're 'ere to talk some sense into 'er."

"I am!" I said. "Four o'clock, you say?" I took out my repeater and flipped open the cover to see the time. The figures hammered out a tune I'd never heard before, ringing the four o'clock hour.

"Well ain't that somethink," Lizzie said, peering over the pram at my watch. "That's the tune your friend 'ums all the time. Is it a favorite song between you two? Somethink you sang at school mayhaps?"

"Something like that," I said, warily eyeing the row of iron spikes emerging from the fog.

"There's the park," Lizzie said. "Your friend will be inside by now. I 'ope she'll wake up a bit when she sees you. Ta-ta, now, try not to get lost

in the fog.” Lizzie waved at us and hurried past the entrance to the park. Within seconds she was swallowed up as if she had never existed, although I could still hear her remonstrating with “young sir” not to toss his pacifier on the ground.

“That’s not an old school song,” Raven said when Lizzie had gone. “Is it?”

“No,” I said. “I’ve never heard it before. It must be part of van Drood’s mesmerism spell, which means I won’t be able to use the repeater to demesmerize Helen. Oh, I do wish Mr. Omar was here.”

As if summoned by his name, the tall Hindu appeared out of the fog. His white turban and tunic blended so well with the fog that it was as if his head were floating bodiless. As eerie as the sight was I was overjoyed to see him. “Oh, Mr. Omar! Have you seen Helen yet?”

“No, but we have observed that she always walks in the park at this hour and have come to have a look at her.”

“Do you think you can free her of van Drood’s spell?”

“If he can’t, no one can.” I jumped at the voice and looked down to see Kid Marvel.

“Let us hope that is not true,” Omar said. “I have no way of knowing if Helen’s spell will yield to my influence until I see her. I do not like this fog. It befuddles the head and saps the spirit, it—”

“Messes up my ears,” another voice announced. Marlin appeared out of the fog, clad in a long waxed duster, water dripping off his shoulders and the brim of his hat.

“Have you been swimming in the Thames?” Raven asked.

“Might as well. I’ve been tracking the fog since dawn. It started from van Drood’s house—”

“Just as Lizzie said,” I said to Raven.

“—then swept counterclockwise around the city making stops at the House of Lords and Number Ten Downing Street.”

“Ah,” Omar said. “Van Drood is using the fog to infiltrate centers of power, lulling government officials into a false complacency just when they should be most alert to the threat of war.”

“The fog makes you want to lie down and give up,” Marlin said, his face grimmer than I’d ever seen it. I remembered what Raven had said about Marlin not being the carefree clown he appeared to be and how he’d

been disappointed in love once before. I wondered what the fog had been whispering into his ears this morning—apparently nothing good.

“I found myself thinking of hanging it all up and flying home to Ravencliffe, but then I remembered . . .” He paused and held out his hand. “Here she comes.”

A veiled woman dressed head to toe in black stepped out of the fog so silently that even my Darkling ears had failed to hear her approach, but clearly Marlin was more acutely attuned to her movements. I thought it must be an older woman, but then I caught the flash of blue eyes beneath the veil and recognized my friend.

“Helen!” I cried, stepping in front of her before she could pass.

She looked at me through the spiderweb shadow cast by the heavy lace veil. “Hello, Ava,” she said as if not at all surprised to see me. “How nice to see you. Have you come to town for my wedding? I’m afraid the weather is frightful.”

I gaped at her. “I’ve come to town to stop your marriage to van Drood!”

“You always did have a wry sense of humor,” Helen replied, nonplussed. “What larks we had at school.” She tilted her head back and forth as if looking for those memories.

“She seems to remember who she is and who I am,” I said to Omar, who had come up beside me and was peering curiously at Helen. “That must be a good sign, right? She’s not completely lost.”

“Of course I remember you, Avaline Hall of the Manhattan Halls. We were roommates at Blythewood, where we learned dancing and deportment and had cocoa parties and midnight feasts. It was all jolly good fun, but now I’m ready to take my place in society. So you see, I am not at all lost. I know exactly where I am—at Number Twelve Belgrave Square. Mama and I are guests of my betrothed, Judicus van Drood. We are to be married tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!” Marlin cried, stepping between Helen and me.

“Yes, tomorrow at the Grosvenor Hotel, which is located conveniently adjacent to Victoria Station. We are leaving for our honeymoon tour of Europe directly after. Please do come. The ceremony is at eleven o’clock.”

“That’s an hour before Nathan’s meeting with Drood,” Raven said. “Drood is double-crossing Nathan.”

“Nathan? Is he here?” Helen blinked her blue eyes. She looked as if she had an eyelash caught in her eye—or as if she were trying to see past the web of shadows over her face.

“Yes,” I told her. “Nathan found out the location of the third vessel to bargain with van Drood for your freedom. But if you refuse to marry van Drood he won’t have to give it to him.”

“But why would I refuse to marry Mr. van Drood?” Helen asked, blinking again. I wondered why she didn’t just push the damned veil away. Helen had never cared for veils. She had always thought they were fussy and old-fashioned. *Why cover my best asset?* she’d once remarked with candid pride in her own beauty. “He’s the richest man in New York, perhaps in all the world. Mother and I will have no more money worries once I am wed. I’ll be able to buy all the dresses I want and have a house in town and the country and summers in Newport and grand tours of Europe. I’ll have servants to tend to my every need and I’ll throw parties and be invited to all the right parties. I’ll never have to worry about anything ever again.”

“But he’s old enough to be your father!” I cried.

“Many girls marry older gentlemen,” she replied. “It’s quite the done thing and often the best course for a girl of my temperament. I need a steady hand to guide me. I’ve been rather fickle on my own.”

Her eyes had drifted to a spot over my shoulder. I turned and found Nathan standing there. He was wearing a black raincoat and a low-brimmed hat that cast his face in shadow.

“Yes,” Nathan said, stepping forward. “You have been rather fickle, haven’t you? You haven’t been able to decide between me and him.” He jerked his chin toward Marlin and I saw Marlin flinch.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Marlin said, moving closer to Helen. I could tell by the way his shoulders rippled under his duster that he wanted to unleash his wings and mantle them over Helen’s head. “I’d say that Helen chose me.”

“Only because she was frightened of her feelings for me,” Nathan said, moving closer to Helen. Her blue eyes were flicking from one to the other, darting beneath the veil like a pair of birds trapped in a net. “When I told you how I felt about you last summer you didn’t trust me . . . I suppose I may have expressed myself poorly.”

“You said,” Helen said, her blue eyes fixing on Nathan, ““As long as Ava’s chosen Raven, you and I might as well throw in our oars together.””

“You idiot!” I cried, swatting Nathan on the arm. “You know perfectly well that it’s always been Helen you loved.”

“Yes, I do know that now. And I know what an idiot I’ve been, thank you very much, but I’m trying to make things right.” He turned back to Helen. “Damnit, Helen, don’t you know how I feel? I’ve loved you since you climbed trees with me even though you were terrified of heights because you knew I didn’t really want to be alone. I love you because despite all the damn fool things I’ve done you’ve stood by me. You’ve always seen the good in me even when I couldn’t see it myself. Just as I see my Helen here, even under van Drood’s spell, fighting to get free and out from under that dreadful veil.” He lifted his hand to Helen’s veil, but she flinched away.

“That was a very pretty speech, Mr. Beckwith, but hardly an appropriate one to make to a betrothed lady. Of course I, too, have many fond memories of our childhood escapades, but that’s all they were. I have put aside my childish ways now and I suggest you do as well. I believe you have made a business deal with my betrothed. You have something he wants. You may think that you will be able to trick him into releasing me without holding up your end of the bargain but I will warn you, for the sake of the friendship we shared, for the sake of old times”—her eyes flicked to me—“you will fail. Judicus van Drood always gets what he wants. And as for bargaining for my release—it is pointless. I am bound to him by chains that none of you can break.”

She stared at each of us defiantly, blue eyes blazing beneath her veil. Nathan’s hands were balled into fists, Marlin’s wings were stirring beneath his coat, but it was Omar who stepped forward in front of Helen and met her challenging stare.

“It is the trick of the master mesmerist to make his victim believe that there is no escape, that the bars of her cage are unbreachable, the irons that bind her unbreakable. But no cage is inescapable if the captive believes escape is possible.”

“Then I am truly doomed, Mr. Omar, because I do not believe escape is possible.”

“But you *know* you’ve been mesmerized,” Marlin cried. “Shouldn’t that make it easier for you to break his spell?”

“I have not been mesmerized,” Helen said, her voice so icy I shivered. “I have simply been shown the truth. Mr. van Drood has removed the scales from my eyes and shown me what the world truly is. I have seen the polite smiles of ladies turn into jealous sneers, the benevolent regard of gentlemen exposed as lecherous leers. I have seen my mother’s maternal care revealed as craven fear of her own poverty and disgrace. Even your pretty declaration of love, Nathan, is only a desperate attempt to save yourself from self-loathing. Just as your attempts to save me”—she turned to Marlin—“come out of your guilt that you gave up on that Blythewood girl who stood you up in the woods. It’s occurred to you that she might not have come because something happened to her. But instead of looking for her you went off to sulk.”

“That’s not fair . . .” I began, but Helen rounded on me, her blue eyes freezing the words in my throat.

“You’re the worst of all, Ava. My dear friend, Avaline, so unselfish in your pursuit of the righteous cause. The phoenix, avenger of injustice, hero of the working girl. But you didn’t save your friend Tillie, did you? Or your mother. You’re afraid that if you don’t save me you’ll never be able to live with yourself.”

“That’s true enough, Helen,” I said, tamping down the dark thing at the base of my spine that threatened to rise up and slap Helen in the face for the hurtful things she’d said. *It’s van Drood talking*, I told myself. *My best friend in the world doesn’t see me as a craven hypocrite*. “I won’t be able to live with myself, but that doesn’t mean I don’t love you.”

“I never said you didn’t. I know you love me, but I also know you love yourself more. Don’t be offended, Avaline, it’s true of everyone, myself most of all. That’s what Mr. van Drood has shown me by removing the scales from my eyes. The world he is creating will be so much simpler. Everyone in his or her place, no one trying to rise above her station. It will run smoothly, like a well-oiled machine.”

I winced, recalling my dream of factory girls sewing themselves to their machines, van Drood lapping up their blood, and then I remembered what Gillie had said about van Drood’s factories in the future.

“Helen,” I said, lifting my hand to her veil, “you can’t want a world like that. What has van Drood done to you?”

She flinched as my hand touched the web of her veil. The lace felt peculiar—damp and spongy, as if it were . . .

“Alive,” Omar breathed. “The net on her dress and veil is living. That must be how she is entrapped. If we could remove it . . .”

“Oh dear,” Helen said, “imagine what people would say if they saw you ripping my dress off in the middle of Belgrave Square. And besides . . .”

She plucked at her veil, lifting it a few inches from her forehead—tugging her skin with it. The veil was attached to her skin by tiny shadow stitches—a nightmarish echo of my dream of the factory girls sewing themselves to their machines. “If you rip my veil off I will bleed to death. You see, it’s sewn to my skin.”

21



“THAT MONSTER. I will flay him alive.”

“So you’ve said a hundred times,” Raven said to Marlin, a wing draped around his shoulder. “And I will gladly help you. But first we ought to figure out how to get that thing off Helen’s face.”

“How can such a thing even be possible?” Agnes asked.

We were in the second-floor parlor of the house that Agnes and Sam had secured from “friends of the Order,” conveniently located across the square from van Drood’s house. When Helen had revealed that the shadow net was sewn to her skin, Nathan had made a strangled sound and fled the park.

“I’d better keep an eye on him,” Kid Marvel had said, quickly slipping into the fog.

“Yes, perhaps you should,” Helen had said, turning to leave. I’d reached out to grab her arm and she had screamed at my touch. Then she had looked over her shoulder at me and smiled sadly. “Who’s the monster now?” she’d asked before vanishing into the fog.

“I have heard stories about such things,” Omar said, sipping a cup of tea. We’d all needed something hot when we’d come in from the fog. “A net of shadows stitched to a man’s skin—there’s even a reference to it in one of your children’s books—*Peter Pan*.”

“Do you mean when Wendy sews Peter’s shadow back on his feet?” Agnes asked, appalled. “But that’s supposed to be amusing!”

“Dark truths often lurk in your fairy tales and nursery rhymes,” Omar said ominously.

“It’s a little like the selkies, isn’t it?” I asked, turning to Raven. “They can slip out of their skins. Maybe they can help Helen.”

“I could go to them and ask,” Raven said.

“And I will go to the British Library to study the ancient texts concerning shadow magic,” Omar said. “The rest of you should make a plan to remove your friend from van Drood’s hold.”

“She made it pretty clear she didn’t want to leave,” Marlin said.

“That’s the shadow net talking,” I said firmly, as much to convince myself as the others. The things Helen had said still stung. “It makes her see everything in the most negative light. She only sees the selfishness in people, not the good.”

“Hmph,” Sam said, “I had a law professor who sounded like that. *Cui bono?* he would tell us to ask. Whom does it benefit? There’s a certain truth in it.”

“But not the whole truth,” Agnes said. “Helen must see that. After all, she selflessly saved Nathan.”

“And she told us that she was to be wed to van Drood at eleven o’clock,” I said. “An hour before Nathan’s meeting with van Drood at Victoria Station. Why would she tell us unless she wanted us to rescue her?”

“So that’s what we’ll do,” Marlin said. “We’ll go to the Grosvenor Hotel at eleven o’clock and rescue Helen.”

“Yes,” Raven said, clapping his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “But we’ll need help.”

“Did someone say they needed help?”

We all turned to the doorway where Daisy stood flanked by Jinks and Collie. A crowd of boys jostled in the hallway behind them. I heard Bottom shout for them all to “pipe down!”

“Have you brought the whole school?” I asked.

“They all wanted to come and help Becky and his friends,” Collie answered. “Is he here?”

“No,” I said, “but he’ll be at Victoria Station tomorrow, and when he sees all of you . . .” I looked at all the bright shining faces of the schoolboys, many of them still streaked with blue war paint and what I

suspected were the remains of the raspberry biscuits they'd eaten on the train, all of them ready to risk their lives for their friend. For a moment I wondered how Helen would see them. Would she see selfishness and greed on their eager faces? But no, even the shadow net couldn't dim these faces. "He'll come back to us. Helen, too; I'm sure of it."

"Then we'd better get planning," Kid Marvel, who'd come in with the boys, said. "Have you boyos ever played a con?"

I turned from Kid Marvel as he began mustering the Hawthorn boys into a coherent team and noticed Sam and Agnes standing by the window whispering to each other.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Sam has a concern," Agnes began.

"I don't mean to be a worrywart, but when you asked why Helen might have told us that she was being married at the Grosvenor at eleven . . . well, there is another explanation. If she is under van Drood's power she could have told us that because it's a trap."



We spent the night planning Operation Thousand Ships ("Because of Helen of Troy," Jinks explained patiently to me). It reminded me of last year when Kid Marvel had taught us to play a con to rescue Etta's sister from the Hellgate Club—only Helen had been there then. I tried not to think of her alone in van Drood's house, trapped in that awful shadow net. *Does she have to wear the veil to bed? Does it hurt all the time?* Instead I busied myself making tea and keeping the Hawthorn boys full of raspberry biscuits and bread and butter. Marlin was perched on the roof keeping an eye on Helen's window. Raven had left to talk to the selkies, and Agnes and Sam had gone to the Grosvenor to "get the lay of the land." Mr. Omar and Collie had gone to Victoria Station to "obtain" porters' uniforms.

The plan was rather simple for one of Kid Marvel's cons. Agnes, Daisy, and I would go to the wedding posing as bridesmaids. I would grab Helen while Agnes and Daisy held van Drood at dagger point. Raven and Marlin would be nearby, as well as Sam and Mr. Omar. The Hawthorn boys, posing as bellhops in the hotel and porters in the station, would form a cordon around us to keep van Drood's agents from interfering with us. We would

take Helen directly to a train and get her as far away from London as we could—to an “undisclosed location,” which only Agnes knew, a school chum’s house in the country where she would be safe while Omar endeavored to free her of the shadow net. A simple plan, really, which the boys attempted to complicate by adding maneuvers from Caesar and code names from Kipling, which Kid Marvel good-naturedly humored.

“After all,” he remarked to me when he got up to help himself to a biscuit from the tea tray. “They’re going up against the evilest creature in creation. They need some fun to buck themselves up.”

“Are we wrong to let them help?” I asked. I was sitting in the window seat behind the tea table, anxiously keeping an eye on van Drood’s house across the square even though I couldn’t really see it through the fog.

“Do you want your friend back?”

“Yes . . . but doesn’t that make me as selfish as Helen said I was? That I’m willing to sacrifice these boys for my friend’s safety?”

Kid Marvel hoisted himself to the window seat and tapped his nose. “You got a case of the dismals, I see. You’re seeing things as if you’re the one wearing the shadow suit.”

“It’s kind of hard not to once you start looking at things that way. Maybe it’s not a spell. Maybe it’s just the way the world is.”

“And what if it is?” Kid Marvel surprised me by asking. “What if we’re all out to save our own skins and there’s no rule in this world but eat-or-be-et? Do you think that hasn’t occurred to me working at the freak show at Coney?”

“No, of course not,” I said, embarrassed that I’d been complaining to Kid Marvel, who’d no doubt had it harder than any of us. “That must have been hard.”

“Well, it weren’t no bed o’ roses, I’ll tell you that, but as my friend Gloria the bearded lady once says to me, ‘I coulda spent my life shaving or made my fortune on the gawker’s dime.’ Sure, I useta think it was every man for himself, but then Mr. Omar and Delilah opened my eyes and I saw little kindnesses all around me. I thought youse ding-dongs were the worst, but then I met you and your friends. You all saved those girls from the Hellgate Club last year—not just your own girls but the girls from the street, too.”

“Helen would say I was just trying to feel better about myself.”

“Helen might be right,” he replied. “But so what? What good does it do to think that way? I figure there’s little enough good in this world to look at it with a gimlet eye. So I choose to look at what we’re doing as *good*, no matter who might benefit from it. And as for these boys . . .” He looked around the room. Half of the Hawthorn boys had fallen asleep on the couches, chairs, and rugs; the other half were playing cards with Daisy, who was teaching them flush and trophies. “What do you think will become of them if Nathan gives Mr. van Drood the location to the third vessel? What *good* will come of that?”

“None,” I answered, shivering at the memory of the list of Hawthorn casualties on Mr. Bellows’s corkboard. “None at all.”



I couldn’t sleep. Daisy and I found blankets to cover up the sleeping boys and then I studied the maps that Sam had drawn of the Grosvenor Hotel and Victoria Station. Near dawn Raven flew back through the fog, his wings dripping with water that smelled like fish and sewage.

“Can the selkies help us?” I asked, pulling him toward the fire to dry off.

He shook his head, ruffling his feathers to shake the water out. “They have their hands full as it is. The channel between England and France is choked with some kind of netting that’s trapping selkies and other mer-creatures. It either drowns them or, worse, clings to their skin and changes them.”

“Like the shadow net on Helen,” Marlin said.

“Yes, I think so. If those nets are there when the war begins they could destroy the whole British navy. The selkies are looking for a way to get rid of them. Did you find anything at the library, Mr. Omar?”

Omar had returned a few hours ago with a stack of books that he and Sam and Agnes had been avidly consulting since then. He looked up now from a heavy volume. “We’ve found references to the shadow net but not how to destroy it without killing its host, but we’ll keep looking.”

“Maybe Nathan’s right,” Marlin said. “Maybe the only way to free Helen is to give van Drood the location of the vessel.”

“And what guarantee would we have that van Drood would remove the shadow net even if we did give it to him?” Agnes asked. “Or that he wouldn’t steal Helen again and enslave her once he unleashed the shadows from the third vessel? Once he has all the shadows at his command he will be able to enslave us all. Tell him, Ava, tell him what the world looked like after van Drood opened the third vessel.”

I looked at Marlin and saw frustration and rage in his eyes. “It’s true,” I said. “It won’t be a world where Helen—or any of us—will be safe. The human race will be enslaved in soulless factories. Scavenging airships will rule the skies where Darklings once flew free. We met you there, Marlin, and you told me yourself that you would do anything to change what had happened in the ten years after the vessel was broken. That it would be worth any sacrifice. You were even willing to let Helen go.”

Marlin held my gaze, eyes burning, hands balled into fists. Ready for a fight. I thought for a moment that he was going to attack me—I felt Raven tense beside me, ready to fly at his friend—but then something changed in him. The spark in his eyes stilled and became a steadier blaze. I remembered how he had looked when I met him in the future, how he had grown into a man, and I thought I saw the beginning of that man here.

“Very well,” he said. “I’m willing to sacrifice myself, but *not* Helen.”

“We won’t let Helen come to any harm,” Raven assured him. “You know Ava wouldn’t let anything happen to her. We’ll get her away from Drood to a safe place and Omar will find a way to free her of the shadow net. Then the rest of you must keep Drood occupied while Ava and I fly to the Ardennes. Hopefully Mr. Bellows will already have alerted the keeper of the third vessel that its safety is threatened. We’ll assemble an army there to protect it from Drood.”

“An honor guard,” Collie said, having awoken from his sleep. “Like the knights of King Arthur.”

The boys awoke then, excited by the talk of knights and battles. I retreated to the tea table to brew hot tea to fortify us all for the day ahead. I couldn’t argue with Raven’s plan, but it made me uneasy. “When armies amass,” Mr. Bellows had once told our class, “war is sure to follow.” And I was troubled by another thought. What if we couldn’t stop Helen from marrying van Drood? Should we warn Nathan and stop him from trading

the location of the third vessel for Helen? If Helen was truly lost, should we sacrifice her for the good of the world?



Dawn came with little change in the monotonous gray fog, but at half past ten the fog suddenly rose from Belgrave Square, like a curtain going up at the theater, just as the door of Number Twelve opened and Helen, her mother, and van Drood stepped out. Van Drood was heavily muffled in his Inverness cape and Homburg hat. Helen was still dressed head to toe in black, the awful veil attached to her face, but she carried an incongruous-looking bouquet of violets, which trembled in the watery sunlight. Her bridal bouquet.

“She always said she wanted a bouquet of orange blossoms and lilies of the valley,” Daisy said. “And a dress of peau de Chine trimmed with point d’Angleterre.”

“She’ll get those someday,” I told Daisy, squeezing her hand. “We won’t let this be Helen’s wedding day.”

Omar and Kid Marvel had left an hour earlier to get the boys stationed in their roles of bellhops and porters. Sam was waiting downstairs for us at the wheel of a Daimler motorcar to follow the “bridal party” in case they went somewhere other than the Grosvenor. We drove in silence, all our eyes fastened on the Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost that carried Helen, Mrs. van Beek, and Judicus van Drood.

“I don’t see any escort,” Sam said. “If I rammed into their car we could grab Helen and make a run for it right now.”

“I think it’s better if we stick to the plan,” Agnes said, touching Sam’s arm. At Agnes’s touch Sam’s shoulders relaxed and I realized how tense he was. We all were. I felt like hot wires were running up my spine and into my wings. It took every ounce of willpower to keep my wings from bursting out. I, too, wanted to ram the smug-looking Rolls, grab Helen, and fly away. But Agnes was right.

“Van Drood could have watchers posted along the street. We’re better off waiting to take her at the Grosvenor where we have backup and we can get her right onto a train.”

We continued down Upper Belgrave Street to Lower Belgrave Street and took a left on Buckingham Palace Road.

“Are we near Buckingham Palace?” Daisy asked, peering out the window. “I’d love to see it!”

“When Helen’s all better we’ll go on a tour to see the sights,” Agnes said. “Look, you can see Victoria Station! And there’s the Grosvenor. Van Drood’s car is stopping in front.”

I saw Helen getting out, taking the hand of the footman briefly, then standing ramrod straight and remote as her mother preened and rustled in her violet silks. Helen turned her head, looking over the roof of the Rolls at the street, until she was looking directly at us. I couldn’t see her eyes behind the veil but was certain that she saw us. Would she tell van Drood we were there? But when van Drood had finished helping Mrs. van Beek out of the car, Helen turned haughtily away and walked into the hotel ahead of her mother and groom.

“She saw us and didn’t tell,” I said. “She wants us to rescue her.”

“Let’s hope so,” Agnes said. “It will make things easier.”

Sam let us out at the front of the hotel and left to wait on a side street. If we couldn’t get to the train, the backup plan was to get to the car. The same footman who had tried to help Helen out offered me his hand. I was brushing past him when I recognized Jinks’s freckled face. “Your friend slipped me this,” he whispered, pressing a folded piece of paper into my hand. I unfolded the piece of paper, which I recognized as the robin’s-egg-blue stationery Helen favored. The handwriting didn’t look anything like Helen’s elegant script, though, it was crooked and jagged like it had been written by someone on a roller coaster—or by someone fighting a great force to get the words out.

“It’s a trap,” it read. “Flee!”

22



I SHOWED THE note to Agnes and Daisy.

“Never mind,” Agnes said. “We’ve got our own trap set.” She straightened her hat and marched into the Grosvenor.

I passed the message back to Jinks. “Tell the others,” I said. “Tell them to be careful.” Then I followed Agnes and Daisy into the crowded lobby, where I only managed to locate them by the upright yellow feather on Agnes’s hat. She was wearing an unusually frilly dress for her, in a pale blue instead of her usual navy. Daisy and I were dressed in the same pale blue. We were meant to be bridesmaids, as Agnes was explaining now to the bell captain. “We’re here for the van Beek and van Drood wedding, but we got held up in traffic. We’re to be Miss van Beek’s bridesmaids. You must take us to her right away.”

“It’s a private ceremony,” the bell captain began, but then Omar stepped beside Agnes and intoned in a deep, resonant voice, “We are part of the wedding party. Take us there at once.”

The clerk stared up at Omar’s turban, blinked once, and then stammered, “Th-they’re in the Palm Suite, right at the top of the stairs. Boy!” He snapped his fingers and a uniformed bellboy appeared. “Take these ladies and gentleman to the Palm Suite at once.”

The bellboy saluted, which seemed to startle the bell captain, and turned smartly on his heel, grinning ear to ear. I recognized one of the Hawthorn boys. “Right this way, sir, ladies. The Palm Suite, tooty sweet!”

We followed him up the grand carpeted staircase. I spied Kid Marvel lounging behind a palm tree on the landing and Bottom, dressed in a bell captain's uniform, dusting a portrait of Queen Victoria. A fluttering sound drew my eye up to the skylight and I saw a shadow of wings pass over the glass. Three ravens peered in. "Droood!" one cawed. The tower ravens had come to watch and pass messages. Raven and Marlin would watch from the skylights until we had Helen and then they would meet us at the station. I was surrounded by my friends, but as I walked up the deeply carpeted stairs I felt completely alone.

"Flee!" Helen had scrawled, as though her life depended on it. Or, knowing Helen, as if *my* life depended on it. We were walking into a trap, but what choice did I have? I couldn't let Helen marry van Drood. Perhaps, though, I could try to protect Agnes and Daisy.

"Let me go in alone," I said at the door to the Palm Suite. "If it's a trap you can get help."

"No," Daisy said, "we go in together. She's my friend, too. I'm not letting you face van Drood alone." She moved her hand to her waist where her embroidered reticule hung from her belt. She moved it aside and I saw the flash of a silver dagger. Agnes slid her dagger out of her pocket.

"Your grandmother would have my head if I let you go in there alone. We do this together." Her face was so pale her freckles stood out like splattered blood. I hoped it wasn't a presage of things to come—unless it was van Drood's blood. I was perfectly ready to shed some of his.



I was so geared for battle that when I pushed open the door to the Palm Suite I expected armed guards and shadow demons, not a room filled with orange blossoms and a harpist strumming Strauss's wedding dance, which I recognized now as the same tune my repeater had played yesterday. Van Drood, cloaked in an Inverness cape and Homburg hat, and Helen, still veiled, stood in front of an Anglican minister. Mrs. van Beek stood to the side, dabbing her eyes with a lace handkerchief. The only other witness was a frightened-looking bell clerk.

"Stop!" I cried. "This woman is being wed against her wishes." I strode down the petal-bedecked carpet, feeling like a figure in a penny dreadful.

Helen stared at me through her veil. Van Drood didn't even look at me. He was looking at the minister.

"Proceed," he said. "This hysterical female has formed an unhealthy attachment to my fiancée. Such is what comes of educating the weaker sex." There was something strange about van Drood's voice, but I was too angry to worry about it.

"*This* is what comes of educating women," I cried, drawing out my dagger. Daisy drew her dagger out and jumped between Helen and van Drood. Agnes pointed her dagger at the bell clerk, who ran squawking from the suite. I grabbed Helen's hand and pulled her closer to me. "We're leaving here with our friend," I said. "If you try to follow us you'll be cut down by our compatriots."

Van Drood turned toward me. I braced myself to meet his gaze, but I was not prepared for what I saw. There was no gaze because there was no face, just a blur between hat and cape. It was as if the fog he had summoned yesterday had eaten away his face. It made me feel ill to look at him, so I looked away into Helen's wide blue eyes staring at me through her veil.

"I told you to flee," she said.

"Sorry," I told her, "but I'm ready to do it now." I grabbed her hand. She winced as the netting on her sleeve writhed away from my touch, but I didn't let go. I pulled her back up the flower-strewn carpet, past her shrieking mother and the frightened-looking harpist and out the door of the Palm Suite. As we approached, the skylight shattered and a flock of crows streamed into the stairwell. Raven and Marlin landed in their wake.

"Go!" Marlin cried, fighting off the crows.

I dragged Helen down the stairs and headed toward the passage to the train station. As I crossed the lobby the uniformed Hawthorn boys dropped whatever they were holding—suitcases, tea trays, even a crystal vase full of roses—to fall in beside us.

"Who are all these boys?" Helen asked.

"They're from Hawthorn, our brother school, and they're Nathan's friends. Don't you see, Helen, we've all come to help you."

Her hand tightened on mine and I felt sure that the spectacle of the Hawthorn boys marching beside us would break van Drood's hold on her. Who could be unmoved by their bright shining faces? As we passed into Victoria Station the boys in porter uniform joined us, marching smartly as

though we were in a parade, and began to sing. It was a marching song they must have learned in school, the words a little silly, but they made my heart beat faster and raised goose bumps on my skin. It was impossible not to march to the same beat and impossible not to join in. I looked at Helen and saw that her face was wet with tears.

True to the Bell and Feather

We'll march all day and night.

Hawthorn boys forever!

We put up a jolly good fight!

"They're here for you," I told her. "They won't let van Drood take you back."

"Oh, Ava, how can you be so blind? These boys are marching to their deaths. All of them! This is how it starts!"

Her words turned my skin cold, but I kept hold of her hand and made her walk faster toward the track. The train had just pulled into the station. Great clouds of steam rose up to the iron-arched ceiling where pigeons wheeled—no, not pigeons—shadow crows. Marlin and Raven were up there, too, battling them. The steam billowed over the platform so I could barely see. Omar and Kid Marvel should have gone on ahead to meet us here, but I couldn't see them through the steam. Porters pushing trolleys piled high with trunks loomed out of the steam. I pulled Helen around them, dodging women with parasols and men with heavy black umbrellas. The boys were having trouble staying beside us on the narrow crowded platform, but that was all right. They had done their part; we were almost there. I saw Omar's turban floating out of the steam.

"There's Mr. Omar!" I shouted to Helen over the sudden sharp shriek of the train whistle. "We're almost there." The steam swallowed him up again. I plunged ahead and ran into a gentleman in a damp wool coat.

"Excuse me," I said, trying to step around the man. But Helen had come to a standstill, her hold on my hand a sudden leaden weight, like an anchor that had been dropped into the sea.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said, trying to look over the man's shoulder for Omar. "Could you let us by, please? Our traveling companions are waiting for us at the next car."

"I believe this is your car," the man replied in a deep, familiar voice. "I've reserved a private car for my fiancée."

I looked up into Judicus van Drood's cold black eyes. His face was starkly etched against the swirling steam. "But how . . . ?" I began, but then I heard a sniggering laugh behind me. I turned to find another man in Inverness cape and Homburg hat. His face was a blur, but as I stared it resolved into the vulpine features, sallow skin, and drooping mustache of Spring-heeled Jack. It had been him in the Palm Suite, not van Drood.

"But I thought you were to marry Helen," I said, turning back to van Drood.

"Did you think I'd subject my darling bride to an ignominious hurried ceremony in a public hotel? I have much grander plans for her—and for you, Avaline. But first there is a little business I have to attend to . . . ah, here is your school chum. It's quite the reunion."

I turned to find Nathan standing beside Spring-heeled Jack. Behind him I spied Mr. Bellows, Agnes, and Daisy trying to get past a porter with a stack of white and peacock-blue ostrich-skin trunks and valises, but the billow of steam cut them off. The steam had formed a circle around us, cutting us off from everyone else on the platform.

"Yes, we'll have a rousing round of 'Auld Lang Syne' once we're alone," Nathan said, holding up an envelope. "I have what you want—a map showing the location of the third vessel. Let Helen and Ava go and I'll give it to you."

"Our arrangement was for the release of Miss van Beek," van Drood said. "Miss Hall was not part of the deal."

Nathan's face stiffened.

"Don't worry about me," I told him. "Save Helen. I can leave any time I want."

"Can you?" van Drood asked, bending his eyes down to my left hand, which still held Helen's. I looked down at our intertwined hands. They were bound together by the netting from Helen's dress, which had crept over my hand and was now inching up my wrist. As if looking at it released some toxin, it began to itch like poison ivy.

"I'm sorry," Helen whispered. "I told you it was a trap. I told you to flee."

Nathan stepped closer, staring at our linked hands. "Can you let go of her hand?" I wasn't sure if he was speaking to Helen or me, but it was Helen who shook my hand away from hers. The net snapped and recoiled

like a snake. It wound itself tighter around my wrist and bit into my skin. Nathan tried to peel it off but it took a patch of skin with it.

“That only makes it worse,” Helen said. “But if anyone can withstand this dreadful thing, it’s Ava.” She wasn’t talking to me anymore, she was staring at Nathan. “Trade the map for Ava. I’m too far gone to help.”

“No,” I said, “take Helen. I’ll fight this thing. I’ll get free.”

“Tsk, tsk,” van Drood clucked like an old schoolmarm. “Such a difficult choice, son. I suppose it’s times like these you really need a father’s advice. Hm . . . what would a good father say?” He scratched his chin and furrowed his brow, looking for all the world like a benevolent patriarch. “I know! Follow your heart. Choose the one you really love. You *do* know which one that is, don’t you?”

Nathan’s face turned pale, his gray eyes flicking between Helen and me. Then he raised his eyes as if he were looking to heaven for guidance. A whistle broke the terrible tension. It came from the other side of the platform, where another train was arriving. Nathan’s eyes flicked toward the arriving train and widened as if he’d found what he was looking for.

He turned the envelope sideways and tossed it across the platform, onto the empty track in front of the oncoming train. A muscle twitched in van Drood’s jaw.

“Bad choice, son. Someone’s going to have to get that. Let’s see . . .” He turned to Helen. I was already reaching for her as he said, “Darling, be a dear and retrieve that envelope for me.”

As Helen stepped across the platform I grabbed for her arm, but I only got a handful of netting. It was writhing around her like a cloud, carrying her across the platform as she stepped into the path of the oncoming train. I screamed and threw myself toward her but before I could reach her a feathered missile streaked in front of the train and knocked Helen back onto the platform. Marlin was on top of her, his wings mantled over them both.

“Well, my dear,” van Drood said, brushing a bit of coal smut from his coat. “I think we’ve learned who cares the most for you. It’s very touching. Shall I relinquish my claim on you and leave you to your winged paramour? I really don’t have any use for you now. Sadly, I know what happens to girls like you after they’re jilted by their fiancés. Society will see you as ruined, especially after all the unchaperoned time we have spent together. No one will want you. You and your mother will languish in poverty. You’ll end up

like the heroine of that book I saw you reading the other day—what was it called?—oh yes, *The House of Mirth*. Doesn't the heroine die penniless and alone in a boarding house of a laudanum overdose—oh, dear, did I ruin the ending for you?"

As he spoke the netting writhed around Helen. She pushed Marlin away and struggled to her feet.

"Don't listen to him," Marlin said. "I won't let anything happen to you."

"Do you think you can stop her from ending herself once I've gotten inside her brain. Do *you*?" he asked me. "I'll never let her go. I'll hound her until she kills herself—just as I did to your mother. If you couldn't save her, what makes you think you can save Helen?"

"Stop it!" I screamed. "Let her go and I will tell you where the third vessel is."

"No, Ava," Nathan said. "We'll find another way."

"There is no other way. He's right. My mother thought she was free of him but she never truly was. I can't let that happen to Helen. I'll tell you right now where the third vessel is. I'll draw a map."

"And why should I trust that you will tell me the truth?" he asked, his voice a low growl that made my wings stir beneath my skin, "when you have tried so often to deceive me? You and your *cons*." He spit the word out.

"I'll take you there," I said.

"No!" Nathan stepped toward me, but I held up my hand—the netted hand—to keep him back.

"And how will I know that you won't lead me on a merry goose chase?" van Drood asked.

"Because I'll come, too," Helen said, stepping away from Marlin. "And Ava will know that you'll kill me if she doesn't keep her promise."

"What a capital idea, my dear," van Drood said, giving Helen a smile that turned my stomach. "I take back everything I said about calling off our engagement. I believe we will make an excellent team. Shall we embark on our wedding tour with your friend as companion?"

He held out his arm. Helen's arm rose as if lifted by the netting on her sleeve and took his. She held out her other arm for me. "Ava?"

I heard Nathan shouting behind me but his voice was drowned out by the train whistle and the engineer shouting, “All aboard!” The steam had cleared around us, freeing the passengers and porter to board the train. I turned around and saw Agnes, Omar, Kid Marvel, and Daisy hurrying toward us. Raven was swooping down from the ceiling, where he’d been fighting off the shadow crows. In a moment he would reach me. He would never let me get on the train with van Drood—but then Helen would get on alone.

I took Helen’s arm and stepped onto the train.

23



A TEA TABLE was set for three in van Drood's private car. A white ostrich-skin traveling case, trimmed with peacock blue, with my name printed on the luggage tag sat by my chair. A leather wallet containing a ticket for the Dover-Calais ferry reserved in my name lay on the table.

"He knew I'd come," I said after van Drood had gone with Spring-heeled Jack to make arrangements to have our luggage transferred at Dover.

"Yes," Helen said, dabbing at her wrist with a white linen napkin. "I told you—he always gets what he wants. I tried to warn you."

"They'll be following us," I whispered. Even though van Drood and Jack weren't in the car I suspected the railway waiters were his spies.

"Raven and Marlin, Sam and Agnes, Nathan, Omar and Kid Marvel."

"It doesn't matter," Helen said. "You've already told van Drood where the vessel is."

I had. It had taken only three minutes after we'd departed Victoria Station. Van Drood had suggested Helen use the fish knife to slit her wrist. I'd given him the location of the vessel as the first drop of blood bubbled through her skin.

"Ah, the Ardennes! I should have guessed. We'll go to Paris first as planned and then take the train to Brussels." Then he'd gone to make the arrangements.

"We can still stop him," I said, leaning over the table and grasping Helen's hand. "Mr. Bellows is already on the way to the Ardennes to warn the guardian of the vessel. Sam and Agnes will tell the Order to protect the

vessel. Raven and Marlin will muster the fairy creatures in the Ardennes—there are apparently quite a lot of them in the forest there. We'll stop van Drood from opening the third vessel and we'll destroy him."

"Then you'll destroy me, too. This net"—she plucked at her veil—"ties me to him. If he dies it will choke the life out of me. You too." She pointed at the bit of netting that encircled my wrist. It was only a tattered scrap that could have been mistaken for a bit of lace trim on my sleeve, but when I tried to pull it off it bit deeper into my skin. "If you don't get it off soon."

She drew her hand away and tugged her sleeve down to cover the mark on her wrist. "Perhaps there's still time for you," she said in a barely audible whisper. "If you get away, Omar might be able to help you."

"And as soon as I'm gone van Drood will tell you to hurt yourself. If you could stop yourself—"

"But I can't," she said in a resigned voice. "When he tells me to do something I can feel his voice inside my brain." She touched her temple where the feelers of the veil were attached to her skin. "My body goes numb and I see myself doing things I can't control. It's the most awful sensation."

"It's all right," I said, alarmed at how distraught she sounded. "We'll find some way to get that damned thing off you. Until then I'm not going anywhere. Besides," I said, trying to make my voice light, "I've always wanted to see Paris."



At Dover we got off the train and boarded the ferry to Calais. I looked around for Raven or Marlin, but there were too many people crowding onto the ferry to see. It seemed like everyone was going to France—packs of schoolboys, families on holiday, clutches of spinsters toting their blue Baedekers, solitary clerks-turned-artists sketching the white cliffs of Dover as we pulled out into the channel. Helen stood on the deck by the railing—my arm firmly linked around hers—and watched England recede into the mist. It seemed like the fog had followed us down to the seacoast. The famous white cliffs were so covered in mist we could hardly see them, but then the sun broke through the cloud cover and lit them up. They shone

white-gold under an ink-blue sky, edged with a bristly black border as if they had been outlined in India ink.

“Will you look at that!” a young man in tweeds looking through binoculars remarked to the troop of schoolboys he was evidently in charge of. “I’ve never seen the likes of that.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“Crows,” someone said, “’undreds of ’em.”

“No,” the schoolteacher said, lifting the binoculars back to his eyes. “They’re too big to be crows. Those are ravens. A whole—oh, what’s the collective noun for ravens?”

“An unkindness,” one of the schoolboys, who was sucking on a bright red peppermint stick, piped up. “But I never understood why. The ravens are supposed to protect England.”

“That’s right, Tommy,” the schoolteacher said. “That’s why there are always six in the Tower.”

“Can I borrow those binoculars?” I asked the schoolteacher.

He turned bright red and stammered something unintelligible while managing to tangle the binocular strap with the strap to his satchel.

“I think you’ve made an admirer,” Helen whispered.

She sounded so much like her old self that when I lifted the binoculars to my eyes I found they were too misted over to see anything. I blinked and wiped at the lenses with my sleeve and then looked again—and my heart rose in my throat. The cliffs of Dover were lined with black ravens all cawing loudly. Amidst them I made out larger shapes—Darklings. They were mustering the ravens. As I watched, two of those Darklings launched off the cliff and flew toward us. I lowered the binoculars and looked around to see if anyone else saw them, but except for Tommy, who was gaping up, his bright red mouth fallen open, no one seemed to see the two Darklings flying toward us. Their wings cloaked them from view, but they couldn’t land in such a crowd. Opening my Darkling ears I could hear their voices as they flew overhead.

“Are you all right?” Raven demanded. “Has he hurt you?”

“I’m fine,” I said in a quiet voice I knew he’d be able to hear. “It’s Helen he’s threatened to hurt. That’s why I have to stay with her.”

“I’ll kill the bastard,” Marlin swore.

“Helen says that will kill her. Omar has to find a way to sever the shadow net. Tell them to follow us to Paris. You two should fly to the Ardennes to warn Mr. Bellows . . . I-I told van Drood where the vessel was.”

“To save Helen,” Marlin said right away.

“You couldn’t have done anything else,” Raven said. “We’ll send Sirena and Gus to the Ardennes. Marlin and I will stay near you.”

“Thank you,” I said, glad that Marlin and Raven would be near. The schoolteacher, thinking my teary thank-you was for him, handed me his handkerchief.

“It always chokes me up, too, seeing the white cliffs of Dover. In fact, it reminds me of a poem . . .” His students groaned as he began to recite, one hand over his heart, the other raised and pointing to the cliffs.

*The sea is calm to-night
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand
Glimmering and vast . . .*

Although his students giggled and elbowed each other at first, they soon quieted and looked up at him with the same open-mouthed awe that Tommy had given the Darklings. The spinsters with their Baedekers and the families with their picnic baskets stopped talking to listen, too. I noticed sleek black heads pop up in the ferry’s wake and heard a selkie sigh at the line “Ah, love let us be true . . .” By the time he got to the final lines the whole deck was listening.

*And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
While ignorant armies clash by night.*

When he finished one of the spinsters broke out in “Rule, Britannia!” and we all joined in, even Helen, whose voice rang true and clear. I turned to her and saw that the wind had blown her veil away and her face was wet with tears.

“You see,” I said. “It will be all right.”

“No,” Helen cried out in a voice that sounded as if the net was choking her. “Don’t you see? All these poor boys are going to die. And we can’t do a thing to stop it.”



At the train station in Calais I saw van Drood studying the schedule board. “Ah look,” he said, “there’s a train for Brussels. Shall we skip Paris and go straight to the Ardennes?”

When he saw my frightened expression he laughed. “Or do you have a previous engagement in Paris? Perhaps your friends are meeting you there and you are afraid you’ll miss them if we go straight on to Brussels? Or perhaps you are worried they will not have time to send their friends into the Ardennes?”

He smiled, waiting for me to respond. Instead Helen said, “You promised I could go shopping in Paris.”

“So I did,” he said. “And what kind of fiancé would I be if I denied my bride a pre-wedding shopping spree in Paris? Jack! Four tickets to Paris please, and wire the Meurice to expect us for a late supper. Oysters and champagne for my bride and her companion.”



I puzzled over van Drood’s actions on the train to Paris, and then in the taxi from the Gare du Nord to the Hotel le Meurice, where we were escorted to a lavish suite overlooking the Tuileries gardens, and in the coming days, that turned into weeks, as we lingered on in Paris. What were we doing here? Why weren’t we rushing to the Ardennes to find the third vessel and crack it open?

Helen only shrugged when I pursued the issue with her. “Why question it? We’re in Paris. Isn’t it lovely? I thought we’d go to Worth’s this morning and then lunch at that lovely place on the Rue Royale.”

And so, on the eve of a cataclysmic war, with forces marshaling all around us, we spent our mornings shopping. We would leave our suite, passing by the door to van Drood’s private sitting room, where there always seemed to be some bureaucratic-looking gentleman nervously smoking, and

walk up the Rue de la Paix to visit the great *maisons de couture*—Worth, Paquin, Doucet, Poiret, the Callot Sisters—where we were served tea in their gilded salons and waited on like royalty. Helen chose morning gowns, afternoon gowns, and evening gowns in sumptuous silks and satins, trimmed with jewels and lace—all that finery spoiled by the black veil she still wore. I heard the shop girls whispering, wondering why *la belle americaine* always wore the veil. Was she a *religieuse*? Was she hiding a hideous birthmark? Helen ignored them all, silencing them with the lavishness of her purchases.

At first I refused to take anything, since van Drood was footing the bill, but when Helen pointed out that I couldn't wear the same dress every day I relented and agreed to have the plainest of tea gowns and a few shirtwaists made for me. The tea gown was made of white lawn so fine it felt like silk and was fitted with inserts of Belgian lace that had been made by nuns. All hand-stitched, the proprietress, one of the Callot sisters, told me. The stitches were so tiny they looked like they had been sewn by hummingbirds.

Broderie des fées, Madame Callot called it. *Fairy stitching*, she said with a wink that made me think she might know something about fairies. But when I tried to question her she looked uncomfortably at Helen and asked if "Monsieur van Drood" liked the dresses she had purchased for the opera.

After a heavy lunch in one of the fashionable restaurants, we would take a walk around the Tuileries gardens. One turn around the carefully groomed paths and then Helen would say she felt tired and wanted a little rest before dinner. I would go back with her, but I felt restless in the suite during the afternoon. If van Drood was out—he often went to long lunches or meetings—I would prowl around his desk to see if I could find any clues to what he was up to, but he would lock away his letters and only once did I find a torn envelope, which had the name Count Alexander Hoyos written on it.

Frustrated, I would go out again and walk around the gardens some more or into the Louvre. I would climb the stairs, passing the headless Winged Victory of Samothrace, and wander through the cool, vaulted galleries, gazing at paintings that I had only seen before in books—the Mona Lisa, who smiled at me as if she knew a secret she would tell if only I knew how to listen; Vermeer's lace maker, so intent on her task she seemed

to make her own light; Delacroix's Algerian harem girls, staring out at me as if daring me to understand their lives.

But the work I spent the most time looking at was a sculpture of a winged man and a swooning woman in a rapturous embrace—Canova's *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss*. The sculptor had caught the moment when Cupid has just landed and embraced his beloved, who has succumbed to the deadly poison from the flask Venus ordered her to bring back from the underworld. Psyche is tilted back, reaching for her lover, her curved arms framing Cupid's face, his wings soaring over his head, their eyes locked, their lips only inches apart. Although Psyche isn't winged, the way her arms curved reminded me of how Raven would mantle his wings above me when we kissed. And the way Cupid's wings stretched upright made me feel as though the figures were about to take off, made me feel as if *I* were about to soar upward, while looking at the space between their lips made me feel as if I were suspended in time, caught in marble, waiting while the world moved steadily toward war and every day Helen seemed less like herself.

She had begun to talk about van Drood as if he weren't the evilest man alive. "Isn't it generous of Jude to buy me all these clothes?" she remarked one day at the Maison Paquin. Or "Look at the lovely ruby choker Jude has given me. Will you help me with the catch?"

"You hate rubies," I had reminded her as I secured the clasp beneath her veil. "You told me once you thought they were gauche."

"What did I know? I was just a child. Look how they make my neck look—so graceful, don't you think?"

"It looks like your throat has been cut," I said, regretting the words as soon as they were out of my mouth. For all I knew van Drood had meant me to say them to plant the idea into her head, but she only laughed and told me not to be so maudlin.

But she'd taken the choker off and not worn it to the opera that night. All the shopping, I realized then, was her attempt to keep at bay the morbid thoughts that preyed on her. The next day we'd gotten lost in the streets behind the Louvre. Helen said she felt faint and had gone into a little courtyard beside a church. I went into the church to find her a glass of water and when I came back with it I found her staring up at a statue of a gargoyle, tears streaming down her face beneath her veil.

“What is it?” I cried, staring up at the gruesome face. “It’s only a gargoyle. They’re meant to drive away evil.”

“It’s not the gargoyle,” she moaned, “it’s what’s under it.”

There was a sort of roughly hewn globe beneath the corbel supporting the gargoyle. It was very old and crumbling and difficult to make out so I stepped closer to see better—and then recoiled. Climbing out of the globe, *gnawing* their way out, were rats.

“It’s meant to represent the world being destroyed by poverty,” the nun who’d given me the water and followed me out said.

“It’s the shadows,” Helen said. “All that’s evil and foul in the world coming out at last. It’s what’s inside us.” She laid her hand on her breast. “Eating its way out.”

The nun stared at Helen and then crossed herself and hurried away. I took Helen’s hand and led her back to the hotel.

When she was settled in bed I went back out again and into the Tuileries, walking briskly around the manicured paths and neatly lined allées of pollarded trees, searching the faces in the crowds for someone familiar. We’d been in Paris for four weeks and I hadn’t seen Raven or Marlin or any of my other friends. Had they abandoned us? Had they abandoned *me* because I’d given away the location of the vessel? Or had van Drood’s henchmen scared them off—or, worse, done away with them?

The thought that I was all alone, at van Drood’s mercy, made me walk faster and faster. I passed fashionable ladies strolling arm in arm, and nannies chasing after their charges down the wide paths. I heard snatches of conversations. Many were talking about the trial of Madame Henriette Caillaux, wife of the finance minister, who had shot the editor of *Le Figaro* for publishing her husband’s personal correspondence, which revealed that she had had an affair with him while he was still married. Others were talking about where they would go to escape the oppressive heat.

“I hear the kaiser is taking the waters at Bad Ischl,” a dandy in striped trousers remarked to his older female companion. “Perhaps we should go there.”

“I hear Marienbad is smarter,” his companion replied.

Are you all insane? I wanted to shout. *War is coming!* And no one, including myself, was doing anything about it.

I took a turn around the basin where little boys were launching toy warships and old men strolled with their arms folded behind their backs and young men lounged in cast-iron chairs reading *Le Figaro*. *L'acquittement*, the headline read, *Le verdict de honte*. So Madame Caillaux had been acquitted. Only one column on the far right side of the page dealt with *Le conflit Austro-Serbe*. How could everyone be so blind?

I passed a statue of Medea grieving for her children and then one of a Roman senator in calm repose, then one of men in scant tunics fighting. The statues alternated between scenes of tragedy and peace as if reflecting on man's ability to look away while others suffered. I stopped in front of a statue of Cassandra and stared at the doomed Trojan woman. She had been cursed to see the future but not be believed. Eventually it drove her insane. I imagined myself running through the Tuileries, snatching the newspaper from the hands of that well-dressed dandy and telling him he would be marching to Belgium in a matter of weeks, shouting at the little boys launching their boats that real warships—flying ones—were on their way to bomb them, shaking the old woman who thought Marienbad was smarter than Bad Ischl. It would be *smarter* to go hide in your root cellar.

They would lock me up. Just as van Drood had locked me away in the Bellevue Pavilion for the Insane. Only no one would come for me this time.

I turned away from the statue, defeated, and found a tall veiled woman standing in front of me. At first I thought it was Helen, but this woman was taller. Had I been talking to myself? Was she going to call the gendarmes to take me away?

But then she lifted her veil and I recognized Lillian Corey.

"Thank the Bells, we've been trying to catch you alone for weeks! Come with me—we don't have much time!"

24



LILLIAN PUT HER veil back down, linked her arm through mine, and steered us toward the river side of the park. She kept us to a measured pace but her grip on my arm was tight and I could tell she wanted to walk faster. We turned left on the Quai des Tuileries and joined the afternoon crowds making their slow promenade beside the Seine.

“I swear I’d like to knock the hats off these ladies and gentlemen just to wake them up,” she said.

“I was just thinking the same thing. I-I’ve felt so alone. Where have you all been?”

“Never far,” she replied, squeezing my arm. “But we had to be careful. Van Drood has spies everywhere. At the hotel, in the Tuileries, in the *maisons de couture*, even the Louvre. But Raven and Marlin have been watching you from the rooftops so when we needed you today we knew where to find you.”

“Needed me? Has something gone wrong?”

“The real question is has *anything* gone right! But I’ll let the others fill you in. We’ve called a meeting.”

We crossed on the Pont Neuf to the Île de la Cité. “Did you know,” she asked, “that the first settlement of the city was here on this island? There is a legend that the original settlers, the Parisii, were the survivors of the lost city of Ys. The Boat People, they were called. That’s why Paris has a boat on its coat of arms and its motto is *Fluctuat nec mergitur*—she is tossed by the waves but she does not sink. Some say the survivors of Ys were fairies.

So it makes sense that there'd be an established community of fairies in Paris."

We were passing by the great cathedral of Notre Dame now, under the watchful eyes of the grotesque stone gargoyles. I shivered, recalling the sculpture of rats gnawing their way out of the earth.

"I haven't seen any fairies since I've been here."

We had come to a little park behind the cathedral at the tip of the island. I looked around for my friends and any fairies, but all I saw was an old woman sitting on a bench knitting socks.

"You just have to know where to look," she said. And then, nodding to the old woman, "*Bon jour, Marie.*"

Marie made a reluctant grunting noise and clicked her needles together. The hedge behind her vanished, leaving only a greenish haze—the same green, I saw now, as old Marie's eyes. A green that reminded me of Gillie. Before I could ask if she were a French cousin of the Ghillie Dhu, Lillian was saying *merci beaucoup* and pulling me through the green haze into a charming secluded bower bounded on three sides by tall hedges (the one behind us grew back as soon as we were on the other side) and open to the Seine on the fourth. Lanterns hung in the hedges and bits of stone statuary—remnants from the cathedral's restoration, I guessed—littered the grass. A picnic was laid out on a checked cloth—wicker baskets full of bread and cheese and fruit and bottles of wine and lemonade—around which lounged an odd assortment of characters, including a turbaned man in a white tunic, a dwarf, a naked woman, and, standing with his back to us, a winged man.

"Raven!" I cried when he turned around.

He rushed across the grass to me and lifted me in his arms. He mantled his wings over our heads and kissed me. All the doubts I'd felt these last weeks fell away.

"I'm so sorry I haven't been able to come to you. Van Dood—"

"I know, I know," I said. "It's better you stayed away."

The light filtering through his feathers dappled his face. He held my face in his hands and looked into my eyes. "Are you all right? Has that monster—"

"He hasn't touched me," I said, but Raven was already picking up my hand to look at the net under my glove. I snatched my hand away. "Don't! I don't want it to spread to you."

“Why would you care if you were really all right?” he demanded. He unmantled his wings and turned from me. “Omar, have you figured out how to get this thing off her?”

Omar uncrossed his long legs and stood up to look at my hand. He waved his hand over the net and spoke some words in Hindi. The net stirred and swayed back and forth like a cobra’s head bobbing to a snake charmer’s flute, but then it sank back down, biting deeper into my skin. I bit my cheek to keep from crying out.

“I’m afraid I haven’t mastered the right spell yet,” he said sadly.

“You moved it at least,” I said, trying to reassure Omar—and Raven. “I’m sure you’ll figure it out. In the meantime . . .” I turned to the rest of the gathering. Miss Sharp stood up to embrace me. Dolores Jager and Gus were there, too.

“I thought you had gone to find Mr. Bellows in the Ardennes,” I said to Gus, and then turning to hug Dolores, “I thought you were in Vienna!” She was wearing a striped skirt and vest and carrying a courier’s bag strapped across her chest. She looked older, somehow, as if she’d become an adult in the weeks since I’d last seen her.

“We flew to the Ardennes but we didn’t see any sign of Mr. Bellows *or* the vessel. So we flew on to Vienna to check on Dolores—”

“Gus flew me out so I could deliver my report to our friends here,” Dolores said, waving to the others. The naked woman stood up, her long black hair settling around her in an approximation of clothes. “This is Islay,” Dolores said. “She’s a selkie. She’s come from Britain to represent her people. And this . . .” She held out her hand and one of the “lanterns” descended from the hedges and alit on her palm. It was a diminutive winged sprite, much like a lamprite, but draped in diaphanous layers of gauze that were somehow more stylish than the rustic lamprite’s garb. I leaned closer, expecting that she would brush her wings over my skin to communicate . . . and she promptly sneezed in my face.

“Sorry,” Dolores said, “I should have warned you. That’s how the lumignon communicate. They’re cousins to our lamprites.”

The lumignon let loose a stream of chatter that I only half understood despite the quantity of pixie dust she’d sneezed in my face. I caught the words “American barbarians,” “our august history,” “Marie Antoinette,”

and “*Vive la France!*” the last pronounced with one hand over her heart and the other pointing to the sky.

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mademoiselle . . .”

She let loose another stream of incomprehensible words that Dolores translated as “Gigi.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Mademoiselle Gigi.”

Gigi sniffed at me and flew down to the picnic basket, where she helped herself to a thimbleful of wine. I started to sit down on one of the toppled statues, but everyone cried out and Dolores grabbed my arm to stop me. The statue I’d been about to sit on lifted its stone head and blinked at me.

“These are the gargoyles,” Miss Sharp said. “They’ve generously agreed to be a part of our council even though they are very busy.”

“We . . . guard . . . the . . . island,” the gargoyle said in a slow, rumbling voice. “Since . . . before . . . the . . . first . . . men.”

“They’re very old,” Dolores whispered in my ear.

“But . . . not . . . deaf,” the gargoyle rumbled. “We . . . protected . . . the . . . city . . . when . . . the . . . North . . . men . . . came . . . and . . . we . . . will . . . guard . . . it . . . now . . . from . . . the . . . shadows.”

“We will be much in need of your protection, Monsieur,” Omar said, bowing to the head gargoyle. “The shadows are amassing as we speak. We have seen them gathering in the streets of Paris, whispering fear into the hearts of Frenchmen and instigating a passion for war amongst the heads of state.”

“It’s even worse in Vienna,” Dolores said. “My father thought that even after we failed to avert the assassination of the archduke we might still stop the war. And at first we thought it was working. The German ambassador warned the Austrian foreign minister against taking hasty measures against Serbia. The emperor Franz Joseph’s first letter to the kaiser did not mention any military action. My father felt sure that the situation could be resolved by diplomatic means.” Dolores looked around the strange assembled group, her pale face lit up. I remembered when she wouldn’t utter a word. Now she’d become an eloquent spokeswoman for peace.

“My father has always believed in the power of diplomacy. He would be heartened to see us all assembled here today in the spirit of peace and cooperation. He labored day and night, hardly sleeping or eating, urging an honorable peace over a cataclysmic war. We thought it hopeful when the

kaiser embarked on his Scandinavian cruise and the emperor Franz Joseph proceeded with his holiday at Bad Ischl. But we had not counted on the warmongering duplicity of the foreign minister's chef du cabinet, Count Alexander Hoyos—"

"Hoyos?" I interrupted. "I saw his name on an envelope in van Drood's office."

Dolores nodded grimly. "I am not surprised. Count Hoyos *interpreted* Franz Joseph's letter to the German undersecretary of foreign affairs, claiming that what Franz Joseph *really* meant was that Germany must support Austria-Hungary to crush Serbia. He appealed to the valor of the kaiser, who responded that he would not fail Austria-Hungary. The flame of war had been kindled. In the coming weeks my father and his colleagues in Vienna and Berlin tried to avert war, but at each turn we were faced by van Drood's agents, who stoked the fires of nationalistic fervor. Count Hoyos *interpreted* the kaiser's response as a mandate to occupy Serbia. And so Vienna issued an ultimatum to Serbia that Serbia could not accept and now Austria has declared war on Serbia. My father has gone to Russia to talk to the tsar and Beatrice has gone to London to speak to parliament, but it is unlikely now that the ball has been set rolling that war can be averted. We suspect that the Germans will soon be marching on France through Belgium —"

"Where the vessel is," I said. "We don't even know if Mr. Bellows has been able to warn the guardian that an attack is on the way. We don't even know if Mr. Bellows is all right!"

"No," Gus admitted. "Sirena and I searched the area but we didn't see Mr. Bellows. When we tried to make contact with the local fairies we were rudely rebuffed. They don't much like Darklings."

"Could Mr. Bellows have been waylaid by some of van Drood's henchmen?" I asked.

"It's possible," Miss Sharp conceded. "But our informants in Belgium say they haven't seen any increased shadow activity in the Ardennes."

"I don't understand," I said. "Why has van Drood waited so long to go to the vessel and open it?"

"It doesn't seem like he needed it," Gus said. "You humans have been all too ready to plunge yourselves into a war even without an infusion of more *tenebrae*."

"I'm afraid that's true," Miss Sharp said. "But we know from Ava's trip to the future that the third vessel does get opened and that it results in a war that destroys everything."

"Perhaps van Drood didn't need the vessel to start the war," I said, "but he needs it to win the war. And perhaps he was just waiting for the right time to attack the vessel."

"What do you mean?" Miss Corey asked.

"I think I know," Dolores replied. "The German army will be marching on Belgium. What better host to carry an army of shadows to attack the defenders of the vessel?"



We talked long into the afternoon about the best strategy to employ.

"We should still do all we can to avert war," Dolores argued.

"We must mobilize!" the lumignon countered.

"We . . . must . . . defend . . . our . . . city . . . at . . . all . . . costs," the gargoyles rumbled.

"We must secure the channel," the selkie insisted.

It was decided to do all of those things. The lumignon would marshal all the fay of France to be ready to help the troops. The gargoyles would stand guard over Paris. The selkies would secure the coastline. Gus would fly Dolores back to Vienna to monitor the progress of war preparations and then go on to Belgium to check on the Darkling deputation to the Ardennes. Vi and Lillian were set up in a little garret on the Left Bank near the Sorbonne from which they were able to keep in touch with their connections in the French government. They even had a wireless, although the lumignon sniffed at that mode of communication and offered to carry messages across the channel to Daisy, who had stayed behind in London. Sam and Agnes were waiting in Calais for further orders.

"And what about Nathan," I asked. "Has anyone seen Nathan?"

Everyone looked uncomfortable. Finally Omar answered. "No one has seen him since Victoria Station. I'm afraid he might be too far gone in the shadows to help."

"I don't believe that," I said. "I know that if I could talk to him he'd be all right."

“Perhaps,” Miss Corey said quietly. “But for now it’s best you stay with Helen.”

“And what will I do?” I complained. “I can’t sit around Paris shopping while the world is falling apart.”

Lillian and Vi exchanged a look. “We don’t think you’ll be sitting around Paris much longer. If van Drood is waiting for the German army to march on Belgium he’s likely to make a move soon. When he does, the best thing you can do is stay with him.”

“We’ll be keeping an eye on the hotel,” Raven said. “If Drood moves you, we’ll follow.”

“As will we,” Omar said, nodding at Kid Marvel. “If we need to get a message to you we’ll send a lumignon.”

I glanced skeptically at Gigi, wondering how reliable a courier she would be. Still I was glad that my friends would be close. I didn’t feel so alone anymore.

As if reading my thoughts, Omar stood and held out his arms, encompassing us all in the orbit of his magnetic gaze. “We are facing a time of great turmoil and danger. I fear that even if we succeed in keeping van Drood from opening the third vessel, the world as we know it is heading for a dreadful cataclysm, one that we will only weather if we join together. I see a great darkness enveloping the world. Let us attempt to be the light in that darkness.”

As he spoke I noticed that it had grown dark in the grove. I felt a chill, both from Omar’s words and from the realization of how late it had gotten.

“I have to get back,” I told Raven. “If van Drood notices I’m missing he might hurt Helen.”

“I’ll go with you as far as the Tuileries,” he said.

I said my hurried good-byes to my friends—old and new—and stepped through the green doorway. Marie still sat on her bench, patiently knitting socks. “For the soldiers,” she murmured as I ran by. “It will be cold where they’re going.”

25



IN THE SQUARE in front of Notre Dame a crowd had gathered around the statue of Charlemagne. They were passing a bottle around and singing “La Marseillaise.”

“Austria-Hungary has declared war on Serbia!” I heard someone shout. “It will be us next.”

Bonfires had been lit along the Seine. I gaped at the sight of a burning man on one of them

“It’s only an effigy,” Raven said, gripping my arm to steer me through the crowds. “Of the kaiser, I think.”

The peaceful atmosphere of the Tuileries had been completely altered. Marching bands played in front of the Louvre. The little boys who had been launching their toy ships on the basin now raced around with sticks in their hands pretending they were sabers. Even the old men looked more animated, and I heard one reassuring his elderly female companion, “Don’t worry, our boys will be home before the leaves fall.” Just a few hours ago I had been frustrated by the complacency of the French people, but now I was frightened by their fervor and excitement.

“They seem *glad* about the prospect of war,” I said.

“I don’t blame them,” Raven surprised me by saying. “I know I’m tired of sitting around doing nothing while waiting for Drood to make his next move.”

“But we could all be killed,” I cried.

Raven grabbed me around the waist and pulled me to him. All around us men and women were holding each other, knowing they might soon be parted. “Then we’d better make this night count,” he whispered in my ear. And then, before I knew what he was doing, he launched us from the ground into the sky.

“Are you crazy?” I cried. “What if someone saw us?” But when I looked down I saw that no one in the crowd was paying us the least bit of attention, so I spread my own wings. They felt stiff and clumsy after weeks of not flying, but then it felt marvelous to stretch them out and feel the wind moving over my feathers. We sailed over the Tuileries and the Hotel le Meurice, where I saw van Drood leaving through the front door and getting into a long dark limousine.

“He’ll be busy tonight,” Raven said. “He won’t notice that you’re gone. Helen will be all right.”

I could have argued, but instead I followed him, swooping over the rooftops of Paris. The late evening light still glimmered in the west, reflecting in glass windows, turning the clay chimney pots on the roofs a deep red and the west-facing stone walls the color of honey against the cool blue gray of the steeply sloping rooftops.

“It all looks so different from up here!” I cried as we sailed over the ornate crenellated rooftop of the opera house. “Like a different world.”

“It’s our world,” Raven said, swooping around a golden statue of a winged man holding a torch in one hand and a broken chain in the other. “See, he’s broken his chains. He’s a Darkling freed from the bounds of the curse.”

“He’s the *Génie de la Liberté*,” I said in a schoolmistressy voice that sounded a little bit like Miss Sharp’s. “And he’s meant to commemorate the Revolution of 1830.”

“He’s meant to stand for freedom—look.” He pointed to a man standing at an easel in a garret window. He was painting the crowds in the street, capturing the blur of faces around a bonfire and the sparks rising into the sky like fireworks. At another window a woman sat writing in a notebook, her face reflected in the glass like a pale companion to her solitude. In another three men passed around a bottle of wine, arguing and laughing.

“Poets, painters, philosophers . . . in Paris they all live near the sky.”

We soared over the dome of Sacré Coeur on the top of Montmartre and looped back down toward the spire of Notre Dame. Everywhere people were out in the streets and in the squares, singing and drinking around bonfires. I could feel the fear and excitement rising with the smoke—and something else: a deep love for their city. Paris must be protected. The life that flourished here in the gardens and cafes, in the rooftop garrets and classrooms of the Sorbonne, must be preserved. Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité! I felt their zeal stirring in me as we flew back over the Place de la Concorde and across the Seine, which shone with the reflection of the lights on the bridges and the bonfires along the quays. As the last light drained from the sky, a million lights kindled in the City of Light and I remembered what Omar had said. *We must be the light in the darkness.*

We soared over the Pantheon, where Voltaire and Rousseau were buried, and over the crowded streets in the Quartier Latin, where packs of students shouted and sang. We finally came to rest on a rooftop overlooking the Jardin des Plantes on a balcony bound by a curved iron railing and cloaked from the street by a hanging curtain of ivy and ferns.

“What is this place?” I asked.

“A painter’s rooftop studio,” Raven answered, lighting a hanging Turkish lamp. “He’s away sketching in Morocco. I’ve been camping out here. We can’t all have a suite at the Meurice.”

The open-air studio was covered by a wrought-iron awning, from which hung gold-stitched silk shawls. Thick Oriental rugs covered the floor. Silk pillows and tufted hassocks surrounded a brass tray holding a samovar, gilt-edged teacups, and a glass hookah. It all reminded me of one of the harems in Monsieur Delacroix’s paintings.

“I like this better,” I said. “It reminds me of your nest in the Blythe Wood. Only instead of tea . . .” I opened a basket and found a bottle of wine, a loaf of bread, cheese, and fruit.

“Are you hungry?” Raven asked. “I’ve been going to the market at Les Halles and there’s an excellent bakery on the Rue des Écoles. Have you been to the Sorbonne? I went to a lecture last week on the philosophy of time . . .”

Raven chattered on as he poured wine into the gilt-edged glasses and fixed me a plate of bread and cheese and fruit. He seemed nervous. Was it because he was afraid of what van Drood was up to? Or of the coming war?

But then I looked around the snug studio—at the sketches of naked models pinned to the walls, the soft pillows and rich throws, the screen of ivy shielding us from the world, and realized he was nervous because we were alone together in his lodgings. We’d been alone together before but this was different—because we were different. When I’d met Raven after my lost time in Faerie I’d felt as if he’d grown up faster than me. Now I saw that there wasn’t so much difference between us. I’d grown up, too, in the last few weeks.

“. . . Paris really is a city of ideas,” he was saying now. “There are statues of philosophers, scientists, and artists on every street corner, book stalls lining the Seine, people talking about ideas in the cafes—”

“You’ve seen a different Paris than I have,” I said, catching his gesticulating hand in midair, “but I feel it, too. Would you like to live here . . . after . . . I mean, if we succeed in stopping van Drood?”

He looked up at me, his face shining in the lamplight. “Yes! That’s just what I want. But only if you would come with me. Do you think . . . ? Could you . . . live like this?”

“In a garret in Paris? With you? Yes, I can’t think of anything I’d like more.” I touched his face and he grasped my hand and pressed his lips to my palm. Their warmth set something fluttering inside me that stirred the hanging ivy and the billowing shawls.

Then he was beside me, his arms around me, his lips on mine. He pressed me down into the silk cushions and I caught a scent of some exotic perfume in the air—night-blooming jasmine and mimosa and Eastern spices from the market-places in the teeming streets below us. I pressed back against him, my heart leaping so hard in my chest I thought it would burst through my ribcage, only it met his heartbeat instead. I pressed my hand on his chest, not to push him away, but he drew his head back to look at me, his eyes locked on mine, his face glowing gold as if the bonfires on the streets had spread to this rooftop.

And they had. My wings had unfurled and caught fire, lighting up the bower, bearing us both aloft. The beating of our wings had lifted us up. We were suspended in the air—and suspended in time—the air between us quivering. *If only this moment could last forever*, I thought, but then we drew together at the same moment, lips to lips, breast to breast, and we sank back to earth together.

Time *didn't* stop, but for a little while it seemed to slow down. Each touch, each kiss, each glance seemed to expand. When with trembling fingers he unbuttoned my blouse—the same one I'd bought at Madame Callot's—each button felt like the toll of a bell that resonated deep in my bones. A bell echoed by the treble bell in my head, the bell that signaled my love for him. His hands moved over my bare skin like the wind over sand, shifting the very shape of me. I *was* changing, becoming someone bold enough to unbutton his shirt, to explore the landscape of his flesh—the long, smooth planes of his chest muscles, the secret dark hollows of his throat, the sea-washed shore behind his left ear. But no matter how far I strayed, his eyes always brought me back to the moment. They steadied me, even when my heart raced faster and my breath came in short gasps and I realized we'd come to a precipice together, that we were standing on the edge of the dark unknown and it was already too late to step back even if we'd wanted to.

But I didn't want to. I didn't mind falling with him. I didn't mind the dark with him—not the dark in me or the dark in him—as long as we were together. Only when we plunged into the abyss together did I remember I had wings—wings of fire to light up the dark. We lit up the dark together, sparks flying into the night like all the bonfires of Paris exploding midair, the bells in my head ringing so madly they set all the bells of Paris ringing.

Later, lying under the silk and cashmere throws, looking out at the night sky, Raven asked me what I was thinking about.

"Something Helen asked me last fall," I answered. "She asked if I ever wanted a spell to stop time. I was thinking that I'd like one right now so that this night would never end."

Raven drew me closer—although we were pretty close already—against his bare chest and pressed his lips to my forehead. "If I could choose one night in which to dwell forever this would be the night," he murmured, his breath tickling my ear. "But remember I *did* stop time once and it was . . . *cold*. According to the physicists at the Sorbonne, it's the flow of time and the friction of us moving through it that keeps us warm—and keeps us alive."

He kissed me to demonstrate the laws of physics and I found I couldn't argue with him. Still when I next looked at the sky and saw that it had changed from deep violet to lavender edged with rose I felt a sinking in my

heart. We dressed and flew in silence over the Latin Quarter, where the street cleaners were sweeping away the detritus of last night's crowds and the bakers were going to work to bake the daily bread. War might be coming but the Parisians would still come out for their baguettes and croissants and their morning cafés au lait.

As we crossed the Seine I caught a glimpse of sleek dark shapes swimming downstream. The selkies were swimming toward the sea. As we flew over Notre Dame one of the gargoyles appeared to wink at us—or it might have been a trick of the rising sun.

We landed on the roof of the Meurice to say our good-byes. "I hate leaving you here," Raven said angrily.

"I know." I stroked his unruly hair back from his face. Limned by the rising sun he looked as if he were edged by fire. "But I can't leave Helen alone with him. And we'll all be going to the same place. I'll know you're close, and once we defeat van Drood—"

Raven pulled me to him. "We'll be together. We'll come back here to Paris—"

"And live in a rooftop garret and survive on bread and cheese—"

"And each other," he finished, kissing me fiercely. Afraid that if I didn't go now I never would, I tore myself away and launched myself off the roof. I looked back over my shoulder and saw him standing on the rooftop, wings edged with the glow of the rising sun, looking like one of the statues that stand guard over the city. Then I ducked down to the fourth-floor balcony to our suite.

Helen was standing at the window, fully dressed, wringing her hands. "Thank the Bells, I thought you'd never come back. Where have you been?"

"I met with our friends," I said. "Lillian and Vi, Dolores and Gus, Raven and Marlin—"

"You saw Marlin?" she asked, plucking nervously at her veil. "Is he all right?"

"Yes, he's fine. Worried about you—"

"And Nathan? Was Nathan there?"

"No," I had to admit. "No one knows where he is. But the picture isn't entirely bleak . . ." I began to tell her our plans but she held up a hand to stop me.

“Don’t tell me. I can’t guarantee that I won’t tell van Drood if he asks.”

“Did he notice that I was gone?”

“Thank the Bells, no. He’s been gone all night. I was terrified he’d come back before you. Were you really plotting with Miss Corey and Miss Sharp all night?”

I turned away to hide the blush that was rising to my face, but even with that blasted veil covering her face she was too sharp to miss my guilty expression. “You were with Raven, weren’t you?” she demanded.

“So what if I was?” I replied, tilting my chin up and defiantly meeting her gaze through the netting of her veil. “You spent quite a few nights alone with Marlin on the *Lusitania* and you don’t even love him. I *do* love Raven and I don’t know when I’ll see him again . . .” My defiant speech ended on a warbled sob. Helen’s shocked expression faded into pity. She opened her arms and let me fall into them. While I soaked the front of her blouse with my tears she patted my back and murmured soothing lies.

“There, there, of course you’ll see him again. This will all be over soon and you’ll be free to go and Raven will be waiting for you. At least you’ll have someone waiting for you.”

I pulled myself up and wiped my eyes. “Helen, you have *two* men in love with you. Marlin saved your life at Victoria Station. He’s been guarding you since we got to Paris. And you must feel something for him after all those nights on the *Lusitania*.”

“Oh that,” Helen said, looking embarrassed, “that wasn’t what you seemed to think it was. Marlin wanted tutoring in French. He’s planning on applying to the Sorbonne when all this is over.”

I gaped at her. “But you let me think . . .”

“Did I? I suppose I wanted to shock you. You’re always the one flying around having adventures. I wanted to be the daring one for a change.”

“So you and Marlin . . . ?”

“No.” Her eyes widened. “But you and Raven . . . ?”

“Yes,” I said, blushing again and trying to keep from smiling at the memory of his kisses, his touch . . .

“Well, I suppose everything’s different in wartime. I suspect things won’t ever be the same between men and women after this. And you don’t have to tell me how it was—I can see that. You look different.” She gave me an appraising look, pushing aside her veil a little to examine my

features. “You look older but also newer—like you’ve been washed clean by the rain.” Her eyes came to rest on my wrist. She snatched my hand up and gasped. “The shadow net! It’s gone!”

I looked down at my wrist and saw that she was right. Where the net had been was a sprinkling of tiny burns. I remembered the moment when Raven and I had come together . . . how I’d felt as though I was on fire. “I think it burned off when we . . . when I . . .”

“You mean *that’s* how to get rid of it?”

“Well,” I said, my face flaming, “I think it was feeling as if the dark couldn’t touch me anymore, not because there isn’t darkness in the world, but . . . I felt like I could see the darkness in me and in him but it didn’t matter anymore because there was something bigger between us—a light that burned everything else away. At least . . .” I finished with an embarrassed grin. “I think that’s when it happened.”

“Oh,” Helen said, her blue eyes wide as china saucers. “Oh!” She lifted her hand to adjust her veil and a very tiny bit of the shadow net fell away.

“Helen! Your veil—it’s coming apart.”

She stared at the scrap in her hand. “I think it’s because this is the first really honest talk we’ve had in months—since before we fell down that hole into Faerie.”

“I think it is,” I agreed, reaching out to take her hand. But before my fingers reached her the door banged open and van Drood walked in. His head was bare, his silver-streaked hair wild, and his cape thrown back from his shoulders. He looked *bigger* than before, as if his nighttime wanderings through the crowds had inflated him. The skin over his face was red and stretched taut as if he’d been singed by the bonfires. His lips were very red as if he’d been drinking red wine—or gorging on blood.

“Ah, my two little turtledoves,” he said, “still safe in the nest. I was afraid one of you might have flown the coop.” He gave me a look that made me think he knew exactly where I’d been. I was terrified that he’d punish Helen for my transgression, but instead he grinned and clapped his hands. “Pack your bags. We’re leaving Paris within the hour!”

26



WE LEFT PARIS that morning in van Drood's Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow, Spring-heeled Jack driving. Van Drood suggested we sit in the rear-facing seats so we could get a "last glimpse of Paris before it falls" while he sat across from us facing "the front," as he called it. We drove north through the city, caught up in the crowds of men heading toward the Gare du Nord and the Gare de l'Est. We passed the *salons de couture* on the Rue de la Paix, all their shop windows now sporting tri-color flags. The opera house was draped in red, white, and blue bunting, too, and in the cafes along the Rue la Fayette the usually bored- looking coffee drinkers waved flags at the troops marching to the station.

"Fools," van Drood said. "They think they're going off to a fancy dress ball. Look at those ridiculous red trousers. They'll make easy targets for the Hun."

"I think they look handsome," Helen said.

"They do," I agreed, "but perhaps they should wear something a little less . . . *conspicuous* into battle."

"It won't matter," van Drood said, rubbing his hands together. "In a month those pretty red *pantalons* will be covered in mud and the only red anyone will see will be their blood oozing into their precious French soil. Listen to them . . ." He cranked the windows so we could hear the soldiers singing. Instead of "La Marseillaise" they were singing a song about Alsace and Lorraine, the territories France had lost in the last war.

“All they can think about is getting their precious Alsace and Lorraine back.” He paused, as if aware he’d said too much, but I detected in him a rare willingness to talk, perhaps fed by the fervor of the crowds.

“So these troops will go to the French-German border. What’s wrong with that?”

Van Drood snorted, but didn’t say anything.

“Oh,” I said after a moment, “it leaves the Belgian border undefended . . . but the Germans wouldn’t march through Belgium, would they?”

“I see you’ve studied your geography,” van Drood replied warily. “I commend your history teacher—what was his name? Rupert Bellows? Is he still in London trying to rouse the doddering old fools at the foreign office to the current threat?”

I was surprised that van Drood didn’t know that Mr. Bellows was in the Ardennes. Instead of answering his question I asked one of my own. “Wouldn’t the Germans risk angering the British by violating Belgian neutrality?”

Van Drood made a mocking sound. “The British won’t commit their troops so fast, and when they do it will be too little too late. The German army, aided by my recruits, will sweep over France. They’ll be marching down the Champs-Élysées by September. So don’t look so sad, my darling.” He leaned forward to pat Helen on her face. I tensed, afraid he’d notice that her veil was torn. I had wrapped a bit of netting around my wrist to keep him from seeing that I was free, and I’d helped arrange Helen’s veil so the torn bit wouldn’t show, but if he touched it . . .

But as his hand approached Helen’s face the veil moved. It was only a slight stir, but it seemed to change van Drood’s mind. He dropped his hand and sat back in his seat and looked out the window.

“Yes, we’ll be back in Paris before the leaves fall,” he said heartily, but I thought I detected a shadow of uncertainty pass over his eyes. Was he afraid of the shadow net that he himself had thrown over Helen? If so, that might be useful. But the thought that even van Drood was afraid of the thing he’d entrapped her with made me feel sick with fear for her.



We drove northeast through Picardy and Champagne, over flat country and rolling hills, past dozing villages and castles perched on hilltops, van Drood ticking off the names of villages like bowling pins the German army would soon knock over. The names sounded familiar to me and I knew I should pay attention in case he revealed a bit of strategy that would prove useful later, but I hadn't slept the night before and the movement of the car combined with van Drood's droning voice soon put me to sleep—

—and dropped me, as though I'd fallen through a rabbit hole, into the burnt and ruined Blythewood of the future. I was standing in Mr. Bellows's classroom in front of the map of Europe reading the names of villages marked with red pins.

Liège, Ardenne, Charleroi, Mauberge, Sambre, Nancy, Verdun, Reims, Meaux, Paris . . . someone had pinned a photograph next to Paris. I took it down and stared at it. It was a picture of a man and woman driving on the Champs-Élysées, only it was obviously shot in a studio against a painted backdrop of the Arc de Triomphe. The man's face was a blur.

I *knew* this photograph. Etta's sister Ruth had had it taken with van Drood in Coney Island last year.

"He was planning even then on taking Paris."

I whirled around and found Helen standing behind me. She was dressed head to toe in black and wearing the shadow veil, but it was torn and ragged. She stepped forward and looked up at the map.

"We should have paid more attention in class," she said with a rueful smile that reminded me of the old Helen.

"Are we really here?" I asked. "Or are we in the car with van Drood?"

She shrugged. "How should I know? Raven's the one who's been attending lectures on time at the Sorbonne."

I sighed. "This is just a dream, then. I didn't tell you about Raven going to the Sorbonne. You're just a projection of myself."

Helen frowned. "That seems awfully self-centered of you." She shook her head. A blonde curl escaped from under her veil and a piece of the netting fell off. I noticed now that the netting on her sleeves was also unraveling. "No matter, though, what's most important is that we stop this." She tapped the map with a gloved finger. "We're already too late for some of these places. Liège, Charleroi, Mauberge . . . but we could still stop him

here.” I leaned over her shoulder to see where she meant, but a fog had risen obscuring my vision.

“Uh-oh,” Helen said. “He’s here. I’d better go now.”

I jolted awake in the car, my neck jerking painfully against the seat cushion, upsetting Helen, whose head had been resting on my shoulder. Van Drood was staring at me.

“Bad dream?” he asked.

“I-I don’t remember,” I stuttered.

His lips parted in a wolfish grin. “You shouldn’t keep such late hours. I’ll have to keep a better eye on you in Bouillon.”

“Bouillon?”

“A quaint village in the Ardennes on the river Semois with none of the distractions of Paris.”

He jerked his chin toward the window and I looked out—and immediately wished I hadn’t. I was staring into a churning abyss. We were on a steep winding road far too narrow for the huge Rolls-Royce. Below us a fast-moving river dashed over jagged rocks. We were so close to the edge that I could feel the car teetering as I leaned toward the window.

I shrank back from the window, afraid my weight would send us hurtling to our deaths. Van Drood laughed. “Anyone would think you couldn’t fly! Now, my dear fiancée is afraid of heights, I know. Aren’t you, my dear?”

“I’m much better than I used to be,” Helen replied. “Heights seem a minor thing to be afraid of given the state of the world today.”

Van Drood barked a short laugh. “Delivered with élan, my dear. But I really can’t have a wife with such a crippling disability. Jack . . .” He clapped his hands and Jack looked back toward van Drood. Seeing him take his eyes off the road made me feel sick. “Can you pull over at the top of this next curve? I want to show my bride the view.”

“That’s not necessary,” Helen said. “Ava will tell you I’m not much for scenery. I’m really more of a city girl.”

“Nonsense! I’ve gone to a lot of trouble to bring us all this far. I want you to appreciate my efforts. Right here will do, Jack.”

We came to a stop in the middle of the road. There was no shoulder on the side on which to pull over, which meant that if any other vehicle came around the hairpin turn in front of us it would likely plow right into the

Rolls and send it crashing down the cliff. But there seemed little point in mentioning this to van Drood. He was already getting out of the car, pulling Helen with him. I followed, determined to spread my wings if he pushed Helen over the cliff.

Which looked like what he was trying to do. He'd dragged her to the edge of the road, where the earth dropped away into empty air. His arm was clasped around her waist, one hand gripping her elbow. Helen was pressed back against his arm, staring down into the chasm. The air roared with the sound of the rushing river and the thrum of my blood thundering in my veins. I stepped next to Helen and looked over. Across the valley stood a ruin of a castle, the stones so black they seemed to block out all the light. A waterfall tumbled from the rocks into the river below. The rocks looked very sharp from here.

"Don't worry," I whispered. "Even if he pushed you I could fly and save you."

"Could you?" As he spoke I heard a heavy click and felt something cold encircle my wrist. I looked down and saw that Jack had snapped a metal cuff to my wrist. It was attached by a metal chain to the radiator grill of the Rolls. I jerked at the chain but it wouldn't budge.

"I'd stay still if I were you," van Drood said. "If you thrash around you might upset Helen's balance."

To demonstrate he gave her a little push. She teetered on the edge of the cliff, dislodging stones and clods of earth that plummeted straight down to the river. She turned around to reach for me but as I shot out my hand Jack was there with another metal cuff to snap onto my wrist.

Van Drood smiled and pushed Helen over the cliff.

The veil billowed out to reveal Helen's horrified face as she reached for me. I screamed and flailed against the chains, the cold steel biting through my skin. At the last second van Drood reached out and grabbed her hands. He knelt at the edge of the cliff, holding her over the abyss, and leaned forward to whisper something in her ear. I only heard it because of my Darkling ears.

"Don't . . . you . . . ever"—he spit out each word—"ever try to get inside my mind again."

Then he lifted her up to the road and let her go. He stood up, dusting the dirt from his knees, and turned to Jack. "I think the ladies have had enough

sightseeing for the afternoon. You can remove the handcuffs from Ava. I don't think either of the young ladies will be giving us any more trouble."

Helen wouldn't meet my eyes for the rest of the drive, but I kept staring at her. The netting on her sleeves was torn—just as it had been in my dream.



The descent into the little village of Bouillon would have been pretty if I wasn't sick to my stomach with fear. What did van Drood mean by Helen getting inside his mind? I knew that through the shadow net van Drood was able to get inside Helen's mind, but had Helen somehow found a way to reverse the process? And what about my dream? Was it really only a dream or had Helen found a way to communicate with me in a shadowy dream space? What was she trying to tell me? Could she dare risk trying again after van Drood's threat?

By the time we wound our way down the steep, twisting road I was dizzy. Looking up at the blackened castle rising vertiginously from the river only made me feel dizzier. The Castle of Bouillon stood on a high dark rock in a sharp bend of the river, cut off from the land as if by a moat. Wreathed in river fog, it looked like a floating island, remote and unassailable. Only an arched bridge attached the castle to the town, but it looked as if it might crumble at a heavy footstep. The town itself, cowering in the shadow of the hulking castle, looked dreary and deserted. No one sat in the one cafe. The only person we passed was a girl in a peasant dress and white lace cap leading a bleating sheep, and she gave the Rolls one look and hurriedly turned into an alley and vanished. The only sound in the town was the monotonous rushing of water.

Perhaps the villagers had heard the Germans were on their way and gone into hiding—or perhaps living so long in the shadow of the great hulking castle had made them naturally timorous.

There was no one in the lobby of the village's one inn. Van Drood struck the bell on the counter so hard it rang out like a gunshot. A large woman in a rusty black dress with an elaborate white collar appeared from the dim interior of the back office and approached the counter.

“Your best suite for my fiancée and her companion,” van Drood said in French. “And something facing the street for me. I want to see the soldiers when they come marching through the town.”

The manager turned pale and quickly bent over a large dusty register, studying it as if the hotel were full to the brim, and finally produced two enormous old keys, each chained to a heavy brass fob and a tattered red tassel.

“Do the mademoiselles require more than one key?” she asked in heavily accented French.

“*Non*,” van Drood replied. “They are so devoted to each other that they go everywhere together. Besides, my fiancée is not feeling very well. She will need to rest.” He looked around the dismal lobby, which contained one worn settee, two straight-backed chairs, and an empty birdcage, as if it were the lobby of a grand resort where invalids came to take the waters and rest cure. “And it looks like we have come to the right place for that.”

I helped Helen up to our “suite,” a dim shadowy room papered in faded toile and furnished with two lumpy twin beds, a towering mahogany armoire that listed to the left, a round table covered with a dingy lace doily, a chipped enamel washstand, and two chamber pots. I expected Helen to make a withering remark, but she only lay down on the bed farthest from the window and closed her eyes. I sat down beside her, the bedsprings moaning at my weight, and moved the veil from her face. The veins at her temple stood out blue against her dead-white skin.

“Helen,” I whispered. “Can you tell me what van Drood meant? Are you able to get inside his head?”

She shook her head and screwed her eyes more tightly shut. Her face was rigid with pain. I filled the basin with cool water and bathed her face, loosened her clothes, and covered her with the mildewed counterpane. When her face finally relaxed and her breathing evened I got up quietly and went to the window to let in some fresh air.

There was an iron grate over the windows—a decorative pattern of acanthus leaves and scrolling vines, but prison bars nonetheless. I shook it in the hopes that like everything else in the old hotel it would be frail and broken, but although it left rust marks on my hands it was solid and unyielding. I checked the door and found that it was locked from the

outside. We were van Drood's prisoners in body and, I was beginning to suspect, in mind.



WHILE HELEN DOZED fitfully, moaning in her sleep, I sat at the window and watched the sun set over the castle. As the sky turned rose, then lilac, then deep purple, the towers of Castle Bouillon grew blacker and seemingly larger, as if they were drawing up the darkness from the river and swelling with it. I felt as if they might overflow at any moment and pour darkness down over the town—and they did. When the sun dropped below the curtain wall, a cloud of smoke poured out of the highest tower and streamed over the battlement walls and down the steep rock slope. I let out a startled gasp and rose from the window, fumbling for the shutters to shut out the onslaught.

“It’s the bats, mademoiselle. They live in the castle tower and come out when the sun sets.”

I turned to find a young girl dressed in a peasant’s homespun dress, starched white apron, and white cotton cap, standing in the doorway holding a heavy tray.

“My *grand-mère* says they are the souls of the dead. It is a cursed, dark place.” She took a tentative step into the room, angling the tray sideways to move past me.

“Let me help you with that,” I said, stepping toward her. *I could push past her*, I thought, *and run*. But what would happen to Helen? I took the heavy tray from the girl and laid it on the rickety table, which rocked under its weight.

“You speak English?” I asked her.

“*Oui*, mademoiselle. A little. The nuns taught me. Madame Berthelot told me you were two English sisters and one of you is sick.” She looked at Helen. “She does not look so well.”

“She’s not my sister, she’s my best friend. I’m Ava. What’s your name?”

She looked surprised to be asked. “Manon, mademoiselle.” She curtsied. “I am sorry your friend is sick. Madame Berthelot sent up broth and bread. She says you will be staying in your room and that I should lock the door when I leave, but I told her I didn’t like to do that. What if there is a fire? I say to her. But she say there has never been a fire at the Hotel de Bouillon and that the gentleman you are traveling with insisted that the ladies were in danger from a jealous suitor and must be protected. Is that true, miss? Do you have a jealous suitor pursuing you?”

“No, Manon, the only ones pursuing us are our friends. It is the man traveling with us who is our abductor.”

Manon’s eyes grew wide. “*Mon dieu!* I knew that man was no good.” She lowered her voice to a whisper. “I thought he might be a German spy sent to plan an attack on our village. Do you think the Germans will come here, mademoiselle? My brother Albert left to join the reserves and half the village has gone to visit relatives in France. I was glad to see him go!”

“You were glad to see your brother go?” I asked, confused.

“No, no, mademoiselle, I meant the gentleman who looks like a German spy, begging your pardon. Perhaps he is your uncle?”

“No, he’s no relation. He’s gone?”

“*Oui*, he and that oily brigand left a few hours ago. I heard him tell Madame Berthelot that he was driving to Liège. So you see, if you have a beloved now is the time for him to come rescue you just like Valancourt comes to rescue Miss Emily in Mrs. Radcliffe’s book. Do you have a Valancourt, miss?”

I smiled at the chambermaid, pleased to find she was an admirer of Mrs. Radcliffe’s novels. “Yes, Manon, my . . . er, Valancourt is coming for me. Perhaps you have seen him—or our friends—in the castle?”

“*Mon dieu!* Let us hope your Valancourt has not gone to the castle. The Castle of Bouillon is haunted!”

“Haunted?” I asked, thinking that Raven would be unlikely to be frightened away by the spirits of the dead. After all, it was the job of a

Darkling to carry the spirits of the dead to the afterworld.

“*Oui!* Have you not heard the story of the fairy queen of Bouillon?”

“The fairy queen?” I asked, trying hard to follow Manon’s serpentine stories. “No, I thought this story was about a haunting . . .”

“*Oui*, it is the fairy queen who haunts the castle. You see, a long, long time ago . . .” Manon began, sitting down at the table and settling in for what promised to be a long story, “in the time of the crusades, the knight Godfrey was wandering through these woods and he came across a beautiful woman bathing in the river with her seven handmaids. He instantly fell in love with her—”

“I always find this part rather preposterous,” I interrupted. “People don’t fall in love instantaneously like that.”

“It was not like that with your Valancourt?” Manon asked.

I remembered the first time I saw Raven at the Triangle factory, the little charge I’d felt when he touched my hand. And then I thought about how it felt when he touched me last night in the garret . . . and blushed. Manon grinned. “Ah, you see it is true. You know when it is the right one, *n’est pas*? And that is how it was for Godfrey when he saw the fairy queen at her bath. He went down on his knees and begged her to marry him. She agreed, but on one condition . . .”

“There’s always a condition in these stories.”

Manon shrugged and tapped her forehead. “*Mais oui*, one may love with the eyes and heart, but one should marry with the brain. The fairy queen said she would marry Godfrey if he agreed to let her keep her seven handmaids and never disturb her at her bath on the Sabbath. Of course he agreed, and they were married on that very day. When they awoke in the morning, a great castle had risen in the curve of the river where they had met—and that is the castle you see now, the Castle of Bouillon, made by fairy magic. Godfrey was overjoyed and loved his queen, who made him the richest knight in the land.

“They were very happy . . . until their first child was born with the scales of a fish. This was surprising, but since the child was otherwise healthy, Godfrey determined to love it and his lady queen all the same. All was well again until the second child was born with a tail. Such a thing was not unheard of—my cousin Gilbert was born with one, my *grand-mère* tells me—and Godfrey determined to overlook his son’s tail. But now the people

began to whisper that there was something strange about the queen, and Godfrey began to wonder why he must never see her in her Sunday bath. Finally, when their third child was born with wings . . .”

“Wings?” I couldn’t help but ask.

“Small ones, like a bat . . . then did Godfrey decide to risk his wife’s wrath and spy on her in her bath. And there he saw that on Sundays she changed back to her original form, a woman above the waist, a serpent below, with great wings like a bat. Of course, Godfrey was horrified—”

“Why? She gave him a castle! He had to realize she wasn’t an ordinary human. If he really loved her he shouldn’t have minded the wings . . . or the serpent’s tail.”

Manon stared at me. “Perhaps not, mademoiselle, but men are fickle. Godfrey ordered her out of his castle. She flew into a rage and reminded him that it was *her* castle and ordered *him* to leave. He did, but he raised an army and came back to lay siege to the castle. The queen and her handmaids were left with only a few knights and squires loyal to them. They withstood the siege as long as they could, but when at last Godfrey’s army charged the outer walls and gained the courtyard, the queen and her handmaids fled to the tallest tower and there the seven handmaids threw themselves to their deaths rather than be taken by Godfrey’s men. As for the queen, she flew off into the night swearing vengeance on the house of Godfrey and all human men.

“Since then anyone who has lived at the castle has met a terrible fate. It is said that the souls of the dead handmaids guard the drawbridges. My *grand-mère* calls them the *Witte Wieven*, the white women. They lurk in narrow places—ravines, bridges, fords—and try to dance with anyone who passes by. If you refuse to dance with them, they will throw you from the parapets, but if you do dance with them, they will dance you to your death. Listen—” Manon cocked her head toward the open window. “You can hear the fairy queen wailing now!”

I listened and indeed heard a low, keening moan that raised the hair at the back of my neck. “That’s just the wind,” I said. “And what you’ve told me is just a story. My friends are coming to meet me at the castle. Have you seen any strangers recently?”

“Only an American schoolteacher dressed in tweed knickers and carrying a rucksack.”

“Was his name Rupert Bellows?” I asked excitedly.

“Is that your Valancourt, miss? He looked . . . I beg your pardon . . . a bit old for you.”

“No he’s not my Valancourt, Manon. He’s my teacher. Do you know where he went?”

She shrugged. “He said he was on a walking tour. I warned him to stay away from the castle, but he only laughed. Let us hope your Valancourt did not make the same mistake.”

“I’m afraid they both will have gone to the castle,” I said. “And I must go meet them.”

“But I am to lock the door after I go. If I do not Madame Berthelot will beat me!”

“But if I don’t my friend and I will be lost—just like Emily St. Auburn in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.”

Manon looked from Helen’s wan face to mine. I felt guilty exploiting her love of Gothic novels and exposing her to Madame Berthelot’s wrath, but I had to get out and find Mr. Bellows and Raven and Marlin.

“I must lock the door, mademoiselle,” she said gravely. My heart sank. But then Manon dug into her apron pocket and produced a large iron key. “But Madame Berthelot did not say I could not give you the extra key. Go find your Valancourt, mademoiselle, but be wary of the Witte Wieven in the castle and the serpent queen, Aesinor.”

After Manon left I tried to wake Helen up to eat some broth but she moaned and turned away from the light. I covered her up and turned the lights off in the room. Then I waited until the inn was completely quiet. I didn’t want to get Manon in trouble. She had given me the information I needed. Aesinor must be the name of the third guardian. Somehow the story of the serpent queen had grown up around her, perhaps to keep people away from the castle where the third vessel was hidden. I wasn’t afraid of her—or the Witte Wieven, another foolish legend. But then, I wondered, why hadn’t Raven and Marlin come for me if they’d followed me from Paris? And where was Rupert Bellows if he arrived here weeks ago? I had to go look for them in the castle. A half hour before midnight I used Manon’s key to let myself out.

Manon had begrudgingly told me how to get to the castle. I had to follow the river past a shrine to Saint Eleanor, patron saint of

chambermaids, abandoned wives, and lost travelers, and climb the stairs to the first drawbridge. As I approached the drawbridge I heard a low moaning that once again made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. *It's just the wind*, I told myself. But when I reached the shrine of Saint Eleanor I was glad to see a candle burning there. I stopped to look into the niche and found myself staring into enormous almond-shaped eyes, all that remained of a medieval painting of the saint's face. They seemed to look right into my soul.

My mother had not raised me in any religion, but sometimes she took me into one of the city's beautiful churches to rest, and she often lit a candle to a saint. She would tell me that the saints had once been gods and goddesses. This saint looked like a goddess. Looking into her eyes I felt like she understood everything that had happened to me—from losing my mother to my fear that I was going to lose Helen now. I felt like I could tell her anything. I wasn't alone in feeling that way. The niche was full of offerings: candle stubs and worn coins, a baby's knit booty, a photograph of a young man in a uniform, flowers dried to powder and flowers picked this morning. This was where the women of the village came to pray for their children, their husbands, their brothers, and themselves.

"I suppose I'm a lost traveler," I said hoarsely. "Help me find my way." I lit a candle from the one already burning, wondering who else was out on this lonely night. "Help Nathan find his way, too, and help me get Helen back," I added. As I moved my hand away from the candle I noticed something lying amongst the offerings: a monogrammed handkerchief with the initials HvB. Helen van Beek. Marlin must have left it here. So it wasn't only women who came to pray at the shrine of Saint Eleanor.

I turned up the stairs and climbed to the drawbridge. As I passed over the river I thought I heard whispering. *It's only the river*, I told myself. But then why was the river whispering *Intruder! Trespasser! Betrayer!?* In the Blythe Wood I had felt the presence of spirits and fairies, but I had never felt this sense of animosity. There were spirits here who did not want me to pass, and if they didn't want me, what would they have done with Mr. Bellows, Marlin, and Raven?

"I'm here to warn your mistress of an attack," I said out loud. In response I heard a hiss behind me. I whirled around and saw something

white flit over the bridge, a gauzy scrap that could have been a wisp of fog, only it was accompanied by a piercing shriek.

“Stop that!” I cried. “We’re on the same side!”

Something wet and clammy brushed across my back. I screamed and whirled around. As I did I felt the wet clammy thing wrap around my waist. I tore at it with my fingernails and shreds of wet tissue fell to the stones with a disgusting *plop*.

“Is that your plan?” I demanded. “To *tissue* me to death?”

“Yes,” a voice hissed in my ear.

I whirled to face it and a damp cloth fell over my eyes. I reached up to peel it away but it was tightened from behind.

“So you want to play blind man’s bluff?” I drew my dagger and spun around, slicing through wet cloth. Something screamed. So the thing, whatever it was, could be hurt. I ripped the blindfold from my eyes and found myself staring into black bottomless eyes not two inches away from my face. The creature was wrapped in layers of white gauze that floated around it as if buoyed by watery currents. Its face was as white as its dress and blurry, like a statue that’s been worn down by centuries of wind and rain. Only the black holes of its eyes and gaping mouth stood out distinctly. Its breath smelled like river water. I braced myself to keep from running—if *I run it will chase me down and kill me*—and spoke to it.

“You’re a Witte Wieven,” I said. “One of the handmaids of Lady Aesinor. I’ve come to speak to your mistress. She’ll want to hear what I have to say. Take me to her, please.”

The Wieven curtsyed, holding up its tattered dress in bony hands, and began to hum.

“That’s right, you like to dance. Very well. I took dancing lessons last year. True, they were with a homicidal maniac who tried to bomb the Woolworth Building, but still he was an excellent dancing teacher.” I curtsyed back to her. The humming grew louder. Fog was rising from the river and spilling over the walls of the bridge. There were white shapes in the fog swaying to the monotonous humming.

“This isn’t much of a dancing tune,” I said. “Perhaps I can provide something better.” I took my repeater out of my pocket and depressed the stem. The tinkling strains of a waltz began. “Oh, I think you’ll like this. It’s about a river, after all. It’s a waltz called the Blue Danube.”

The Wieven tilted her head, listening to the tune, and began to sway to the infectious waltz. She snatched my hands in hers and twirled me around, taking the lead, and sweeping me over the bridge. At the next drawbridge she passed me on to another Wieven. The rest of the Wieven whirled around us, their white gauzy draperies spinning in a dizzy blur. They clearly liked the music, and why not? The waltz had the rush of the river in its lilting strains. Dancing to it felt like being carried by the current. I could almost feel the splash of water on my face—

I did feel something wet. As we danced over the third drawbridge, the Wieven's dress billowed around me, shedding droplets of cold water. I tried to brush the water away but I couldn't free my hands from the Wieven's grip. Perhaps, I thought, as a length of wet cloth wound around my shoulders, this hadn't been such a good idea.

"It's been lovely dancing with you," I said, as I'd been trained in Herr Hofmeister's class to respond to an awkward dancing partner, "but I really must be going."

The Wieven grinned, revealing a mouthful of needle-sharp teeth. A wet scarf wound around my waist. Another slipped over my hips. It was getting harder to move my legs, but the Wieven bore me aloft and spun me around the courtyard, holding me closer to its damp bosom—which smelled, I realized, like rotting fish.

I remembered the story Manon had told me. When the castle was besieged, the queen's ladies-in-waiting had jumped from the tower—and drowned in the river. I looked into the Wieven's face. It wasn't just blurry, I saw now, it was bloated. I looked down at the pale, spongy substance winding around my arms. It wasn't cloth; it was flesh. The flesh of a drowned woman falling off her bones. The Wieven was wrapping her decaying flesh around me so I would suffer the same fate she and her friends had.

"I understand . . ." I began. An awful cackle echoed off the courtyard walls, which were festooned with white swags and ribbons as if decorated for a medieval jousting tourney—only the ribbons and pennants were made of the Wievens' rotting flesh and fluttered with the Wievens' voices. *How can you understand? You didn't see . . .*

But I could see. I was a Darkling gifted with the ability to share the memories of a dying soul. The Wieven might already be dead but their

spirits still hovered between worlds and their flesh now encased me. I closed my eyes and saw a beautiful woman bathing in a forest spring, surrounded by her handmaids and other creatures of the forest—lumignon and lutins, pixies and elves, and even Darklings. They all lived in peace together. They were happy. But then one day a man came, a man on horseback wearing cold steel armor. He saw the beautiful woman and fell in love with her and begged her to marry him. I saw the castle of Bouillon rise from the river bend, a creation of fairy magic and love, carved of stone the color of sun-warmed honey, not the blackened hulk the castle was now. I saw the years of happiness pass, the pageants and festivals, Godfrey's knights flirting with and wooing Aesinor's handmaids, and I realized that Aesinor's tragedy hadn't been just her own. When Godfrey spied her in the bath and fled the castle he took his knights with him. When he raised an army, his own knights, who had courted the ladies-in-waiting, rode on the castle. It was that betrayal that sent the seven ladies over the tower wall. I saw Aesinor become an angry winged serpent, breathing fire on the castle walls and Godfrey and his knights, destroying all in her path. Then I saw her raising her dead ladies-in-waiting from the river, fog-like wraiths who stood on the drawbridges waiting for human men to pass by. Centuries flew by; hundreds of hapless travelers were seized, wrapped in cocoons and presented as gifts to the Lady Aesinor—including one tweedy schoolteacher whistling a happy tune as he crossed the drawbridge—

“Mr. Bellows!” I cried out, opening my eyes. “What have you done to Mr. Bellows?” I searched the courtyard. A tented pavilion had been set up at one end, a dais for viewing a joust, with a throne at its center. In front of the throne lay three bundles swaddled in the Wieven's ghastly white flesh. Protruding from one I spied a tweedy leg. Within the other two I detected the shape of wings.

“You've got Raven and Marlin, too! But they've all come to help!” I cried out, anger making my wings flex and strain against the fleshy bandages. The wrappings smoldered and smoked. I stoked my anger with the thought of poor kindhearted Mr. Bellows, brave Marlin, and Raven! My own beloved Raven—

My wings burst into flame, searing through the fleshy bindings. The Wieven let go my hands and stumbled backward. I spun around, fanning the flames with my wings into a circle of fire. The other Wieven shrunk and fell

back. The fire caught the draped dais and it burst into flames, raining sparks down on my trussed-up friends. I rushed to the three prone shapes and stripped the wrappings off Marlin first, who immediately began to free Mr. Bellows. I ripped the cloth off Raven, my heart pounding with fear and anger. He was so still . . . but then he was coughing and shaking the rest of the wraps off him.

“You’re still alive!” I cried, looking around at Marlin and Mr. Bellows, who was picking the last shreds of Wieven flesh from his tweed walking suit. “You’re all alive!”

“Are we?” Mr. Bellows gasped. “These fish women have been saving us to snack on our bones. Hurry—we have to get out of here before their queen arrives.”

But it was too late. A wind roared through the courtyard, fanning the flames. Lightning hit the tower above our heads and lit up the looming black stones and the sky above. A piteous wailing echoed off the old stones and I thought I could feel the whole castle shake. I looked up to see a winged serpent descending from the sky. Her wings were bat-like, her skin scaled, but her eyes were the eyes of the painted saint in the niche below the drawbridge. I realized now why they had looked familiar. I had met her sister and brother. Aesinor, guardian of the third vessel, had arrived.

28



“WELL, IT’S ABOUT bloody time you put in an appearance,” I said, marching up to the throne where Aesinor had settled, her flashing green tail coiled around its legs, her red leathery wings fanned out behind her. “While you’ve been gone your she-devils have been trussing up my friends like Christmas turkeys while we came to help—”

Aesinor opened her mouth and spit out a stream of fire. I only avoided getting it square in my face by crossing my wings in front of me. Marlin and Raven leapt to either side of me, their wings flexed to spring at her while I heard Mr. Bellows comment, “A fire-breathing Melusine! Fascinating!”

“I do not need your help, Darkling.” She spat out the words in smoky gusts. “Or the help of your male companions—Darkling or human. Males of both species have done nothing but betray me.”

“How have the Darklings betrayed you?” Marlin demanded.

“They were pledged to defend me when Godfrey stormed the castle, but they never appeared. They let me fight alone until all was lost and my handmaids took their own lives.”

The Wieven swayed and moaned behind the throne.

“Do we know anything about a treaty with a Melusine at Bouillon?” Marlin whispered to Raven.

“No, only that we were driven out of the Forest of Arden by giants.”

“A lie to excuse you breaking your treaty with me. I owe you nothing. And as for this . . . *man* . . .” She glared at Mr. Bellows. “I owe him only

the same watery grave his kind consigned my handmaids to.”

She spat fire at Mr. Bellows and I stepped in front of him, shielding him with my wings. “Mr. Bellows is a good man,” I said. “He’s always been kind to me and my friends. And even though he was in love with Miss Sharp he didn’t begrudge her happiness when she fell in love with Lillian Corey, did you, Mr. Bellows?”

Mr. Bellows blushed and stammered his reply. “I-I only want her to be happy.”

“See! He’s no Godfrey. I’m sorry your husband was so awful to you. He shouldn’t have cared what you did with your free time or what you looked like in your bath. He sounds like a very shallow person. My friends are not like that. They’ve accepted me even with my”—I flexed my wings—“differences. But there is a terrible man on his way to seize the castle and open the vessel. His name is Judicus van Drood and he’s a shadow master. He wants the whole world to be as dark as his soul.”

“Let him come!” Aesinor roared, beating her wings. “My Wieven and I will eat him alive!”

“And what if he’s too strong for you? This isn’t a hapless traveler out for a stroll—”

“I was on an official expedition,” Mr. Bellows objected.

“—or two Darklings not expecting an attack—”

“She did take us by surprise,” Marlin murmured.

“—but a shadow master with an army. He has been planning this for a long time. If he breaches your walls—”

“What then? Will he kill me? Let him. I am tired of living. As for my handmaids, they are already dead. What more can he do to them?”

“But he’ll get to the vessel!” Mr. Bellows cried. “And release the rest of the *tenebrae*. The world will be overrun by darkness.”

“He’s right,” I said. “I’ve seen the future where the third vessel has been broken. It is a dark and ruined place with no hope.”

“Perhaps that would be better,” Aesinor replied, curling her tail around her throne. “I built this castle to protect the vessel from your kind—ah, you’ve heard the story that the peasants tell, that I built it as a wedding present for Godfrey. That is true, but it is not the whole story. I sought an alliance with Godfrey because I saw how powerful and violent you humans

were becoming. I built the castle around the hill where the vessel was buried.”

She gestured toward a well that stood in the middle of the courtyard. “It lies deep below us, sealed by solid rock. But after Godfrey’s perfidy I saw that the shadows were everywhere—they even tempted Godfrey to spy on me in my bath and made him turn on me. But I was the fool to believe a human could be anything but a base betrayer.”

She beat her wings so angrily that she rose from her throne, her tail lashing like an angry cat’s, her eyes blazing fire as she spit down at us. “Over the centuries I have watched the humans who live in this valley and beyond nurse foolish hopes of love and peace and happiness only to have those hopes dashed as cruelly as my handmaids’ bodies were dashed on the river rocks. Your countries are girding for war as we speak—and for what? You say it’s your Shadow Master who is bringing this war, but is it really the darkness that rallies men to war, or foolish dreams of glory and valor in battle? These men march off to war because they want to be heroes in their sweethearts’ eyes. And the women wave them good-bye and toss flowers to them. They pray that their men will come back to them. Wouldn’t it be better if they knew they would not be coming back—at least not as the men they once loved? Wouldn’t it be better if they gave up hope and love?”

The Wieven moaned in answer. She didn’t wait for us to respond. “It’s hope that breaks our hearts. The world would be better off without it. Let your Shadow Master come. I will greet him with open arms and show him the way to the vessel.” She spread her arms to demonstrate and swooped over the well, her words reverberating in the long, hollow shaft.

“If you meant that, then why haven’t you broken the vessel yourself?” I asked. “Why have you remained here protecting it?”

Aesinor bristled at my question, puffing up with rage. Marlin and Raven edged closer to me. “It is mine,” she hissed. “It is the one purpose that remained to me.”

“That hasn’t been your only purpose,” I said, stepping closer to the throne. Raven and Marlin moved with me, but I waved them back. “The women of the village pray to you as Saint Eleanor.”

“That is their foolish business.” She ruffled her wings again, but this time it struck me as less with anger and more with pride.

“But you said you heard their prayers,” I pointed out. “Why do you listen to them if you don’t care?”

“To relieve the boredom,” she replied.

“So you never answer them? It seems funny that all those women would keep praying to you if you never answered them.”

She hesitated. The Wieven were pulsing behind the throne like airborne jellyfish, humming. “As I said, humans are stupid. You should hear the stories my handmaids bring me—wives beaten by their husbands, scullery maids abused by their masters, mothers who can’t feed their babies because their worthless husbands spend their wages on drink.”

“Did never a woman do wrong?” Marlin muttered. “Or ever a man do right?”

“They also come to pray for their sons and husbands and brothers,” I said. “I’ve seen the shrine.”

Aesinor’s wings beat the air three times before she answered. “I hear . . . occasionally of a male specimen who is not entirely reprehensible. And for the sake of the woman who speaks for him I sometimes, for my own amusement, intervene.”

The Wieven suddenly burst into song. “She brings the rain to nourish the earth and eases the pain in childbirth. She lights the path for the girl who is lost and leads home the soldier to his mother’s arms. All hail, Eleanor the Good!”

We were all silent for a moment after this extraordinary outburst. Even the Wieven deflated as though embarrassed. It was Mr. Bellows who broke the silence. “You love them,” he said simply. “You love the people of this village.”

“And what if I do?” Aesinor demanded.

“Do you know what will happen to them if we don’t stop van Drood?” I asked.

I stepped forward and laid my hand on Aesinor’s arm. Her skin was burning hot but I held on just the same. I was hoping that just as a Darkling could read the thoughts of the dying so we could transfer our thoughts to the living. I closed my eyes and let myself remember the future I had seen at Blythewood—the ruined castle, the lists of the dead, the blasted woods, the fearsome zeppelins ruling the skies. I felt Aesinor shudder and knew she was seeing it, too—and more. We weren’t just remembering what I had

seen, we were in the future, ranging over the world van Drood and his shadow army had made. We saw the forests burnt to the ground, trees blasted by gunfire, the cities destroyed, the mounds of the dead piled high like logs, the hollow eyes of the survivors as they marched to the orders of the shadows. We saw the factories van Drood would build on the blasted ruins—vast, airless tombs in which human slaves toiled without a glimpse of hope or love. It was a world of no light, no beauty.

“Aesinor,” I said aloud, “this is what the world looks like without the foolishness of hope. Is this what you want?”

I opened my eyes and looked into hers. They were wide and shining, the eyes of the saint, not the monster.

“No,” she said. “It is not.” And then, including my companions and her handmaids in her gaze, “I suppose we might as well all be fools together.”



We made plans late into the night. Aesinor agreed to let us set up camp in the castle and begin to fortify it against van Drood’s attack.

“Since he hasn’t attacked already, we can assume he’s planning to gather a stronger force first,” Mr. Bellows said.

“Manon said he’s gone to Liège,” I said.

“I’ll fly there tonight,” Raven said, “and see what he’s up to there. Then I’ll fly on to Vienna to tell Gus and the Jagers that we’re making a stand here.”

“And I’ll fly back to Paris to let Miss Sharp and Miss Corey know to send recruits,” Marlin said.

“Tell them to wire Daisy in London,” I added. “See if she and the Hawthorn boys can get here before the borders close.”

“And send Omar here,” Mr. Bellows suggested. “He’ll know best how to fight an army possessed by the shadows.”

“And Kid will have an idea of how to con the German army,” Marlin said with a grin.

It was the first time anyone had smiled all night. It seemed a good note to end on. “I’d better get back and check on Helen,” I said.

Raven flew with me to the outer drawbridge. “That was amazing the way you talked to Aesinor,” he said as we landed on the bridge. “You don’t,

er, feel like that toward men, do you?”

I laughed at the worried look on his face. “No,” I said, “it seems to me that there are some very good men in this world—human and Darkling.” I moved closer and laid my hand on his chest. “Like you.” He bent his head to kiss me.

“But,” I said when he lifted his head, “when I worked at the Triangle, and then at the Henry Street Settlement, I saw some terrible things—girls who came to work with black eyes and bruises on their arms, women who had more babies than they could feed because their husbands wouldn’t leave them alone, girls who turned to prostitution because no one would give them a decent job. . . .”

Raven laid his hand on my arm and I realized that I was close to tears. “You know I would never treat you like that,” he said hoarsely.

“Yes,” I told him, “but that doesn’t mean I don’t understand how Aesinor felt when she was betrayed by Godfrey. I’m just glad we were able to convince her to stand with us—”

The trill of a lark interrupted me and I noticed that the sky was lightening in the east—and realized how little time I had left with Raven. “I wish you weren’t flying east,” I told him, laying my head down on his chest. “There could be fighting already . . . guns, bombs . . .”

“I’ll be careful. You be careful, too. I hate leaving you with van Drood.”

“Maybe he’ll stay away in Liège,” I said.

“Maybe he’ll step in front of one of the Germans’ big guns,” Raven said, “and solve all our problems.”

“Just make sure you don’t step in front of one of those guns,” I said, shivering at the thought.

“I won’t. I have too much to live for.” Then he kissed me and launched himself into the sky so fiercely that he shook feathers loose. I watched him until he was only a speck in the eastern sky and then I turned and walked down the steps.

I stopped at the shrine to Saint Eleanor at the bottom of the stairs. There were more candles burning and more tokens crowding the niche, photographs of sweethearts, husbands, brothers, and fathers. The women of Bouillon had stolen out in the night to pray for the men this war would take away. I wished I had a photograph of Raven.

Instead I plucked one of his loose feathers from my hair and laid it on the shrine. “Keep him safe,” I said. “Keep them all safe.”

As I walked back to the Hotel de Bouillon the bells of the village began to ring. I hoped it was a sign that someone was listening to our prayers.



IN THE NEXT few weeks, while the Germans besieged Liège, we marshaled our forces and fortified the Castle of Bouillon to withstand van Drood's attack. Mr. Bellows set up headquarters in the great hall of the castle complete with maps flown in from a Belgian boys' school by Gus, plans of the castle provided by Aesinor, a wireless set carried from Paris by Miss Corey and Miss Sharp, and a war table with tin soldiers and toy tanks provided by Daisy, who said they were a gift from Bottom.

I was surprised to see Daisy arrive without the three Hawthorn boys. "They wanted to join the British Expeditionary Force," she told us, handing out tins of biscuits and tea she'd brought with her from England. "And march with their pals from Hawthorn. The BEF will be here soon."

Mr. Bellows set Daisy in charge of restoring the bells in the tower—they needed new ropes and ringers to pull them—and "provisioning" the castle for a long siege. At night I flew her around the countryside to collect supplies. Gus and Dolores flew reconnaissance missions east to report on the progress of the Siege of Liège.

"The Belgian forts are holding strong," Dolores reported, "but we're worried about the German siege guns. We've seen them in the factory at Essen and they're enormous."

"They're so big," Gus informed us, "that the Germans can hardly move them."

"That might be to our advantage," Mr. Bellows said, studying the map. "If we could keep the Germans from getting the guns to Liège—say by

blowing up a railway tunnel . . .”

And so our first sabotage missions began. Kid Marvel turned out to be adept at planning missions, and Omar could mesmerize any German soldiers we encountered. Along with scores of brave Belgian citizens, we cut telephone and telegraph wires to hinder the Germans’ communications and we blew up bridges and railway tunnels to slow their advance. And yet they kept on . . .

“Like South American predator ants,” Mr. Bellows remarked one evening. “Nothing seems to stop them.”

“It’s because van Drood is with them,” Omar said. “I have seen the German troops, and they are shadow-ridden.”

Although it was worrying to know that van Drood was with the troops, I couldn’t help but be glad that he was staying away from Bouillon. I didn’t want him anywhere near Helen—even though I wasn’t sure Helen would have known if he were there or not. Since the first night she had remained in a delirious limbo. Manon watched her when I was away, sitting by her bedside with a bit of lace she was working on, chatting amiably about her upbringing at the convent, where she had learned to make beautiful, intricate lace, and her ambitions to become a *lingère* at one of the big *salons de couture*, while Helen tossed restlessly.

Although I spent most of the night at the castle I tried to sleep a few hours toward dawn at the Hotel de Bouillon in the hope that Helen would communicate with me again in that shadowy dream space. But even though I dreamed of the ruined Blythewood, Helen wasn’t very communicative there. She wandered the halls of the ruined school as if she were looking for something—or someone—muttering inconsequential nonsense.

“This is where Nathan carved our initials,” she said, pointing to a fire-blackened wall. Or “He’s playing hide-and-seek but I know all his hiding places. I’m just pretending that I can’t find him.” Then she would drift off into the fog, which seemed to grow thicker with each dream, crying, “Olly olly oxen free!”

“I’m afraid she’s getting more and more lost,” I admitted to Daisy one night while we were making up beds in the tower. “She seems to be living in her memories.”

“Who can blame her?” Daisy replied. “The past is looking more and more like a better place to be.”

I was surprised to hear Daisy sounding so pessimistic. “Have you heard from Mr. Appleby?” I asked.

She sighed. “He’s upset I’m over here with the war breaking out. In the last letter I got before I left London he said if I didn’t come back he was going to sail to England and join the BEF.”

“Can an American join the British army?” I asked.

Daisy shrugged. “I don’t know. But I imagine that before long they’ll take whatever they can get.”

Taking her own statement to heart, Daisy disappeared into the forest one night and came back with a battalion of lumignon and a cadre of tiny wizened gnomes called lutins. The river was full of undines, she said, who were also willing to fight. She was right that we’d need all the help we could get. By the middle of August the last fort in Liège had fallen, opening the rest of Belgium up to the German army. The mood in Bouillon changed. I’d thought the town was deserted before, but many of the residents had been hiding behind their shuttered windows and high garden walls. Now they appeared on the streets whispering together in tight, frightened clusters.

At the sound of guns from the east, the villagers scattered back behind their shutters and walls, but many reappeared a little later with their belongings piled into goat carts and vegetable wagons and headed east toward the French border. Madame Berthelot joined the exodus. She gave Manon her heavy ring of keys and instructions to dump out the wine in the cellars rather than let the Bosch drink it. Then she kissed Manon on both cheeks and hurried out the door, grabbing the empty birdcage as she went.

“You should go with her,” I told Manon.

“And leave Mademoiselle Helen? *Non!* She needs me. She likes me to tell her stories about the nuns and she admires my lacework.”

“I’m sure she is very grateful to you for staying with her, but she wouldn’t want you to risk your life on her behalf. I think we should move her into the castle. My friends are gathering there to . . . um, hide from the Germans.” I couldn’t very well tell her we were planning a battle against van Drood and his shadow army, but keen-eyed Manon, who could detect a microscopic flaw in a lace pattern, didn’t buy my story for a second. She tugged at the skin below her eye in that characteristic Gallic gesture of skepticism.

“You have not fooled me, mademoiselle. Do you not think I see you meeting with those handsome boys in the moonlight? And going into the woods? And bringing supplies to the castle? I know that you are working with the Resistance and I want to be part of it. I will help you take Mademoiselle Helen to the castle and then fight at your side.”

She drew herself up to her full height of five foot one and placed her hand over her heart. I thought she might burst into a rendition of “The Brabançonne.” There was no one I’d rather have fight by my side, but how could I take her into a castle full of fairies, Wieven, and a winged serpent? Not without some warning.

“There are a few things about my friends that you might find surprising,” I began.



In the end, Manon was not overly surprised that the castle was full of fairies and gnomes. “My *grand-mère* always told me such creatures existed.”

We carried Helen to the castle with Marlin and Raven’s help—or rather, Marlin carried Helen and Manon, Raven, and I carried all of Helen’s luggage. I could hear Helen murmuring in Marlin’s arms. “Where are you hiding, Nathan? Olly olly oxen free!” I felt sorry for Marlin.

“She’s reliving her childhood,” I told him. “I think it represents a safe place for her right now.”

“Then I’m glad that’s where she is. When she realizes Nathan isn’t going to come out of hiding I’ll be here.”

“Ah, so the handsome American loves Mademoiselle Helen, too, but she loves another,” Manon observed as we settled Helen in a camp bed in a tower room that Daisy had fixed up for Helen. “Who is this Nathan that she calls out to, and why is he not here by her side?”

“He’s a friend of ours who has lost his way,” I replied, busying myself stacking Helen’s trunks. “I don’t know where he is.”

“I think we know where he was a week ago,” Daisy said, coming into the room breathlessly. “Come on down, Ava, there’s someone you have to see.”

I followed Daisy down the steep winding staircase, nearly tripping over the worn ancient stones, into the great hall. A crowd was gathered in the

center of the room around the war table. They parted as I came forward, revealing a tall man with shaggy white hair and beetling eyebrows.

“Professor Jager!” I cried. “I thought you were in Vienna!”

“It was time to retreat,” he said, bowing his leonine head over my hand. As he bowed I couldn’t help noticing a bald spot on the top of his head. His once magnificent head of hair had thinned, as if negotiating with German diplomats had forced him to tear his hair out. I remembered him haughtily demonstrating magic lessons, but the months of watching his diplomatic efforts fail to avert war had turned him into a humbler man.

“There is no shame in a well-considered retreat,” Beatrice said, stepping out of her father’s shadow and leading forward a girl in a cloak. “And Nathan asked us to take Louisa out of Austria, so we thought it best that we bring her here.”

I stared at the cloaked girl beside Beatrice. A wisp of pale, nearly white hair fell over her gray eyes. I recognized those eyes—they were identical to her twin brother’s—but I barely recognized Louisa Beckwith. It had only been two years since Nathan had rescued her from Faerie, but she looked like she had aged ten. I remembered that Helen had said that Louisa wasn’t well, but I was shocked at how wan and lost she looked.

“Hello, Louisa,” I said. “I’m Ava, a friend of Nathan’s. We met at Blythewood.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” she said mechanically without looking me in the eyes. “Blythewood must be lovely this time of year. Do you play cards? Perhaps we could play a round of flush and trophies later.”

“That’s all she wants to do,” Beatrice whispered. “Nathan said it calms her down.”

I remembered that when we’d found her in Faerie she was playing cards and that she’d wound herself into the fabric of Faerie by doing so. “Where is Nathan?” I asked.

“We don’t know,” Beatrice answered with a worried look. “He brought Louisa to us a week ago, begging us to bring her to you, and then he disappeared.”

“Louisa?” Marlin stepped forward and stared at the girl. “Is it really you?”

Louisa blinked at Marlin, a spark of intelligence briefly lighting her vacant eyes.

“Do you two know each other?” I asked.

“We met in the woods a few years ago,” Marlin answered, not taking his eyes off Louisa. “I thought we’d become friends, but one day she just stopped coming. I was sure she had turned against me because I was a Darkling.”

“*Louisa* is the Blythewood girl you liked?” I asked, flabbergasted. “Didn’t you know she got lost in Faerie?” I turned to Raven, who had seen Louisa stray into Faerie. “Didn’t you tell him?”

“I had no idea it was the same girl,” Raven said. “I didn’t even know there was a girl until later.” He turned to his friend. “You didn’t tell me.”

“I was embarrassed,” Marlin replied. “We weren’t supposed to talk to humans back then,” he explained to the rest of us. And then, looking back at Louisa, “I’m sorry you got lost in Faerie. I should have looked for you. I thought you’d stood me up.”

“I was unavoidably detained,” she said in a polite, wistful voice. “But I’m here now. And what a lovely hotel this is! Are you here to show me to my room?”

For a moment Marlin’s face looked stricken as he realized how lost Louisa still was. I saw his eyes slide away, as if he’d rather make a joke or escape than deal with addled Louisa, but then he firmed his jaw and held out his arm for her. “Yes, that’s exactly what I’m here for,” he said. “Let me show you the way.”

“We’ll make a bed for her in Helen’s room,” Daisy said, following Marlin and Louisa. “Manon can keep an eye on them both.”

When they had gone, I looked back at Beatrice. “Nathan didn’t say where he was going?”

She shook her head. “I’m sorry, Ava. He looked . . . *haunted*. Like he was being followed.”

“And we didn’t have time to worry about him,” Professor Jager said. “I had a lot of loose ends to tie up at the embassy. As it was we were barely able to get here ahead of the German army.”

“Are they that close?” Mr. Bellows asked. “How many days’ march?”

Professor Jager shook his head sadly. “I’m afraid it’s not a matter of days, my friend. The German army is less than a day’s march away. And they’re not marching alone.”

30



THAT NIGHT RAVEN and I flew a reconnaissance mission. We didn't have to go far to see the evidence of the army's passing. We flew over a terrain of sacked houses and blackened villages. Broken glass littered the empty streets. The roads were jammed with carts and wagons, and refugees huddled together in the ditches. We flew over abandoned farms where un milked cows lowed piteously in the barns and the hay fields lay unmown in the moonlight. We flew over a village where the townspeople wept in the square over a pile of bodies. We landed there and asked an old man what had happened.

"When the Germans arrived they were angry because the telephone wires had been cut. They rounded up all the villagers and then they shot every tenth man. My grandson . . ." The man dissolved into tears. Raven put his hand on the man's shoulder. I'd seen him comfort the dying by touching them, but instead of murmuring soft words he said fiercely, "They will pay for this."

He spread his wings, not caring if the old man saw. As he took flight I heard the old man whisper, "*L'ange de vengeance!*" The Angel of Vengeance. Was that what we were to become?

I caught up to Raven over the Meuse. "Can't we stop this?" I cried. "Can't we help these people?"

"How?" he asked, pointing toward a black mass along the riverbank. "How do we fight this many?"

I looked and saw that the mass, which stretched for miles, was a German encampment. There must have been thousands of men camped in orderly rows of tents, infantrymen in gray-green uniforms shining their boots and sharpening their bayonets, cavalrymen tending their horses, and grim, silent soldiers guarding the huge siege guns. Over all of them hovered a black cloud. At first I thought it must be the smoke from their cooking fires, but then I saw the smoke writhe and twist into the shapes of bats and crows and grimacing faces. The shadows ebbed and flowed over the troops like an airborne river.

“*Tenebrae*,” Raven whispered. “They’re riding with the army, feeding off them.”

A current swept over a troop, twining around the men. One of the officers stood up with a tankard in his hand and burst into song. “*Heil dir im Siegerkranz*,” he sang. I didn’t know the German but the words were sung to the tune “My Country, ’Tis of Thee” so I imagined it had much the same sentiments. And as I listened with my Darkling ears I found that I *did* understand some scraps of conversation.

“ . . . the Belgians are delaying us by their senseless guerrilla warfare . . . ”

“ . . . if they didn’t fight we wouldn’t have to kill them . . . ”

“ . . . our orders are to put down such treacherous attacks . . . ”

“ . . . they must be punished . . . ”

“ . . . any village harboring saboteurs must be burnt to the ground . . . the resistance is centered in Bouillon . . . we must root it out and destroy the resistance!”

“Did you hear that?” I asked Raven. “They’re going to attack Bouillon. They’ll kill the villagers. We have to warn them!”

Raven nodded grimly. But instead of turning to fly back he landed next to one of the siege guns, using his wings to cloak him from the view of the guards. I followed him as he walked all around it, staring at the black oily metal. I’d seen him looking at a broken watch with this concentration, but his face had none of the patience he had when he was fixing something. Instead his face was filled with a murderous rage. “If only we could jam it somehow . . . ” But when he reached out to touch the muzzle a black shape oozed out of its gaping mouth and struck at his hand like a snake. I pulled

him away before the thing could touch him, but his cry of alarm alerted the guard.

“Who goes there?” he barked in German, swinging his bayonet in our direction. I gripped Raven’s arm to keep him still. Suddenly our feathers seemed like frail protection against the cold blue steel of the soldier’s bayonet. Worse, the snake shadow—all six feet of it—had slithered out of the gun and was coming toward us. If we took flight the soldier would hear us and shoot. But if we stayed still the snake shadow would strike us. When it was only a few inches away it rose like a cobra, its flat head hovering a few inches from our faces, its red eyes staring at us. It opened its fanged mouth and van Drood’s voice came out.

“Go back to playing knights and castles, children, and see how your walls hold up to my pretty guns.”

The snake spit at us and then lowered back to the ground and slithered back to the gun—but instead of crawling back into the gun it coiled its way up the guard and poured itself down the poor soldier’s mouth. The sight of it swelling in the man’s gullet made me feel sick, but when the man’s eyes turned red and fixed on us, Raven grabbed my arm and yanked me into the air.

A bullet whizzed past my ear as we climbed into the sky. As we flew over the camp, knowing now that any shadow-ridden soldier could see us and shoot us down, I could hear the same words traveling from soldier to soldier: “Tomorrow Bouillon!”



We got back to Bouillon at dawn. The village looked peaceful, nestled in its loop of the river in the shadow of the castle. For how many centuries had it clung here while the knights of the castle rode off to the crusades and defended the land against foreign invaders? Was it possible that now an invader was coming who would destroy all this?

“We have to get the villagers inside the castle,” I said as we landed in the courtyard. “I’ll get Manon to help me.”

“And I’ll talk to Bellows and Gus about fortifying our walls against those guns.”

I found Manon dozing in a chair between Helen's and Louisa's beds, her lacework fallen to the floor. I picked it up as I leaned over her, and even though I was frantic with the news I carried and haunted by the terrible things I'd seen in the night, I was arrested by the beauty of what I held in my hand. It was a veil stitched in an intricate pattern of birds and flowers and quaint rustic figures of shepherds and shepherdesses. How Helen would love it!

But Helen slumbered on, tossing fitfully. "I'm tired of playing hide-and-seek, Nathan. Come out now. Olly olly oxen free!"

I laid the veil in Manon's lap and shook her shoulder to wake her. Her nut-brown eyes stared at me a moment as if she didn't recognize me, but she came instantly awake when I told her the Germans were on the way.

"They'll punish the villagers for harboring us," I told her. "We have to move them into the castle. Do you think you can convince them to come?"

"I am not so sure they will listen to me," she said, stretching her arms over her head. She looked down at the lace in her lap as if she didn't recognize her own work and then shook her head like she was trying to clear the cobwebs out. "But *Grand-mère* will make them see sense."

I left Manon on the drawbridge and went back to the great hall to see what progress was being made to fortify the castle. Mr. Bellows was seated at the war table with Gus, Dolores, Professor Jager, and a group of Darklings who had come in the night. I recognized Raven's parents, Wren and Merlinus, and when he looked up I was overjoyed to recognize my father, Falco. He stood up and embraced me, mantling me with his wings that rustled with a sound like paper. There *were* papers in his wings. My father had saved the book *A Darkness of Angels* from van Drood by stitching the pages into his wings. The pages were so integrated now into my father's wings that they could not be removed.

"I thought Master Quill was still transcribing you," I said.

"I couldn't sit in a library while my daughter and her friends fought a war," he said. "So I flew over with a flock of others who didn't want to sit on the sidelines, including these two." He pointed to the two other Darklings at the table and I recognized Buzz and Heron. Sirena had also come to join them from London.

"Yeah," Buzz said, "I wasn't going to let Raven and Marlin and Gus have all the fun."

“It’s not fun, you idiot,” Sirena scolded. “But this is where we should be. If van Drood’s shadow army takes Bouillon and releases the vessel, we’ll all be finished. We’re here to fight.”

“The Darklings will provide our aerial defense,” Mr. Bellows said, pointing to the plan of the castle. “Regiments of six will be stationed on each tower and three regiments will guard the curtain wall. They each will be armed with an incendiary device to drop on the enemy if they get too close to the wall.”

“Gus has made the bombs,” Dolores said proudly. She pointed to a squat wine bottle wrapped in a straw basket with a wax candle sticking out of the top. I’d seen bottles like these, dripping with wax, standing on checked tablecloths in restaurants in Little Italy back home.

“It’s really a very simple device,” Gus said modestly. “I found the bottles in the castle cellars, dumped out the wine”—Buzz made a disgusted noise—“filled them with gunpowder and stuck a candle in. You just have to light the candle, drop it on your target and . . . *kaboom!*”

I noticed that everyone was using words like “the enemy” and “your target” instead of “man” or even “soldier.” These were flesh-and-blood men we would be killing. Even if they were possessed by the shadows, they had once been men. “I wish there was another way,” I said.

“There isn’t,” Sirena said. “If we don’t stop them, millions will die. You know that better than anyone.”

“The best we can hope for is a swift offensive that will discourage the rest of the soldiers and make them back down,” Mr. Bellows said. “If they don’t fight, we won’t have to kill them.”

The rest of the group echoed his words. There wasn’t anything I could say to argue with them, but as I turned to go I couldn’t help remembering that I’d overheard the German soldiers saying much the same thing last night about the Belgians.

In the courtyard I found Miss Sharp and Miss Corey passing out quivers of arrows to the new recruits. “These are special arrows,” Miss Corey said, holding up an arrow fletched with bright green and purple feathers. “The lumignon have generously provided their own feathers for the fletching and pixie dust for the arrowheads. Be very careful when nocking your arrow not to cut yourself. Once you’ve nocked your arrow, have your partner”—she smiled at Miss Sharp, who held up a long thin piece of wood—“light the

fletch.” Miss Sharp dipped the taper in a fire-filled brazier and applied it to the lumignon feathers. They instantly burst into flame.

“You must not hesitate at this moment. Take aim and . . .” She shot her arrow at a straw stuffed target on the far side of the courtyard. “Fire!” Miss Corey cried gleefully as the target exploded. “As you can see, the pixie dust is highly flammable.”

“And particularly deadly to the *tenebrae*,” Miss Sharp added. “We learned that from you, Ava, when you defeated the shadow attack on Blythewood.”

I remembered that I’d also burned off all my hair.

“I’d suggest the archers tie their hair back. Even you,” I told Marlin, whose tawny red-gold mane was flying around his face.

I walked past Kid Marvel drilling a troop of lutins in an “underground offensive” and Omar discussing strategy with a Wieven. I walked along the curtain wall and stood in a sheltered loop pierced with a slit to shoot arrows through. Did we really think we were going to defeat the German army with quaint medieval weaponry like arrows—even coated with pixie dust? The idea seemed as outdated as the French army’s red *pantalons*. I had a sinking feeling that this was going to be a different kind of war.

My spirits revived when I spied a white-haired woman leading a troop of villagers up to the castle. She was carrying the Belgian flag and singing “The Brabançonne.” If I hadn’t known she was Manon’s eighty-year-old *grand-mère* I would have thought she was a girl of twenty who just happened to have white hair. The villagers—mostly old men and women too stubborn to leave the village and boys too young to join the Belgian army—carried pitchforks and ancient-looking muskets. Here we thought we were offering them shelter and they’d come ready to fight. Their élan lifted my spirits . . . until I looked up and saw a dark haze filling the sky to the northeast. It looked like a storm cloud but I knew that it was the shadow-ridden army coming to destroy us.



By noon the shadow-cloud blotted out the sun and the Castle of Bouillon was surrounded by a German battalion.

“You have to wonder,” Raven murmured in my ear as we watched the German general, in Prussian blue uniform, high polished boots and spike-topped helmet, approach the first drawbridge, “what German HQ thinks this expedition is about. Why waste time and resources on a tenth-century castle in the middle of the Ardennes forest?”

“Perhaps they think it’s a Resistance stronghold they have to squash before rolling on to France. Or perhaps they’re not thinking anything at all. Look at the jerky way that general is marching; he looks like an automaton possessed by the *tenebrae*.”

“I think that may be the way they’re taught to march in Germany,” Raven replied. “But you’re probably right. There’s the puppet master right behind him, jerking his strings.”

Although he’d traded his customary Inverness cape and Homburg hat for a Prussian uniform and spike-topped helmet, I would have recognized van Drood anywhere. He was a dark blotch on the landscape, sucking all the light and air out of the day. How he must hate the whole world to bring it to the brink of this terrible war!

“To think it all started because he loved a girl who didn’t love him back,” Raven said.

I glanced at him, surprised. I’d never talked to him about how van Drood had loved my mother and been spurned by her. “How did you know that?”

“Your father told me when I brought him back to Ravencliffe last year. He said that your mother cared for van Drood and felt terribly guilty at how he took her rejection.”

“She did? But he was her teacher!”

“He wasn’t much older than Rupert Bellows is now, and in case you haven’t noticed, your friend Daisy is awfully fond of him.”

I opened my mouth to object, but then I remembered that Helen had said the same thing. “Still, Mr. Bellows won’t become a shadow master when Daisy marries Mr. Appleby. And he didn’t become one when Miss Sharp fell in love with Miss Corey. And look at Marlin! He’s had to listen to Helen calling Nathan’s name for weeks now and it hasn’t turned him mean. In fact, he’s been lovely to Louisa—”

“I suspect that’s to do with how *lovely* Louisa is.”

“Judicus van Drood could have found someone else. In fact, he did. Dame Beckwith cared for him, but she wasn’t enough for him. Just because you’re disappointed in love is no excuse to give up hope and become a monster!”

“No,” Raven agreed, tucking a lock of hair behind my ear. “But I often think that if you had chosen Nathan over me I wouldn’t be a very pleasant person.”

“Good thing that I love you,” I said, leaning my head on his shoulder.

“Good thing,” he agreed, holding me tight.

We stayed arm in arm as we watched Mr. Bellows and Falco stand on the parapet overlooking the drawbridge to listen to the general’s demands.

“In the name of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, emperor of Germany,” the general began, his mouth barely moving beneath his large bushy mustache, “I order you to open your gates and surrender this stronghold. If you do not, reprisal will be swift and merciless.”

“Never!” Mr. Bellows cried, shaking his fist in the air. “You are being led into a war you cannot win by the puppet master van Drood. Go back to Berlin and tell your leaders that millions will die and your country’s name will be dishonored by your actions.”

“A fine speech, Rupert,” the general said—only it was van Drood’s voice issuing from beneath the drooping mustache. “You always were one for eloquent speeches. I remember one you gave in my class on the Civil War. But you were trying to impress Vionetta Sharp then. Who are you trying to impress now that Vionetta has chosen a woman over you? That little schoolgirl?”

“How does he know about Daisy?” I asked Raven, blushing in sympathy for Mr. Bellows.

“He’s in Helen’s head, remember? He must know everything she does.”

I watched as Mr. Bellows regained his composure. “I would never behave inappropriately with a student as you did in pressuring Evangeline Hall to marry you—and as you have done by kidnapping Helen van Beek. At least we have her back now.”

“Do you?” the general asked in van Drood’s voice. He and van Drood both tilted their heads up in unison and looked over our heads. We all turned at once to see Helen standing on top of the tower, her nightgown fluttering in the breeze like a pennant, balanced on the edge of the parapet.

“Open your gates or I’ll make her jump to her death,” van Drood barked, his voice coming out from the general’s mouth and his own. I saw Helen take a step closer to the edge and I snapped my wings out. I launched myself toward the tower but Marlin was ahead of me. He swooped toward Helen. Before he could reach her there was an enormous explosion. The ground shook and a missile flew straight at Marlin.

“No!” I screamed trying to push Marlin out of the way. But I was too late. The mortar shell struck him in the chest and he fell to the flagstones with a sickening thud. Helen was staring down at his broken body with blank eyes. I heard Raven screaming and the general, in his own voice now, barking an order to reload the guns. The first shot in the siege of Bouillon had been fired and the first soldier had fallen.

31



THE FIRST HOUR of the battle was a chaotic blur. I grabbed Helen and carried her down to her room. She babbled the whole time about how naughty Nathan had been to lead her up onto the roof when he knew how frightened she was of heights and did I know where he'd gotten to? All in a childish high-pitched chatter that made my skin crawl. When I dumped her on her bed and she started in with olly olly oxen free again I slapped her.

"Nathan's not coming and Marlin's been shot down!" I screamed.

"Don't you care?"

She blinked at me like a newborn chick, her hand rising to touch the red hand mark on her face.

"Don't blame her, mademoiselle!" Manon cried, grabbing my arm. "It is my fault. I fell asleep dreaming over my lace and let her slip past me. I will lock the door from now on."

"Do that!" I said, spinning on my heel. I couldn't look at Helen's blank face a moment longer. I fled the room and dove down the stairs, barely touching the steps with my feet, heading to the great hall, where I heard anxious voices. I found Wren and Raven bending over Marlin's too-still body.

Had I ever seen him not in motion? He was always the one making a joke, taking a pratfall to make others laugh. I noticed with a pang that he'd taken my advice about tying his hair back—with one of Louisa's pink ribbons.

"Is he—"

“He’s alive,” Wren answered, “but barely. The mortar struck his shoulder. It would have killed him straight on, but his ribs were broken and his lungs crushed when he fell.” Marlin coughed and a thin trickle of blood seeped out of his mouth.

Miss Sharp knelt by his side. “We have to open an airway. Someone get my nurse’s bag . . . we need boiling water . . .”

I turned to find Daisy carrying a basin of water. Louisa was behind her with a stack of white bandages. “I watched the nurses at the sanatorium,” Louisa said. It was the first sensible thing I’d ever heard her say. I started to tell her so, but the floor suddenly shook and something loud exploded outside in the courtyard. I ran from the great hall into the courtyard, Raven close at my heels, and found Miss Corey leading a troop of Darklings and villagers against a swarm of shadow snakes. How had they gotten over the walls?

As I drew my dagger and lopped off the head of one of the creatures I got my answer. A mortar shell flew over our battlements and landed against the tower wall. It exploded, releasing a swarm of hissing shadow vipers. Beatrice Jager drew an arrow, Dolores lit the fletching for her, and she shot it into the heart of the swarm. They exploded in a hissing mass of flames, extinguishing all but one that Sirena decapitated with the heel of her boot while shooting an arrow at another missile sailing over the wall.

“We have to stop the guns!” I shouted at Raven.

“Yes, but how?” He pulled me down into one of the archery loops and pressed his face to the opening in the wall. “Look at them. Each gun is guarded by twelve men—and I suspect they’re all shadow-ridden. They’ll see us coming—and I don’t know how to destroy one of those guns.”

“We’d have to shove an explosive down its throat,” another voice said. It was Gus, crouching beside us. “I could rig a device. If we could just get close enough . . .”

I looked out the slit at the battlefield. The army was encamped in a ring around the castle on the other side of the Semois. The guns were positioned on the riverbank, squatting like ugly toads. At least they hadn’t crossed the river yet. The guns would be too heavy for the bridge and they would be ruined by the water.

“I have an idea,” I said. “But I need a lumignon.”

No sooner had I said the word than a lumignon was on my shoulder sneezing in my ear. “I need you to talk to the undines . . .”

Twenty minutes later Raven, Sirena, Buzz, Gus, Heron, and I launched ourselves from the battlements, each carrying one of Gus’s explosive wine bottles. We each headed for one of the guns. I could see the guards around the guns looking at us—then aiming their bayonets at us. Before they could fire, though, a wave erupted from the river, engulfing gun and guards. When it receded the guards were gone. I could hear their screams as the undines dragged them under the water. I focused on the open maw of the gun, trying not to think about the lives being extinguished in the river. Would I ever get used to the idea of taking lives? I wasn’t sure if I was more afraid that I would or that I wouldn’t.

As I swooped down toward the gun, I swung my bottle up to light the candle, but that proved impossible to do midflight. I touched down in front of the gun and struck the match against the box Gus had given me, but my fingers fumbled and the match fell to the damp ground with a hiss.

I lit another one, held it to the candle—

—and heard another hiss. This time it came from inside the gun. A black snake was slithering out of the muzzle.

“Clever girl,” it spit in van Drood’s voice. “killing eighteen-year-old boys. The one screaming now is named Hans.”

I tossed the bottle into the gun’s mouth. “That’s on you!” I cried, launching myself into the air. The explosion drowned out the screams of the soldiers—*Hans*—and singed the tips of my feathers. Four other explosions followed—but at the sixth gun Sirena was wrestling with a shadow snake, her wine bottle lying in the mud. I dove toward her, but Raven and Buzz reached her first. Raven sliced the snake in half while Buzz retrieved the bottle and lit the candle. Or tried to. The wick was too wet.

“Leave it!” I shouted. We’ve gotten five out of six.”

“Not good enough,” Buzz shouted. He pulled the bandana from his neck and stuffed it in the mouth of the bottle. I lit a match from my own box and held it to the cloth, but it didn’t light as quickly as a candlewick.

“Give it a second,” Buzz said, sheltering the flame with his hand. “You go.”

Raven was pulling me away and shouting to Buzz to drop it already. “Right behind you, chief,” Buzz said, grinning as he lobbed the wine bottle

into the gun. Raven was already pulling me into the air as Buzz stepped forward, wings flexed, but before he could take off a hand reached up from the mud and grabbed his foot. It was one of the soldiers who had been drowned in the river, so covered in mud we hadn't seen him. Buzz kicked at the soldier's head, which caved in with a sickening squelch, but the soldier's hand still held on to Buzz's foot. I screamed and tried to fly back but Raven held me as more drowned soldiers slithered out of the river toward Buzz.

It was a horrifying sight, but when he saw them, Buzz grinned and stepped backward into the maw of the gun. "Come and get me," he shouted as the ghost soldiers swarmed over him and the gun exploded.

The explosion knocked me and Raven backward, clear over the battlements and into the tower wall. Raven cushioned our impact with his wings. I heard dozens of bones crack—I wasn't sure if they were Raven's wing bones or mine—then I heard nothing at all. As our friends gathered around us I could see their mouths moving but no sound coming out. The only voice I heard was the lumignon's inside my head. *The shadow soldiers cannot be killed. They come back as ghost soldiers. How do we fight against an army of ghosts?*



That night Raven and I flew over the battleground. The soldiers who had drowned in the river stood at their posts around the debris of the guns, their mud-streaked faces blank and bloated.

"The lumignon have a point," Raven said. "How do we fight a ghost army?"

I shook my head, which made the ringing worse. I could hear again, but everything sounded echoey, as if I were under water. "I don't know," I said. "Do you feel anything of Buzz here?" I asked.

Raven shook his head. "Darklings don't have souls like humans. It's part of our curse. When we're dead we're just . . . gone."

I shivered in the clammy night air. "It doesn't seem fair that you help the souls of humans and fairies to their afterworlds."

"What's fair about any of this?" he asked, waving his arms at the muddy field where Buzz had made his last stand. "Why should Buzz have

lost his life here? What was it for? These poor sods just came back and took up their posts—and I can't even help *them*. The shadows have bound up their souls."

I touched Raven's arm. "At least the guns are gone. Buzz would have been glad of that."

Raven nodded and took off into the air. I followed him back to the castle, where the Darklings had gathered on the rampart. Gus and Wren held a paper lantern affixed to a wire basket and a candle. While Gus lit the candle, Falco recited a prayer I'd never heard before.

*Let our prayers be carried
Where our souls cannot go.
Let our souls be borne on the air
Until we can come home.*

When he was done, Wren released the lantern and it floated up into the sky—a pale, glowing shape like a firefly. We watched it until it vanished in the dark and everyone murmured once again, "Until we can come home." The murmur was louder than before. I turned around and saw that the villagers and my Blythewood friends had joined us—and also the lumignon, the lutins, the Wieven, and Aesinor, whose face shone wet in the moonlight as if she, too, longed for a home she couldn't return to. We were all exiles, I realized, as displaced as the refugees choking the roads of Belgium.

I spent the rest of the night sitting by Helen's bed, listening to her play hide-and-seek with Nathan through the rooms of Blythewood. We were exiled from there, too, I realized. Even if we ever did go back, even if it wasn't destroyed, we could never go back to who we were there . . . except in our dreams.

Toward dawn I fell asleep and joined Helen there. We were sitting in Professor Jager's class listening to him deliver a lecture on the four kinds of magic—air, earth, fire, and water—our first year at Blythewood. To illustrate air magic he had created a bond between Daisy and a pair of scissors. He blew on the scissors and made Daisy's hair puff up. He doused the scissors with water and made Daisy choke. He was just about to apply a match to the scissors—which is when I'd interfered the first time I'd

watched this lecture, but as I rose to my feet now Helen stayed me with a touch of her hand.

“No, wait,” she said. “I want to see this.”

I turned to her, appalled, but before I could object I woke up in the chair by Helen’s bed, Manon shaking my arm. “They’re asking for you downstairs, mademoiselle.”

I staggered to my feet and stumbled down the stairs, shaking my head to clear the fog from my brain. Why would Helen want to see Daisy hurt in her dream world? Was she really that far gone?

All thought of Helen’s dreams were banished from my mind when I came out into the courtyard. My friends were standing at the curtain wall, staring out over the battleground. Huge black shapes, like giant prehistoric monsters, loomed out of the morning mist. “What are they?” I asked.

“The guns,” Raven said in a grim voice. “They’ve replaced them. Buzz died for nothing.”



That day set a pattern for the next day and the next . . . stretching into the next few weeks. The archers defended the walls with flaming pixie arrows while the Darklings bombed the guns and the undines drowned any soldier who strayed too close to the riverbank. Miss Sharp and Wren organized an infirmary for the increasing ranks of the wounded, helped by Manon’s *grand-mère*, Daisy, and Louisa, who turned out to be a surprisingly competent nurse and devoted to taking care of Marlin.

At night the Wievens and Aesinor flew patrol over the castle and Omar walked among the ghost soldiers trying to free them from their mental bonds. When he returned he and Professor Jager would sit up late until nearly dawn discussing how they could break the magic that van Drood used to control the soldiers.

“He ought to be controlling them through air magic,” I overheard Professor Jager saying one night as I headed up the stairs to check on Helen. “But if that were so we could break the bonds with earth magic using bells forged with blood.”

“I’ve tried that,” Omar replied. “I have a set of handbells forged in the Shalu Monastery in the mountains of Tibet that contain a drop of the Dalai

Lama's blood. I've rung them in front of the soldiers to no avail. Their bond with the Shadow Master cannot be broken with our earth magic. Perhaps because van Drood has forged a stronger bond."

"*Eisen und Blut*," Professor Jager muttered.

"Iron and blood?" Omar asked. "Is that not a slogan from Otto von Bismarck's famous speech?"

"Yes, it's all the Germans ever talked about. *Eisen und Blut, Eisen und Blut* . . . I wonder . . ."

I left them wondering. When I reached Helen's room I found her murmuring the same phrase. *Eisen und Blut, Eisen und Blut* . . .

Whatever magic van Drood was using, it was working. Gus and Dolores flew back with news of the battles raging all around us. The French had retreated from Lorraine; the advancing German army had shot fifty civilians and burned to the ground the tiny village of Nomeny; north along the Sambre and Meuse rivers the forts at Namur fell to the siege guns and the French retreated from Charleroi; and all around us in the Ardennes, French and German troops blundered into each other in the fog letting loose a tumult of bullets and bayonets and soaking the forest floor with blood.

Eisen und Blut, Eisen und Blut . . .

When we heard the guns of battle, we Darklings flew out to usher the souls of the dying to the afterlife. The dead and dying lay in heaps, piled so high that many of the dead were still standing, their bodies propped up against the buttress of their fallen comrades. Unlike the German soldiers attacking Bouillon, these soldiers weren't shadow-ridden, just helpless pawns of the inexorable war machine. Raven showed me how to reach inside for the soul of the dead soldier and how to comfort him as we flew together into the sky.

"Where exactly am I taking him?" I asked the first night, trying not to sound as scared as I was. Although I'd touched a dying soul once, I'd never ferried one to the afterlife and I didn't really understand where human souls went. "I know that fairies go to Faerie, but you never talk about where humans go after they die."

"It's because we don't really know," Raven admitted. "We carry human souls up and then, when they're ready, they fly free. You'll see."

The first soldier I carried was a German boy named Friedrich. He came from a village called Hamlin and he had a sister named Gerthe who was

nine years old. He had promised her that he would come back and walk her to school on the first day of the fall term. “How will I do that now?” he asked.

I didn’t know how to answer—Raven hadn’t prepared me for this—but suddenly I saw Friedrich in my head, his blond hair cleansed of blood, his body whole and unbroken, walking along a village lane, holding a little girl’s hand.

“Ah!” Friedrich said. “I see!”

And then he broke free from me and soared upward, dissolving into pure light that cascaded around me like a waterfall, cleansing me of the blood and gore of the battlefield. “I really didn’t have to do anything,” I told Raven later. “He did all the work.”

“Yes,” Raven admitted. “We’re just there as a sort of conduit. The dead know what they want.”

Not all passings were as peaceful as Friedrich’s. Some fought me, insisting it wasn’t their time yet; some clung to me, refusing to fly free. There was a French boy I had to fly all the way back to his village on the outskirts of Paris to sit by his father’s bedside while he told his father a long complicated story about some stolen sausages. Only when his father rose from his bed, lit a candle, and picked up his son’s photograph from his night table and kissed it did his son let go.

When I flew back that morning I saw with alarm how close the Germans were to Paris. The future I had seen in Mr. Bellows’s classroom was coming true and the vessel hadn’t even been broken yet. Once it was broken—once those shadows spilled out and joined the shadows already riding with the German army—the future would belong to the shadows.

I flew over the blasted woods of the Ardennes, which only a few weeks ago had been lush and verdant and had harbored the lumignon and lutins. Now all the fairies of the woods had retreated to the castle.

When I saw the castle of Bouillon my heart sank further. It was surrounded on all sides by an immense shadow army. When the soldiers who were shadow-ridden died they rose again as ghost soldiers and joined the ranks laying siege to the castle. Watching them rise made me feel ill. They didn’t move like men, they jerked and stuttered like machines. And as I flew over them I heard a whisper passing through the ranks of the ghost soldiers—a rattling sound like the gears of a great machine clanking

together. *Today we make the big push!* They whispered. *Today we take Bouillon!*

As soon as I landed in the courtyard I went into the great hall to tell Mr. Bellows what I'd heard. I found him sitting at the war table with my father, Professor Jager, Omar, Kid Marvel, Miss Sharp, Miss Corey, Dolores, and Gus. Their faces were grim as they studied the maps. Dolores and Gus were pointing out where the newest troops were camped and where the guns were stationed.

"They're planning to make a big push today," I said. "I heard them as I flew over."

They all lifted their heads—except for Mr. Bellows, whose eyes were glued on the map. "Ava, you look like you've been through the wringer," Miss Sharp said. "Let me get you some tea with sugar."

"For shock?" I asked, laughing. "I rather think I'm past being shocked."

"That's good," Miss Corey said, "because we ran out of tea and sugar three days ago. Here, have some brandy. It works rather better." She passed me a dusty bottle with a label that read "Armagnac," and I took a swig. It burned my throat, but it made me feel warm for the first time all night.

"Did you hear what I said?" I asked after I'd taken another swallow of the Armagnac. "They're going to attack today. What are we going to do about it?"

"We're going to do what we always do," Mr. Bellows said, pushing his hand through his hair. I noticed a bit of gray in it that I don't think had been there when the siege began. "We're going to fight to the last man standing . . . or"—he summoned a wan smile for Miss Sharp—"to the last woman, Darkling, or fairy standing."



THE ATTACK BEGAN at dawn. A thousand shadow soldiers swarmed over the walls. The archery brigade stood on the battlements behind a shield wall, shooting flaming arrows at the enemy. Omar dealt with the shadow snakes that made it over the wall by mesmerizing them. We Darklings dropped bombs on the guns. Kid Marvel and the lutins dug under the battleground and dragged shadow soldiers into their trenches, burying them alive—or what passed for alive for ghost soldiers—in the mud. Aesinor flew over the battlefield spraying fire at the shadows, incinerating whole swaths of ghost soldiers. But still they kept coming, a seemingly inexhaustible supply.

“I’m afraid van Drood has found the answer to modern warfare,” Raven remarked when we paused on top of the tower to scout out the lay of the land. “Enlist the dead. You’ll never run out of fresh recruits.”

At noon Mr. Bellows called a council to discuss surrender terms.

“There are no surrender terms for van Drood,” Miss Corey objected. “He’ll break the vessel and kill us all.”

“Or worse, make us his shadow puppets,” Miss Sharp said. “I’d rather die. If it comes to that, Lil”—she reached a hand over to grab Miss Corey’s—“will you kill me?”

“I did not call this meeting to plan our suicides!” Mr. Bellows roared, getting to his feet. I’d never seen him so angry. “We will not all die. Ava saw into the future—some of us were alive, weren’t we, Ava?”

They all turned to me. I was hearing Gillie's voice. Rupert Bellows fallen at the Somme, Miss Sharp burned by a fire attack, all those boys from Hawthorn on the list in Mr. Bellows's room . . . How could I tell them all that?

I was spared from telling them anything by the frantic entrance of Beatrice. "There's something you all have to see!" she cried.

"What now?" Mr. Bellows grumbled, wiping a tear from his eye. "What infernal machination has van Drood gotten up to now?"

"No, it's not that. The shadow army has stopped shelling the castle. They're retreating."

"Retreating?" We all echoed. "But why?"

"I'm not sure but I can hear shouts and gunfire coming from the northwest. I think another army is attacking van Drood's rear—" She clapped her hand over her mouth. "I mean . . ."

"We get it Bea," Dolores said. "But what army?"

Raven pushed past Bea, his hair and wings singed from flying close to mortar fire, his face blackened with smoke. "It's . . ." He coughed and spit. I handed him a glass of water, but he waved it away. "It's the Brits," he said. "Come to save our bacon."



I flew out with Raven to see for myself. Another army was attacking the rear flank of van Drood's shadow army—an army in khaki. "Do they know what they're getting into?" I shouted at Raven over the roar of gunfire.

"Should we warn them they're fighting ghost soldiers?"

"They seem to know," Raven answered. "Their bullets and bayonets are laced with pixie dust . . . look!"

I watched a troop of British soldiers charge a cluster of shadow soldiers. When they shot or bayoneted one of the enemy the shadow soldier burst into flames. "How did they know to use pixie dust and where did they get it?"

"Look at the badge on their caps— isn't that a hawthorn tree?"

I flew closer to inspect a private's uniform. The badge on his cap did indeed have a flowering hawthorn tree sewn on it.

"Gorblimey!" the soldier cried, staring up at me. "Is it Ava?"

“Collie?” I cried, only now recognizing him beneath the soot on his face. “Are these all Hawthorn boys?”

“Right you are! This here is the Hawthorn Fusiliers, led by Cap—” An explosion shook the ground. “No time to talk. We’re going over the top now.” He pointed to the hill that rose in front of us. “And then on to the castle. See you on the other side!”

He saluted me and then dashed into battle, crying, “For Hawthorn and England!” I watched the company of Hawthorn Fusiliers storm up the hill, singing the Hawthorn school song.

True to the Bell and Feather

We’ll march all day and night.

Hawthorn boys forever

We put up a bloody good fight!

The hill they were storming was the Giant’s Tomb. The Hawthorn Fusiliers routed the shadow soldiers led by a captain in khaki uniform and cap who waved his sword in the air crying, “Into the breach, lads, for Hawthorn and England!” The voice was familiar.

“We should go back and tell the archers to give these lads cover,” Raven said. “I’ll get Gus and the Darklings to come fight with them.”

“Yes,” I shouted back. “You go on ahead! I’m going to stay and help out.”

I provided what aerial artillery I could as the brave boys in khaki charged up the hill and the shadows fell before them. But there were more shadow soldiers swarming over the hill. I thought the Hawthorn Fusiliers would give way in the face of such overwhelming numbers, but their captain rallied them again and again, always taking the lead and putting himself at the greatest risk. When the captain reached the top of the hill he cried, “Now, Bottom! Blow your heart out!” His subaltern, a stocky private in an ill-fitting uniform, pulled a bugle out of his pack and proceeded to blow a stirring charge.

“What’s he doing?” I asked Collie.

“Calling the Giant,” Collie said. “That’s why we got to take this hill.”

“But that’s only a story, Collie, and even if there is a giant under the hill —” I was about to say that even if the giant existed how did we know it would fight on our side, when the hill began to shake.

“Take cover, lads,” the captain cried. “She’s going to blow!”

The top of the hill didn't so much "blow" as vaporize. Dirt and tree limbs flew past us. An enormous creature was rising up out of the dust. It was covered in mud—much the same color as the British uniforms.

"He's got on khaki," one of the soldiers cried. "He must be one of us!"

The giant opened his mouth and roared, revealing a mouth full of enormous teeth and expelling a hot and pungent gust. Undeterred, the captain approached the giant and saluted him. "Sorry to wake you, sir, but these shadows are destroying your woods. Would you mind taking care of them so we can join our friends at the castle?"

It was a brave speech, but I doubted the giant understood a word of it. What he was beginning to understand, I thought, was what had happened to his woods. He looked around at the blasted trees, the blood-soaked mud, and the bodies of the dead. A cloud of lumignon clustered around his head, blowing their pixie dust on him. He grunted back at them and then fixed his heavy-lidded eyes on the shadow soldiers.

They had dragged one of the guns to the base of the hill. The giant wrenched a tree from the ground and used it to swat the gun. Then he used the tree to sweep away the rest of the shadow soldiers. The Hawthorn Fusiliers cheered. Their captain raised his sword and cried, "Meet you at the castle, lads, where I'm sure they'll have a spot o' tea for us!"

Then he charged into the breach, mopping up whatever stragglers the giant left behind him. A biplane swooped in and strafed the enemy with gunfire. I flew by the cockpit and recognized Cam at the helm. Raven and the other Darklings flew in her wake, shooting flaming arrows into the shadow soldiers. I heard one of the Hawthorn Fusiliers cry out, "It's Saint George and his Agincourt bowmen come to save us Brits!" I heard the story repeated down the line until they were crying that "the Angel of Bouillon" had saved them.

By nightfall the Hawthorn Fusiliers had cleared a path to the drawbridge. The giant sat down in front of the castle, his back to the battlements, resting his tree club on his knees and glaring out at the river as if daring anyone to cross it. I flew over the walls and shouted for Gus and Dolores to raise the portcullis to let the British troops in. The captain led his company into the courtyard, where they were greeted by cheers and shouts of "*Vive les Anglais!*" by the Belgian villagers. A flock of lumignon crowned the captain with a floral wreath. He stood in the center of the

cheering crowd, looking dazed. Then he took off his cap to wipe his face and I finally recognized him.

"It's Nathan!" Daisy cried. "Oh, I knew we hadn't lost you! You've come back a hero."

Nathan shook his head and pointed to Bottom, Collie, and Jinks, who were gathered around their captain beaming with pride. "These lads are the heroes. They found me when I was feeling sorry for myself and we all joined up together."

"But how did you know we needed help?" I asked.

"Helen told me," Nathan replied.

I stared at him, wondering if he'd lost his mind. "But Helen's here," I said.

"I know," Nathan replied. "She found me in my dreams. Just like she always found me when we played hide-and-seek when we were children. She told me I had to come and rescue the castle—and she says she knows how to stop van Drood's army."



Nathan insisted I take him to Helen right away. "You should prepare yourself," I told him as we climbed up the stairs. "She's been lying in bed for nearly a month senseless—"

"Not senseless," Nathan corrected me. "She's been traveling in van Drood's head, trying to find a way to stop him."

"Are you sure?" I asked, stopping outside her door. "I've been in her dreams, too, and it seems to me she's been wandering in Blythewood reliving her childhood when she visited you there."

"That's how she's been getting by him," Nathan said, "by pretending that she's lost in childish fantasies, but really all along she's been looking for—"

"Nathan?" The door across from Helen's opened onto the room where Marlin was recuperating. Louisa stood on the threshold.

"Louisa!" Nathan cried, embracing his sister. "I'm glad you made it here. You look . . . better than when I saw you last."

"I'm a nurse now!" she said. "It's ever so much more interesting than playing cards."

“Good for you, Louisa. I’ll come see you when I’ve visited Helen.”

“Of course,” she said. “She’s been calling for you. I have to go back to my patient now.”

“Who—?” Nathan began.

Not sure how Nathan would react to his sister nursing his archrival, I interrupted. “How will we learn van Drood’s weakness from Helen? She hasn’t uttered a sensible word in weeks.”

“Easy,” he said, opening Helen’s door. “We’ll go into her dream world with her. We’ll help her find van Drood’s weakness and destroy him.”

For all his bluster, Nathan looked startled by Helen’s appearance. She lay on the bed, still as death, white as the sheets Manon washed every day. Manon had pushed the shadow veil off her face but its horrible black feelers still clung to Helen’s gaunt face. Manon stood up as we came in and stared at Nathan.

“You’re Nathan, aren’t you?” she said. “It’s about time you got here.”

“Yes,” Nathan agreed, sitting down on Helen’s bed and taking her hand. “I was unavoidably detained at the Battle of Mons. But I’m here now. Thank you for taking care of her.”

Manon sniffed. “*Mais oui, monsieur*. Mademoiselle Helen is *très sympathique*. I would guard her to my death.”

Nathan tore his eyes off Helen’s face to glance at Manon. “I believe you would. Would you guard the door for us while Ava and I are here with Helen? It’s very important we are not disturbed.”

Manon straightened up. “*Oui, monsieur*, if the Bosch try to pass I will stab them with this.” She drew out a ten-inch butcher knife from her lace basket.

“Good girl,” Nathan said, clapping her on the shoulder. “I’ll see you get the Silver Star for valor. And look, you’ll have company.”

Bottom stood at the door nervously revolving his cap in his hands. Raven stood behind him, glaring at Nathan. “Sorry to disturb you, Beck—Captain, but the blokes downstairs wanted me to tell you them shadow-thingums are coming again.”

I stood up and looked out the window. The ground around the river was filling with ghost soldiers. They were pulling new guns. I could smell the reek of iron and blood in the air. *Eisen und Blut*. Raven and Nathan came to stand beside me.

“Will they never stop coming?” I cried.

“Not until we cut their tie to van Drood,” Nathan replied, “and the only way to do that is travel into Helen’s dream world.”

“Ava can’t do that,” Raven said. “It’s dangerous for a Darkling to vision travel. The last time Ava did she almost died. Can’t you do it yourself?”

“I would if I could, but Helen told me she needs Ava.”

“I have to do it,” I told Raven. “I came back last time. I’ll come back this time.”

“You’d better,” he said, then turned to Nathan, “because if you don’t I’ll have to kill him.”

“Fair enough,” Nathan said, grinning. “We don’t have any more time to argue. Bottom, tell them to hold them off as long as they can. And then come back up here and guard the door with this pretty mam’selle.”

Bottom smiled sheepishly at Manon, saluted Nathan, and clambered down the stairs. Raven kissed me, glared once more at Nathan, and then followed him. Nathan looked over my shoulder out the window at the gathering shadow troops. “It doesn’t look like we have much time. We’d best get started.”

33



NATHAN SAT ON the bed beside Helen holding her right hand and I sat on the chair holding her left. “Once we enter the dream space with her we mustn’t lose contact with each other. If we do, I’m afraid Helen will be lost forever in there.”

I nodded and reached out to take his hand. As soon as our fingers touched, the room went black and I felt the floor fall out from beneath us. I squeezed Nathan’s hand, terrified. Before I’d fallen into the dream space through the gentle door of sleep; now I was plunged into it like falling through a trapdoor. I held on to Nathan’s hand, then felt a reassuring squeeze from Helen’s hand.

“It’s all right, Ava,” I heard her say inside my head. “Pretend you’re riding the loop the loop at Coney Island.”

“When did you ever ride the loop the loop?” Nathan asked. “I could barely get you on the Steeplechase.”

“I’d have ridden it with you,” she said. “Remember when you dared me to climb up to the bell tower?”

“Yes—”

“Remember it now,” Helen said, her voice suddenly serious. “Remember the bell tower. You too, Ava—the bell tower at Blythewood. Quick!”

I tried to picture the bell tower the first time I’d climbed up to ring the bells. I could almost hear them . . .

“Good, Ava, I nearly forgot you’re a chime child. You’ve summoned the bells to ring us home. We’re almost—”

We landed with a thud in the bell tower. It was a crisp autumn day, the valley spread out around us in shades of red and gold, the river gleaming below us. The air smelled like apples and wood smoke. The Hudson! How beautiful it looked. My eyes filled up with tears as I realized how afraid I’d been that I would never see Blythewood again.

Helen was also looking out over the river valley. “I never really appreciated this view before; I was always too scared. Fear kept me from so many things,” she said, looking at Nathan. “But I’m done being afraid now. Come on.” She pulled both of us down the belfry stairs. “Let’s go find Jude.”

We crept down the stairs, still holding hands. On the landing Nathan stopped and stared at a newel post. “I broke this sliding down the banister when I was six.”

“We’ve come back to Blythewood before that,” Helen said, leading us down the stairs to the classroom hall. “I’ve been trying to get us back to just the right time . . . ah, see this rug?” She pointed to a runner in the classroom hall. “It’s not the one from our day. Dame Beckwith had to replace it after the flood of aught-one. This is Blythewood before we were born—oh, look, here’s Mr. Bellows’s classroom, only it isn’t his yet. It’s Jude’s.”

“Why does she keep calling him Jude?” Nathan whispered to me. “It gives me the creeps.”

“Because it helps to get closer to him,” Helen replied. “Look, he’s preparing his lesson. He’s planning a demonstration on one of those boring Roman battles.”

She pointed to a figure seated at the front desk—the desk that would belong to Mr. Bellows in our day—which was covered by tin soldiers in Roman garb and toy chariots. At first I thought Helen must be mistaken. The slim young man bent over the mock battle scene couldn’t be Judicus van Drood. He looked like—

“Me,” Nathan said. “He looks like me.”

Van Drood lifted his head as if he’d heard Nathan’s voice. His gray eyes flashed in the sunlight. A lock of dark hair fell over his eyes. His features, which would one day harden to a mask of contempt, looked fine and sensitive here. And he did look a lot like Nathan.

“Can he hear us?” I asked. “Is this *his* dream space?”

“It *is* his dream space,” Helen said, “but it’s a corner of it he no longer comes to, so he can’t hear us. But he can hear *her*.”

A girlish laugh came from behind us in the hall. Van Drood’s face when he heard it became . . . *soft*. I turned to see where the laugh was coming from and a girl walked right through us. It made me shiver. Helen squeezed my hand. “Did you feel that?” I nodded. “Hm, I never feel it when they pass through me.”

“It might be because Ava’s half Darkling,” Nathan said. “Raven said—”

“It’s my mother,” I interrupted. The girl whose laugh had softened van Drood’s face was younger than I was now and dressed in a corseted and bustled dress. Her long red hair was piled on top of her head. Little ringlets escaped around her face. When she smiled at van Drood a dimple appeared in her left cheek.

I’d never seen my mother look so young—or so carefree. She walked to the front of the classroom and sat with hands clasped on top of her desk looking at her teacher with an expression of studious attention. Her other classmates were not so well behaved.

More girls were filing in now, filling the classroom with loud voices and raucous laughter. Van Drood’s face hardened as the noise grew.

“Ladies, please!” he remonstrated in a weak, quavering voice. “Please sit down and be quiet.” It was shocking to hear the tentative voice issuing from his mouth. His face was turning red with embarrassment. He was gripping a metal ruler so tightly that it was cutting into his hand. He rapped it on the desk to get the class’s attention, upsetting a bottle of ink over some papers. The class was startled into a momentary hush and then burst out laughing even harder than before.

“Oh, do grow up!” Evangeline cried, standing up and facing the class. “I, for one, would like to hear Professor van Drood’s lecture. It’s on magic, isn’t it, Professor?” She smiled engagingly at van Drood.

“Why, she’s flirting with him,” I said.

“Don’t sound so shocked,” Helen said. “Lots of girls have crushes on their teachers—as I’ve tried to explain to you—and look, she’s gotten the class to be quiet.”

I looked back at the class, who were indeed regarding their teacher with interest.

“Oh yes, please,” one of the girls, who looked like a young Albertine Montmorency, said. “Tell us about magic. Professor Jager’s lecture on the four kinds of magic didn’t make any sense to me.”

“This is Latin class,” he said, fiddling with one of the toy soldiers. “I’ve prepared a lesson on the Battle of Cannae.” He pointed to the carefully laid-out battle scene.

“Oh, but we’re learning Latin for spells, aren’t we?” Evangeline said. “So it really is all about magic, isn’t it? And I’m sure you could explain so much better than Professor Jager. What I don’t understand is how earth magic can break air magic. It doesn’t make any sense. Can *you* explain it?” She was practically batting her eyes at him.

“Why are we watching this?” I asked Helen. “I know van Drood was in love with my mother and that her rejection of him turned him into a monster—”

“Sh!” Helen shushed me. “It’s this bit that’s important.”

Coaxed by Evangeline, van Drood was demonstrating the principles of earth and air magic, much as I’d seen Professor Jager do. He had created a simulacrum of my mother by affixing a strand of her hair to a toy soldier. He made my mother laugh by blowing on the soldier and ruffling her hair. He made the class gasp by making my mother levitate in the air by holding the toy soldier over his head. Then he gently put the soldier back down in the battle scene. “I will refrain from demonstrating the effects of fire and water on the simulacrum . . . for obvious reasons.”

The girls laughed. For a moment van Drood’s face pinked, but then he realized they were laughing at his joke, not at him, and he smiled. Such a happy smile that it made my heart ache.

“And will you release me?” Evangeline asked. “Or am I to continue as your slave for the rest of the school day?”

Now he did blush as he fumbled to pull a bell from his drawer. “Oh yes, all it takes is a bit of earth magic—a bell forged with a drop of blood—”

“Ew,” squealed Albertine Montmorency, “that’s gross!”

“But necessary,” van Drood said, ringing the bell, “to break the bonds of air magic. See, now the bond is broken . . .” He toppled the toy soldier and my mother fell hard to the ground. All the girls gasped, but none louder than van Drood.

“Evangeline!” he cried in a voice that revealed how much he cared for her. He reached to help her up, but in doing so he brushed the toy soldier with his arm into the pool of spilled ink. Instantly, Evangeline started coughing, blue ink bubbling up out of her lips. One of the girls screamed. The door flung open and Dame Beckwith strode into the room. She was younger, but still commanding. The girls were instantly silenced.

“What’s going on here?” she demanded.

“I-I was demonstrating air and earth magic,” van Drood stammered. “And something went wrong. I used the bells to break the bond between Evangeline and the simulacrum . . .” He lifted the soldier from the ink and Evangeline screamed. “But it didn’t work! I-I don’t know what’s gone wrong!”

“Whyever were you demonstrating magic in Latin class?” Dame Beckwith muttered, while gently cupping the toy soldier in her hands. “Ah . . . I see, you’ve gotten blood on it. The mixture of iron and blood in the simulacrum creates a bond indissoluble by the bells.”

“Iron and blood,” I whispered. “*Eisen und Blut*. That must be why our bells don’t break the bond between the soldiers and van Drood. How do we break it . . . ?”

Helen hushed me again. Dame Beckwith was dismissing the class—all except Evangeline, who lay on the floor crying.

“I never meant to hurt her!” van Drood cried.

“Of course you didn’t, Jude,” Dame Beckwith said gently. “But this sort of magic is very dangerous to play with.” She lowered her voice. “Once you introduce blood into the mix you’re working with shadow magic. It can only be reversed by a chime child. Luckily, we have one. I shall send for Emmaline Sharp. In the meantime, I will keep an eye on Evangeline and her simulacrum.”

“That’s it!” Nathan said. “A chime child can break the bond between the simulacrum and the soldiers. Ava can do it.”

“But how?” I said. “And what’s he using for a simul—” But suddenly I knew. *Eisen und Blut*. “The guns. They’re made of iron. If they were forged with blood . . .”

“Van Drood has forged a bond between the soldiers and the guns; he’s made the soldiers . . .” Nathan began.

“Part of the machine,” I said, remembering the awful dream of the factory girls sewing themselves into their machines and van Drood drinking their blood. “It’s diabolical.”

“But most effective,” Helen said. “Look.” She pointed to van Drood, who was staring at the scattered soldiers on his desk. “He came up with the idea then.”

“I always thought it was being spurned by my mother that turned him to the shadows,” I said.

“In part, yes,” Helen said, “but it started here with his need to control. To never be laughed at or shamed again.”

Van Drood was ordering the toy soldiers, his face set and grim, looking out at the rows of empty chairs, and then he looked at us.

Helen gasped. I followed her gaze and saw why. The man standing at the desk was not the young Jude; he was the van Drood we knew, the Shadow Master.

“Congratulations, my dear, you’ve surprised me. And here I thought you were just playing hide-and-seek with your friends. You’ve discovered my little secret. But it won’t do you any good. Ava still doesn’t know *how* to undo my spell with her chime magic and you’ve run out of time. Do you hear that?”

For some time I’d heard a faint drumming, but now it was louder. It shook the walls of Blythewood so hard that the glass shivered in the windowpanes and books fell from the classroom shelves.

“That’s my army pounding on the gates of Bouillon Castle. It will only be a matter of minutes before they storm the castle and slaughter your friends. Ah, do you smell that?” He sniffed the air. I did smell something—*smoke*. “The flames will reach your tower room soon.”

A sudden jolt threw me to the floor, which was caving in beneath me. The dream space was collapsing and I was sinking into oblivion. I felt the same chill that I had when I’d fallen into the North Atlantic from the *Titanic* and I’d lost a piece of my soul. I felt that tug now, of being sucked into a churning maelstrom where my soul would be chewed to bits . . .

And then I felt two hands grasping mine, pulling me out. Helen and Nathan pulled me back to the classroom, but the building was falling apart. Cracks ran down the walls, books fell to the floor, the very stones of

Blythewood were crumbling. Just as the walls of Bouillon were crumbling under the pounding of the guns.

“I have to go back!” I cried.

“We need the bells,” Helen cried. “The bells of Blythewood rang us home; we need the bells of Bouillon to bring us back there.”

I could hear them ringing—both the bells of Blythewood and the ones at Bouillon—and, holding Nathan and Helen’s hands, I ran out of the classroom and down the hall toward the tower stairs. The glass cases holding our trophies had shattered. I glimpsed, along with the pictures of Blythewood girls of the past, faces I recognized—my classmates—Daisy’s plaque for the Latin prize and newspaper clippings of Hawthorn boys killed in the war. The future Blythewood was somehow folded into Helen’s dream space—but did that mean *that* future was collapsing or that Blythewood was being destroyed?

We came out into the Blythewood tower, the bells ringing so hard the walls were shaking, the landscape shrouded in fog. Over the tolling of the bells of Blythewood I heard, like an echo, the bells of Bouillon and one other bell—the smallest treble bell chiming faintly as though it were underwater. It was Merope’s bell, the one that had fallen into the Hudson River when the bells were brought over from Scotland. I could feel its chime spreading out in circles, like rings in a pond, spreading over Blythewood and beyond—across the ocean to Bouillon.

The fog cleared and we were standing on top of the tower at Bouillon. The air was thick with smoke and the reek of gunpowder and blood and the metallic tang of iron. A mortar shell whizzed by and struck the castle walls. Stones tumbled to the ground leaving a gaping hole, which the ghost soldiers poured through. Mr. Bellows charged forward, sword in hand, Sam Greenfeder by his side. Raven and Marlin led a battalion of Darklings into the fray. Bottom blew his bugle to muster the Hawthorn Fusiliers. Miss Sharp and Miss Corey shot burning arrows into the advancing lines of shadow soldiers.

All our friends were fighting valiantly, but the ghost soldiers kept coming. There was an inexhaustible supply, and they kept coming with the relentless precision of a machine.

“They *are* a machine,” I said aloud. “Van Drood forged the guns with the soldiers’ blood and bound them together into one infernal killing

machine. If I can destroy the guns—”

“But we destroyed them before,” Nathan asked, staring at the destruction around us. “And it didn’t keep the soldiers from coming back.”

“Because we didn’t break the bond between the guns and the soldiers. Only my bells can do that.”

I closed my eyes and tuned in the sound of the bells inside me. I could still hear the subaqueous echo of Merope’s bell tolling beneath the Hudson River, spreading vibrations out through the water, connecting the bells of Blythewood to the bells of Bouillon. I let myself fill with all the bells until I was vibrating to their tones—to the deep bass clanging fear and the sweet treble chiming love, and to everything in between—despair, joy, envy, hope.

I felt it all. I felt how it was all connected, the bad to the good. And deep at the base of my spine, I felt the darkness uncurling, coming to life . . .

I opened my eyes. The tower was shaking, but not with the blows of the guns. *I* was making it shake. I had the power of all the bells within me.

Nathan and Helen were staring at me.

“Please don’t explode,” Helen said. She was shivering in her chemise, the veil and netted dress fallen away. Her face and arms still carried the marks of the shadow net. I wondered if she was completely free of van Drood’s power, but then Manon burst through the tower door and threw the white lace veil she had been making over Helen’s head and shoulders. Instantly the marks faded from Helen’s skin and she stopped shivering. She cast off the last shreds of van Drood’s veil.

I’d have to ask Manon someday what magic she wove into the lace to free Helen from van Drood’s power, but right then I knew I had better move before I blew us all up.

I spread my wings and flew from the tower, over the courtyard where my friends were losing the battle to the ghost soldiers, over the battlefield where the giant, bloody and stumbling, swung his club at mortar shells. I saw lutins struggling to stem the tide of the dead and lumignon darting in and out between the ranks of the Hawthorn Fusiliers, protecting them from the gunfire. I saw Collie kneeling beside an injured Jinks screaming for help and Gus swooping down to save Sirena from the point of a bayonet.

“Retreat!” I screamed. “Fall back to the castle!”

In the midst of it all I saw van Drood, riding the crest of the ghost soldiers, like a swollen tick on a dog's back. I pictured the young schoolmaster bent over his toy soldiers and the way he'd blushed when the girls laughed at him, and pity mixed with all the other emotions clanging away inside of me. Pity was a deep sonorous bell that threatened to bring me to the ground, but then it mixed with anger, which stoked the fire in my wings.

"So you were hurt!" I cried out. "Millions are hurt every day and they don't lash out. You can't destroy the whole world to keep from feeling! You can't turn us all into your toy soldiers!"

As I spoke I felt the vibrations of the bells inside me spreading outward, entering the only iron vessels near me—the guns. They were vibrating with my fury, the mortar shells clattering inside them like loose teeth. The ghost soldiers, too, were shaking. They were tied by blood to the guns and to van Drood's mind. For a moment I was inside his mind. I saw him sitting at his desk, lining up his toy soldiers in a row—

—and then it all exploded. The great iron guns shattered into a million pieces, spraying steel shards and clods of earth into the sky. I was pushed up and back, hurtling backward over the castle wall. My head was full of the screams of the ghost soldiers as their bond to van Drood was broken. Then I hit the tower wall and the screaming stopped. As I slid down the stones to the pavement below I heard only a single bell tolling. A death knell for me, I suspected.

Raven caught me before I hit the flagstones. I saw his face over me, his lips moving, but I couldn't hear his voice. Instead I heard van Drood's voice inside my head.

A brave gesture, my dear, but fruitless. There are so many more shadows where I'm going.

I pushed Raven aside and struggled to my feet. Van Drood was standing in the courtyard beside the well. His face was covered in blood and ash, his hair burnt off by the explosion, one arm flapping limp and disjointed from his shoulder. He shouldn't have been alive—and I'm not sure he was. He'd drunk so long from the shadows that his limbs were held together by hatred and malice. When he grinned at me part of his jaw flapped open, revealing white bone. He jerked one leg over the rim of the well and, his cape flapping like the wings of a bat, plunged feet first down the chute.

He was heading for the last vessel.

Before Raven could stop me I leapt across the courtyard and followed him down into the darkness.

34



I HAD TO tuck my wings in close to my sides in the narrow well so they wouldn't slow my descent. I plummeted down and down until I wondered if we were journeying to the center of the earth like in Mr. Verne's novel. Aesinor had said that the vessel was buried beneath the castle, but I hadn't imagined it was so deep—and I didn't know what I would find at the end of the well. Another maze like the one at Hawthorn? I didn't have a golden thread or a knight to show me the way—but neither did van Drood. Or was the well a trick? Was it a part of Faerie where I'd be falling forever?

Then I hit water with an impact like hitting a brick wall. The cold enveloped me and wiped out every feeling but the need to breathe. But which way was up? Was there a way out? Or was this a trap to drown anyone trying to reach the vessel?

I saw something glimmering below me and dove toward it. I swam through a tunnel and came out in a cavern, gasping for breath and so cold I could barely drag myself out of the water. When I managed that I could only lie on my back, panting, gazing up at what looked like the ceiling of a great cathedral spun from glass and lace and a million colored lights. The great arching vault rested on intricately carved pillars that glimmered like wet sand. The ceiling was paved in tiny bits of stained glass—a mosaic that formed a shifting landscape of mountains and rivers, sunsets and clouds, and figures moving across fields of grass and tundras of ice. The figures built fires and stone circles and castles and churches. The whole history of

the human race seemed to be passing across the ceiling. Maybe I was dying and this was my last glimpse of the world.

“They’re dreaming.”

The voice roused me from the panorama. I turned my head and saw a man crouched a few feet away, kneeling beside a glowing pool of light. It took me a second to recognize van Drood, he was so transformed. The water had washed away the blood and ash, but more than that, his expression was one I’d never seen on his face. It was wonder.

I rolled over and since I couldn’t stand—I had broken something in the fall—crawled to him, dragging my limp wings in the sand. The pool was surrounded by a stone rim. I braced myself on it and pulled myself up into a sitting position to look in.

It wasn’t a pool. It was a round sheet of opaque glass beneath which swam dark shapes. It reminded me of the time I had skated on the frozen Hudson and seen fish swimming beneath the ice—and then later, shadows.

“This is the vessel,” I said. “Those are shadows. But they’re—”

“Beautiful,” van Drood said. “The fairies locked them away because they made humans too powerful.”

“They locked them away because mankind was destroying itself.” I looked up at the ceiling and saw that the pictures were projected from the shimmering glass surface like images from a magic lantern. They were battling each other now. Flames flickered on the walls, bursts of blood dripped down the columns.

“Because they hadn’t found a master yet. I have found a way to harness the shadows, to tie them into a machine that works for the greater good.”

“*Good?* You call this war you’ve raised *good?*”

He clucked his tongue and shook his head like a schoolmaster disappointed with his favorite student. “The war was a necessary evil to gain my objective—to free the last of the shadows so that I could have complete control. Once the shadows have all been harnessed into my machines they will be harmless. The world will be a peaceful place.”

“A dead place,” I countered. “I’ve seen your world. You would destroy all free will, all beauty—”

“Not at all! Look at this.” He held up his hands to the images playing over the walls and ceiling. “There is no beauty without darkness. You, of all people, know that, Avaline.”

I began to object but then I felt that dark thing stirring at the base of my spine.

“Yes, there’s darkness in you, born from the Darkling curse but nurtured by all you’ve seen in this world. Don’t deny it any longer. It’s what makes you strong.”

I tried to tell myself that he was wrong, but the thing coiling around my spine told me differently. I could feel it responding to the pictures on the walls, to the closeness of all those shadows clustered beneath the glass. I put my hand on the glass and the shapes swarmed to it like sharks smelling blood. They sensed me, sensed the darkness in me that was rising up.

Van Drood was right. The darkness may have come from my Darkling heritage but it was nurtured on the streets of New York, where I saw children starve and horses beaten to death, and in the dark, unheated tenement rooms where my mother and I went to bed hungry and even the *hope* that things could ever be different grew thin and wasted in the frigid air. It was fed at the back doors of Fifth Avenue mansions where I stood in the cold waiting for my mother to deliver the hats she made for rich, idle women, shut out from even the hope of a better life.

The darkness wrapped itself around my spine, healing the bones I’d broken in the fall, and got me to my feet. Van Drood rose with me.

“Yes!” he cried. “I saw it in you, Avaline, as you were growing up. I saw the way you looked at those rich women. Why should they have it easy while your mother worked her fingers to the bone? I saw how you looked at the factory owner’s daughters that day at the Triangle.”

I gasped at the memory. It seemed like a hundred years ago that I’d looked up from my sewing to see Mr. Blanck’s plump well-fed daughters in their pretty dresses and smart hats. Tillie had wanted me to copy their hats for her, and I’d snapped that a knock-off hat wouldn’t make her look like those girls. I could feel the jealousy and spite crawling up my spine, making my skin tingle. Whenever I’d felt like this before, I’d tamped down the feeling, afraid that once I let it loose I’d never be able to stop it, that my anger would consume me—

My wings snapped open and caught fire, the reflection of their flames lighting up the cathedral, the shadows dancing gleefully against the flaming backdrop. Darkest of all rose the shadow of a winged creature—a monster.

This is what I'd always been afraid of: that if I gave free rein to my anger it would turn me into a monster.

I just hadn't realized how good it would feel.

"I always knew you had the darkness in you, more even than my son. And look how powerful you are—not just a Darkling but a phoenix! It was your kind that carried the vessels and sealed them, and only your kind can open the vessel. Do it now, Ava. Open the vessel. The fire from your wings can melt the glass."

I stared at him. "Only a phoenix . . . But that would mean . . . ?"

Van Drood smiled. With his loose jawbone and burnt skin it was a gruesome sight. "That the first two vessels were opened by phoenixes. Your kind has always betrayed the Darklings. It's because the darkness in you *burns*. It longs to be reunited with its kind."

"No!" But I could feel the snake at the base of my spine uncurling, spreading its wings. It wasn't a snake—it was a fire-breathing dragon and it wanted *out*.

Van Drood's smile widened to reveal a bottomless smoking pit. "And it's not just your predecessors who have betrayed your kind. You've already done it once in that future you traveled to. The only way the shadows could have gotten out of the third vessel was if *you* let them out. Look . . ."

The figures on the walls were acting out a play. The phoenix and the man in the cape, whose shadow looked like a giant crow, were both kneeling over the mouth of the vessel. The phoenix was fanning the flames around them, melting the glass cover, releasing the shadows—fat tadpole-shaped creatures with gaping fanged mouths that latched onto people and sucked the life out of them. *Sucked the hope out of them*. These were the hope-eaters that Aelfweard had told me about.

"But how could that be?" I cried.

"We're standing outside time," van Drood explained patiently. "This moment exists in all time. What you did before is what you'll do again—and again. It's what you'll always do. Can't you hear them calling to you?"

I did. I didn't need Darkling ears to listen. The shadows were calling from beneath the glass. *With us you will never be weak again, you'll never be cold or hungry. No one will laugh at you or hurt you.* I knelt beside the mouth of the vessel, beside van Drood, just as my shadow had—as it *would?* as it *always did?*—and pressed my hand to the glass. The shadows

swarmed to my touch. I could feel the glass growing warm, melting in the flame from my wings. Why else did I have wings of flame if not to do this?

Out of the shards of the broken vessel a new light will shine.

It was Miss Corey's voice I heard, reading from *A Darkness of Angels*.

A phoenix born of Darkling and human, to drive the shadows away.

Then I heard Wren's voice.

When a phoenix is fledged our curse will end.

Could it be that I was supposed to break the vessel?

Yes, sang the shadows.

But there had been phoenixes before and the curse wasn't ended. . . .

You are different, sang the shadows. You are the one.

I stared at van Drood. His eyes shone with the reflection of my burning wings. Suddenly I saw the flames leaping across the cutting tables at the Triangle factory. I saw girls shrieking as their dresses caught on fire. I saw Tillie Kupermann reaching for me on the roof and plunging to her death. That morning she had said to me that she knew I was on the side of the angels.

And then I felt Raven's arms around me when he'd caught me and I heard Raven's voice, like a bell tolling in my head—*only a chime child can destroy a shadow master*.

The bell tolled sweet and clear—the treble bell I heard for love. A long jagged crack fissured through the glass. Van Drood, his face rapt, leaned forward. I put my hand on his back—just as I'd seen him put his hand on Tillie Kupermann's back on the roof of the Triangle—and pushed him through the widening crack. Taken unawares he fell, but at the last moment he grabbed my arm and pulled me with him. I toppled forward, one hand clutching the rim, our bodies blocking the crack, the shadows clambering around us, calling to me. Their voices were surprisingly sweet. It would be so easy to let go—

But then I heard other voices—Raven and Helen, Nathan and Daisy—calling for me. They had climbed down the well, braving this terrible place to find me. I fanned my wings behind me and twisted out of van Drood's grip. I saw his eyes widen with surprise—and then he was falling. I saw the shadows swarming over him, devouring him, as carrion crows pick clean a carcass on the side of the road. Then I pulled back and fanned my wings over the glass, sweeping the melted glass over the crack until it was filled. I

doused the fire in my wings by thinking of the icy North Atlantic and frigid mornings waking up in unheated tenements, and then fanned that coldness over the glass until the seal had set. The shadows battled against the glass, but like moths against a window their cries were muffled, drowned out by friends calling for me.

I turned away from the shadows and called back to my friends. "Here," I cried. "I'm here."

35



IN THE YEARS to come I sometimes wondered if we had really won after all. Yes, the shadows in the world, without a master, scattered willy-nilly (where to, we would learn only too well in the years to come), but once set in motion, the war rolled on like some horrible machine grinding young lives in its vast pitiless gears. The German advance *was* stopped a few weeks after the Battle of Bouillon at a battle along a river in northeastern France. Nathan and the Hawthorn Fusiliers fought in the Battle of the Marne. Nathan won the Silver Star, and Private James Jenkins first class and a dozen other Hawthorn boys lost their lives.

It soon became clear that the only boys who were going home “before the leaves fell” were the ones whose souls we Darklings carried off the battlefield. There were so many souls to ferry that we needed more Darklings. They came from every corner of the earth. Aesinor offered the Castle of Bouillon for their base of operations. I stayed there a few months, but when Raven joined the Hawthorn Fusiliers (Mr. Farnsworth, working in the British War Office, wrangled him a commission) I decided I couldn’t spend the war helping only the dead. I volunteered for service at a field hospital near the front where Miss Sharp had become head nurse and Miss Corey drove an ambulance.

I asked Helen if she wanted to volunteer, but she said she wasn’t cut out to be a nurse. She went back to Paris and with Manon started a relief society for Belgian refugees. She raised money by going around to Blythewood “old girls” living in Paris, including Georgiana Montmorency

and Andalusia Beaumont, who were living together in Montmartre. Frustrated at having to rely on charity, she and Manon opened a lace school and clothing manufacturer that made bandages, socks, sweaters, and other war supplies. “Not exactly high fashion,” Helen wrote to me, “but I do like to think our soldiers will be the best dressed on the front.”

I wondered if they were more than well dressed. When I asked Manon about how she had managed to create a lace shawl with the magic to heal Helen’s wounds from the shadow net and free Helen from van Drood’s power, she had shrugged with Gallic insouciance and replied, “A woman always feels at her best wearing something beautiful, *n’est-ce pas?*” Miss Corey thought Manon must be a natural spell weaver, able to convey healing spells through needlework. I liked to think that every sock and scarf Manon knitted for the front kept some soldier safe from harm.

Marlin was too injured to join the army, but he and Louisa Beckwith (whose years of card playing had made her an adept at ciphers) worked with British intelligence on breaking German codes. Cam Bennett, masquerading as a boy, flew aeroplanes to gather intelligence to bring back to the Allies. Daisy went to work at the American Embassy in Paris along with Mr. Bellows, Agnes, and Sam Greenfeder. She wrote articles for the *Kansas City Star* exhorting Americans to come to the aid of France and Britain. As far as I could tell, she hadn’t become a spy. Dolores was the one who went again and again behind enemy lines to bring back intelligence of German troop movements. She and Gus were shot down somewhere over Alsace in the spring of 1915. Beatrice, heartbroken over her sister’s death, returned to America with her father on a speaking tour to rally American support for the war. On her way back to Europe she took the *Lusitania*. It was torpedoed by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland and sunk within eighteen minutes. Beatrice rescued a dozen survivors, including her father. Beatrice went on to become a tireless campaigner for America joining the war.

During the Battle of the Somme I held my breath, fearing all the time that I would hear that Rupert Bellows had fallen, even though Mr. Bellows was still working in the embassy in Paris. Instead Nathan walked into the hospital with a wounded soldier covered head to toe in blood. It was only when he was laid out on the operating table that I realized he was Raven.

“Get Ava out of here,” Miss Sharp barked at Nathan.

“I would,” Nathan replied. “Only I actually don’t think I can walk another step.”

I saw then that Nathan had a piece of shrapnel sticking out of his right leg. I helped him to a bed and dressed his wound while Miss Sharp and a young surgeon from Liverpool operated on Raven. “What if they don’t know how to fix a Darkling?” I fretted.

“I think all the parts are pretty much like ours,” Nathan said, wincing as I bathed his wound. “Excepting the wings and whatever organ controls foolhardy blockheadedness. We were under machine gun fire and the Bosch threw a grenade into our trench. Raven saw it and took it into his fool head to grab it and fly it into no-man’s-land, only it exploded before he could drop it.”

“And I suppose you’re the one who went into no-man’s-land to get him,” I said, biting back tears.

“Well, if I hadn’t I was afraid you and Helen would never speak to me.”

I poured a whole quart of carbolic lotion on his wound and he yelped. “What the bloody hell was that for?”

“For risking your life,” I said, and then kissed him and went off to see if there was any news about Raven, but he was still in surgery. I washed and rolled about a thousand bandages before Vionetta appeared, white-faced.

“He’s alive,” she told me, “but his wounds were very serious. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

“I can do more than that,” I told her.

I flew that night back to Bouillon and found Wren. When I told her she sent Sirena into the woods to collect certain plants. Before we left, Aesinor embraced us both and told us that she would light a candle for Raven. We flew back over the scorched, blasted woods and wasted fields of Belgium and France. What good had it done for me to come back to change the future if Raven wasn’t going to share that future with me?

When we landed at the hospital, Wren took my hand. “I’ve watched my son become a man these last two years,” she said. “I would not have had him miss the love he bears for you or the love he’s shown for these humans. You must not regret what has happened, even if . . .” She couldn’t finish.

“We won’t let him die,” I said. “Between the two of us we’ll keep him alive.”

We found him lying in a hospital bed, swathed in bandages, still as death, barely breathing. Vi told Wren the extent of his injuries while I sat down beside him and took his hand. It felt cold. I helped Wren change his bandages and administer the herbal salves she'd brought. Vi asked if the herbs would work on humans and Wren answered that she thought they might. For the next six weeks the only time I left Raven's bedside was to fly into the woods to find the plants Wren needed to treat him, which Vi now also used on other patients. I'd only leave, though, when Nathan was there to sit with him. Nathan had become almost as protective of him as I had.

"I'm going to limp for the rest of my days because of you, old man," I heard him tell Raven one day, "so you'd bloody well better live."

Helen came to visit, bringing medical supplies she'd wrangled out of her network of rich benefactors, and raspberry biscuits for Nathan. She also arranged to have Raven and Nathan both evacuated to a hospital in Paris to recuperate. "It will be much nicer than those ghastly places in the provinces and we can all be together. Of course Ava will stay with me at my new place on the Rue de Varenne. I've already arranged about her leave."

And so in the midst of war, Raven, Nathan, Helen, and I had a little holiday in Paris. Once Raven was well enough, Nathan snuck him out of the hospital to join us for dinner at the bistros and brasseries where Helen had cultivated the friendship of all the head cooks and waiters. She also, we discovered, had an unlimited access to the black market and used it to "fatten up our boys" on butter and eggs and good French cheese. During the day I would take Raven on slow strolls through the Tuileries, where little boys still sailed boats on the grand basin and old men still walked with their hands folded behind their backs. The only difference was that now the only young men were the injured—like Raven. He still limped, but he was making so much progress that he started talking of going back to the front.

"Is it wrong that I'm considering breaking his other leg so he can't go?" I asked Helen.

"I've been thinking of having Nathan kidnapped by Gypsies—I know some living in the Marais—but I don't think either of them would forgive us. Surely the war can't go on much longer. . . ."

It went on for two more years.

When the United States finally entered the war, Rupert Bellows resigned his post at the embassy and took a commission in the U.S.

Marines.

He fell, carrying a soldier back from no-man's-land, at the Second Battle of the Somme. The soldier's name was Roger Ignatius Appleby.

Daisy and Ig named their first son after him. Rupert James Appleby.
But I get ahead of myself.



When the war finally ended, Daisy and Ignatius went back to the States, as did Agnes and Sam, and Cam Bennett, but many of us stayed on in Paris. Vionetta Sharp and Lillian Corey opened up a little bookstore in the Latin Quarter called Shelley & Company. Helen insisted that she couldn't leave her lace factory. She and Manon had plans to open a couture house, which Manon insisted must be called Madame Hélène's. Raven said he'd just as soon stay in Paris. We found out that the artist who lived in our garret had decided to stay in Morocco, and we were able to rent it. Raven enrolled in classes in the Sorbonne and got a job at a watch shop in the Marais. Nathan and I also signed up for classes, but he seemed to lose interest quickly.

"He can't seem to settle to anything," Helen fretted.

"It's understandable," I told her. I was having trouble focusing on my classes, too. It was hard to concentrate on literature and philosophy after all we had seen in the war. I felt like I needed something that would keep my hands busy. And so I asked Helen for a job in her workrooms. She tried to get me to take a position as a partner, or at least a manager, but what I really wanted, I found, was to sit in a workroom sewing with a lot of other women who laughed and gossiped. It was like being back at the Triangle—only we were better paid and the workroom was well lit, spacious, and clean and we had a delicious hot midday meal made by Manon's *grand-mère*.

Helen did finally get me to take over as manager, but only so she and Nathan could take a honeymoon on the French Riviera. They were married in June of 1919 in a chapel of Saint-Germain-des-Prés (mostly, I think, to scandalize Mrs. van Beek's Protestant sensibilities). Helen said she didn't want a fuss but wept when we girls in the workroom presented her with a *peau de Chine* gown trimmed in point d'Angleterre. For a veil she wore the one Manon had made for her in Bouillon. Vi and Lillian brought armfuls of orange blossoms from their country place in Saint-Tropez, which Daisy,

Beatrice, Cam, Agnes, and I tossed in her wake as she and Nathan motored away for their honeymoon.

My tenure as manager stretched to six months as Nathan and Helen prolonged their trip, traveling to Spain, North Africa, Italy, Greece, and Istanbul. Helen sent me cheery postcards—*Nathan almost gored by bull at Pamplona! Nathan almost impaled by shark deep-sea fishing in Spain!*—that didn't quite disguise her concern that Nathan was still restless and unsettled. Still, I was shocked when they came back at how thin and drawn Nathan had become. We had dinner with them at the Closerie des Lilas, and Nathan ordered bottle after bottle of wine and insisted we all go out afterward to a cabaret in Montmartre. Raven went with him while I took Helen home.

"Sometimes," she confided, "I think the shadows never really left him."

The sky was lightening by the time Raven came back to our garret, smelling of absinthe and Turkish cigarettes. When I told him what Helen had said, he replied, "He's not the only fellow to come back from the war with a few dark places in his heart."

After that Raven always made sure to get Nathan home before dawn and to keep him from drinking too much. One day I happened upon Nathan at the Café St. Germain scribbling in a notebook. The saucer of his espresso cup was full of pencil shavings and cigarette ends. I asked him what he was writing and he answered, "Utter rot," but then conceded it was a story.

I asked if I could read it, and he showed it to me reluctantly. "This isn't half bad," I told him (when, in fact, it was *very* good). "You should show it to Vi and Lil. They've started a little magazine . . ."

In the end I showed it to Vi and Lil and they published it in the *Bell & Feather*. A New York editor on holiday got a hold of it and asked Nathan if he had any more like it. Nathan said he didn't but he'd see if he could dash off a few more. He started writing in the cafes, and drinking less, and began to look a shade less haunted.

"I'm married to a writer!" Helen remarked one day gleefully. "My mother will be mortified!"

Although she professed annoyance with her mother I knew that Helen sent regular checks to support Mrs. van Beek in her suite at the Franconia Hotel in New York, and I heard from Caroline Janeway, who together with Etta and Ruth Blum had opened the New York branch of Madame Hélène's,

that Mrs. van Beek spent her afternoons at the shop bragging to clients that her daughter was a successful couturière.

I was just beginning to think that it might be time for all of us to go back home—at least for a visit—when we got a telegram from Dame Beckwith.

Grave situation in the Blythe Wood STOP Council meeting called for August 26 STOP Your presence needed!

“My mother always exaggerates,” Nathan said. “It’s probably just an excuse to get us to come visit.”

“Well, that’s reason enough,” Helen said. “I need to go to New York to see how the new shop is doing.” I knew that wasn’t strictly true. Miss Janeway and the Blum sisters were more than capable of running the store, but I backed her up.

“I would like to see my grandmother.”

“And I’d like to have a fly over the Gunks again before they get too built up,” Raven added.

“Then let’s go,” Nathan said. “I can visit with my new editor. Have I mentioned that Scribner’s is publishing my first novel?”



THE FOUR OF us sailed to New York in the summer of 1920. Agnes and Sam, married the spring before, met us at the dock with my grandmother. When I saw how frail my grandmother had grown, I was sorry I'd stayed away so long. (She had refused to set foot on a ship since her experience on the *Titanic*.) Still, when she embraced me I felt a steely strength in her arms.

"Don't look at me as if I'm on death's door, girl. We Hall women aren't so easy to kill off."

We dined at my grandmother's house on Fifth Avenue and spent the night there—in separate rooms since Raven and I weren't married, a fact that my grandmother commented on several times at dinner much to my embarrassment. The truth was that since my reaction to his first proposal, Raven hadn't asked me again, and even though I knew that a modern girl wouldn't sit around waiting for a proposal, I was shy of bringing it up. Among our friends in Paris it didn't seem to matter, but back in New York it might.

The next day we took the train to Blythewood. Gillie met us at the station in a horse-drawn open carriage festooned with flowers. While Helen rushed to embrace the caretaker, Raven stared at the carriage. "It looks so . . ."

"Quaint?" I finished for him. "Old-fashioned?"

"I imagine that there will come a time when a horse-drawn carriage will be a novelty," Raven said.

“Good riddance,” Nathan said. “Give me a Gold Bug Speedster any day. Hullo, Gillie, old man!” He clapped the tiny man on the back. “What say we go down to Poughkeepsie later and look at the latest Fords?”

The sky turned an ominous green as Gillie grumbled that he didn’t need “no newfangled contraption.” Raven was still staring at the carriage, an odd look on his face.

“What is it?” I asked. “Are you nervous about going to Blythewood?” It had occurred to me that because the school had once been at war with the Darklings, Raven might feel uncomfortable there. “We can stay at Ravencliffe if you prefer.”

“No,” Raven replied, shaking himself as if shedding cold water. “I was just wondering what else about our lives might someday seem obsolescent and hopelessly outdated.”

“You need only stick with me,” Helen said, tossing her long fringed scarf over her shoulder and adjusting her cloche hat, “and you will always be in style. I shall never obsolesce.”

Raven broke into a grin. “No, I don’t believe you will.”

It was a perfect summer day to ride down River Road, the sky so blue it seemed to seep through the sycamore branches overhead. The apples were ripening in the orchards and the hedgerows were full of white flowers—hawthorn flowers. The flowering tree the fairies had planted to protect the vessel and the door to Faerie had spread from the woods into the fields. In the Ardennes, where we had gone in the spring to lay a wreath on Mr. Bellows’s and Jinks’s graves, the woods were still blasted and bare. Aesinor, who still stood guard over the last vessel, said that most of the fairies had vanished from the woods.

“What are you thinking about now?” Raven asked.

“Only that it feels strange to be back somewhere that hasn’t been a war front,” I answered.

“We’ve had our own wars here,” Gillie said, turning his head to look at me. His eyes were the sharp green of new leaves, and I felt a restless stirring in the trees on either side of the drive as we turned into the gate. The scrolled ironwork motto—*Tintinna vere, specta alte*—looked a bit rusty. “Ring true, aim high,” we were taught to translate it. But the last part also meant “look up.” I looked up now, half expecting to see shadow crows, but here was only the melting sweetness of a summer sky and the gentle

flutter of green leaves . . . and the ringing of bells, so clear and sweet they sounded like the soft air had been given voice.

“Oh, they’re ringing us home!” Helen cried. “Look, it’s dear old Blythewood! It looks just the same.”

And it did. The stone castle walls shone honey gold against the deep blue of the mountains across the river. I’d seen many castles since I’d last seen Blythewood, but none as pretty or serene. My eyes filled up with tears and Raven squeezed my hand. “You saved it,” he said. “You’ve kept it from being ruined.”

“We saved it,” I answered. “You held the door and Nathan led an army and Helen went into the shadows . . .”

“Oh, but the gardens are rather overgrown,” Helen said as we drew closer. “Gillie, why have the gardens been let go?”

“We don’t have so many students no more,” he replied, “and so there’s no’ so much money for extras like gardens.”

“Why is the enrollment down?” Nathan asked.

“Weel, your modern female doesna have to go to a girls’ school anymore and this new generation thinks the school’s old-fashioned. Besides,” he added in a lower voice, “there’s no need to defend the world against fairies now. There’s hardly any left.”

“But why . . . ?”

“The Dame will tell ye more. It’s why she wanted you to come.”

“Not another council meeting,” Nathan grumbled. “I thought that was just an excuse to get us back to the States.”

Gillie glared at Nathan over his shoulder. “It’s no’ all about you, lad.” Then he added in a gentler voice, “But your mother will be right glad to see you.”

Dame Beckwith was standing on the front steps as we came into the circular drive. I was startled by how much older she looked. Perhaps it was just that the last time I’d seen her had been in Helen’s dream space when she’d been much younger, but when she stepped forward to greet us her step seemed a bit unfirm, and when she clasped my arms and looked me in the eyes I saw that her characteristically piercing gaze was clouded over by cataracts.

Her voice, though, was as rich and commanding as ever. “Ava, you look more and more like your mother. And Helen, you’re . . . why, you’re

glowing! Are you . . .”

“Just a few weeks along. Nathan thought I was seasick on the boat but I never get seasick.”

Dame Beckwith’s eyes filled with tears as she looked toward her son. “Don’t worry, Mother,” he said, “Helen’s sure it’s a girl, so you’ll have another student for Blythewood.”

A cloud seemed to pass over her eyes, or perhaps it was just the sun reflecting off the cataracts. She hugged Nathan fiercely and then turned to Raven. “You look so handsome, young man, your parents will be so proud to see you.”

“My parents are here?” Raven asked.

“Of course. This concerns the Darklings most of all. Come along—there’s a buffet in the Great Hall but the meeting will take place in the garden. Help yourself to tea and sandwiches.”

She led us into the Great Hall, which was crowded with old friends—human, Darkling, and other. Omar and Kid Marvel were there with a crowd of madges, Sam and Agnes, Vionetta and Lillian chatting with our old teachers, Miles Malmsbury and Euphorbia Frost, Beatrice and Cam laughing with Marlin and Louisa. I saw my father and rushed forward to embrace him. He was standing with Master Quill, Merlinus and Wren, Gos, and a crowd of unfamiliar-looking Darklings. They were all sipping tea and eating sandwiches and scones and Victoria sponge cake cheerfully doled out by Harriet and Emmaline Sharp. When Merlinus turned to ask my father a question I excused myself to walk over with Raven to talk to Marlin and Louisa.

We hadn’t seen much of Marlin since the Armistice. He and Louisa had been posted to Munich, ostensibly as attachés to the British embassy, but I suspected that they were still working as spies. I saw him pull Raven aside to talk to him about something called the German Workers’ Party.

“We’ve seen shadows lurking at their meetings in the beer halls,” I heard him tell Raven. I shivered and turned to talk to Louisa, but she was pulled away by Professor Jager.

Poor Professor Jager. I remembered what an intimidating presence he’d been in the classroom, but now he was frail, like one of the old cypress trees I’d seen on the Côte d’Azur, bent and twisted by the wind. In his case he’d been worn down by the merciless winds of war and Dolores’s death. Left on

my own I looked around the room. Nathan was surrounded by a gaggle of Blythewood schoolgirls, who were supposed to be serving tea, asking him to sign his first novel. I saw Helen besieged by the Montmorency set and heard Myrtilene drawl, “How clever of you to run your own little dress shop. I’ll be sure to drop in.”

I excused myself from two old women who wanted to know when Raven and I planned to get married and rescued Helen by saying we wanted to see our old classrooms.

“Thank the Bells! You saved me from swatting Myrtilene’s hat off her head. Doesn’t she know that wearing dead birds is so pre-war—oh, look, Ava, Miss Frost’s old room. D’you remember when Daisy had a fit about dissecting lampsprites? And here’s a picture of us playing field hockey—can you believe they made us wear those dreadful bloomers? And here—”

Helen’s voice cut off abruptly. We’d come to Mr. Bellows’s old classroom. A plaque had been erected on the door. “Rupert Bellows 1890–1918: *Their shoulders held the sky suspended; they stood, and earth’s foundations stay.*”

Helen took out her handkerchief and handed it to me. “Why, he was hardly older than we are now.” She sniffed. “Ava, there’s something I’ve always wanted to ask. When Mr. Bellows . . . when he . . . did you . . . ?”

“Was I the one who carried his soul off the battlefield?” Helen nodded. “Yes. Raven offered, but I wanted to. He’d done so much for us all, I wanted it to be one of his students. He—he told me he was glad it was one of ‘his girls’ and that he was so proud of us all . . . then he asked if I would help him remember something . . .”

Helen waited until I’d wiped my eyes and then asked, “What was it?”

“It was just an ordinary day, us having tea at Violet House, a few of his favorite students, Mr. Bellows balancing a teacup on his knee and making a silly joke that made Vionetta Sharp laugh. That was the last moment he remembered before he flew free. I think a part of him is always there. I think a part of you and me—and Vi—are always there with him.”

“Oh,” Helen said, “oh. What a lovely place to be. I wouldn’t mind if that were my last dying thought.”

I squeezed Helen’s hand and looked meaningfully down at her still-flat belly. “I think you might have some moments coming up that will contend, but yes, I wouldn’t mind if it were my last . . .” Only I wouldn’t dwell in my

last moment forever. Because I was a Darkling and there was no forever for my kind.

Voices broke the moment. Daisy came into the hallway, a mischievous smile on her face.

“You look like the cat that swallowed the canary,” Helen said.

“Oh! I do have some wonderful news but I’m going to leave it for Dame Beckwith to announce.” Then she linked her arms in ours and pulled us through the library and out onto the lawn toward the gardens. They *were* overgrown, I saw, with hawthorn bushes in full bloom. The bushes formed a wide circle, inside of which had been set folding chairs. Some of the guests had found a chair; some were lounging on the grass, sipping tea or lemonade, brushing scone crumbs from their shirtfronts, chatting amiably. A stirring from the hawthorn bushes alerted me to the presence of more Darklings, roosting in the bushes and the woods, whispering nervously amongst themselves. But they all grew quiet when Dame Beckwith stepped into the center of the circle.

“Before we begin with the main business of the day I have a bit of good news. Our friends in Washington, D.C., have telegraphed to say that the Nineteenth Amendment has been ratified. Women have the vote!”

“Huzzah!” cried Cam.

“About time!” Miss Harriet Sharp muttered, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief.

“Well,” said Helen, “I might consider moving back to this country after all.”

“I’m glad to begin with some good news,” Dame Beckwith said when the excitement had died down. “As I’m afraid that there’s graver news to report. For some years now we here at Blythewood and our friends at Ravencliffe have noticed that the door to Faerie has been growing smaller and harder to find.”

There was a murmur of concerned voices and one old woman croaked loudly, “In my day we’d have welcomed an end to fairies!”

“Those old days are long gone, Lucretia,” Dame Beckwith said, bending the undimmed force of her eyes on Lucretia Fisk. “The fairies and Darklings are our friends now and we mourn their passing—”

“Their passing?” It was Raven, gotten to his feet. “Is it as bad as all that?”

“Close to, son,” Merlinus said. “When was the last time you ushered a fairy-soul to Faerie?”

“I was rather busy in the war with human souls,” Raven answered angrily. I reached up and squeezed his hand. When he spoke again his voice was more tempered. “And afterward the woods of the Ardennes were destroyed. It’s true I haven’t seen a fairy there since the war. But why would they be dying out here?” He spread his arms to take in the peaceful summer afternoon. “There was no battle here.”

“But there is one now,” Gillie said. “The very woods have been at war. You see, this place—the Blythe Wood—is connected to the woods of Hawthorn and the Arden Forest through Faerie. When the terrible battles stained the ground with blood in the Ardennes most of the fairies retreated back to Faerie and closed off their door—all their doors. They’re afraid there is no longer a place for them in this world, and I canna say I blame them.”

The air turned chillier with Gillie’s words, and I shivered, recalling what Marlin had said about shadows lurking in the beer halls of Munich.

“But if the door to Faerie closes,” Raven asked, “what will happen to the fairies left here when they die? We won’t be able to carry their souls to Faerie.”

“The fairies who have chosen to stay here will go to the human afterworld when they fade away,” Gillie said. “It’s a terrible sacrifice they’re making, but a few have become so attached to humans they have decided to stay here.”

“Good for them,” Gos said with a sneer. “But I don’t see how this concerns us Darklings. Faerie’s been closed to us since the curse anyway.”

“Not anymore,” Master Quill said. “We’ve found a cure for the curse.”

He got shakily to his feet, a heavy scroll in his hand. My father put a steadying hand on his arm. Miles Malmsbury stood on the other side of him.

“Well, that’s bloody awful timing,” a British Darkling swore.

“Yes,” Gos agreed, glaring at Master Quill. “I said that book would be useless. Are you telling us you found a way to get us into Faerie just when the door is closing?”

“Better late than never,” Master Quill snapped. “The problem was that the wording was very tricky because the knowledge was passed from the

Guardian Lady Aethelena to Dame Alcyone. She told her that when Aderyn was wounded by the shadow crows he asked her to cast a spell to keep the Darklings out of Faerie lest they contaminate Faerie with the *tenebrae*. Lady Aethelena agreed, but reluctantly. She said—“Master Quill unfurled a scroll and read aloud—““The Darklings shall be barred from Faerie until a phoenix arises from the ashes who will burn away their shadows.””

“Ava’s a phoenix,” Helen said. “Does that mean she can dispel the curse?”

Everyone turned to look at me. I felt my face redden and my wings prickle. “If I knew how, I certainly would have already. I can’t even burn away my own darkness . . .” I bit my lip, recalling how I’d let that darkness uncoil only one time—with van Drood in Bouillon—and how I’d been tempted by it to let the shadows out of the last vessel. *Out of the shards of the broken vessel a new light will shine.*

“Perhaps if I had broken the vessel I could have dispelled the curse,” I said. “But I couldn’t do that. I don’t know how else to do it.” The truth was I didn’t want to confront that darkness inside me again.

“You won’t have to,” a thin reedy voice said.

We all looked to where the voice had come from. It appeared to have issued from a hawthorn bush. The bush rustled and out of it emerged two twiggy arms and two long spindly legs.

“Mr. Ward!” Helen cried, jumping to her feet and extending a hand to help the guardian rise from the tangled bushes. He looked down at us all, blinking his pale green eyes in the bright sunlight.

“Forgive me for not making myself known earlier but I’m unused to the daylight.”

“We would have visited, but we thought you were still guarding the shadow crows trapped inside your vessel. Has it been very awful?” Helen asked.

Mr. Ward waved a twiggy hand. “It is my duty to guard the shadows, and I was not alone. Master Quill and his apprentices have come every day to visit me, and they came up with a way for me to get out of the vessel without letting the crows out so that I could come and bring this to the phoenix.”

He plucked at his robe and withdrew something from its pocket. It looked like a bit of broken crockery.

“A shard of the broken vessel,” Master Quill said. “It’s really very simple. All Ava has to do is heat the shard with the fire in her wings and she can use it to destroy the shadow inside any Darkling. That Darkling can then return to Faerie.”

“Really?” Helen asked, looking from the shard to me. “Is that all?”

“How do we know it’s safe for Ava?” Raven asked, coming to stand beside me.

“The phoenix burns with a fire that will keep her safe,” Aelfweard said. “I would not suggest anything that would harm her.”

“I’m sure he’s right,” I told Raven. “And besides, if I can free the Darklings to return to Faerie it’s worth the risk. When should I, er, begin?”

“Tonight when the moon rises,” Master Quill said. “We haven’t much time. According to my esteemed colleague . . .” He turned to Professor Malmsbury.

“Er, yes, I’ve done the calculations. From what I observed during my sojourn in Faerie and the, er, rate of growth of indigenous flora divided by the diminishment of aboriginal peoples and charting the position of the planets and the lunar cycle—”

“What he means to say,” Euphorbia Frost interrupted, looking fondly but a little impatiently at her husband, “is that this growth of hawthorn is a sign that the door is about to close and it’s going to happen tonight. So if you want to go to Faerie, you’d best pack your bags now.”

There was a moment of shocked silence, like a baby drawing in breath before letting out a long drawn-out wail, but before the crowd could break into chaos a calm voice asked, “And what if we don’t want to go to Faerie? If the curse is lifted, but we don’t have Faerie to go to, what happens to us when we die?”

“The same that happens to humans,” Falco said. “We go to the human afterlife.”

“But who will carry us?” another voice demanded.

“No one,” Falco answered. “We won’t need anyone to carry us—nor will the humans need us anymore. The era of fairies and Darklings is over.”

Now the crowd did burst into a thousand opposing voices. As I listened to them all I realized that there were far more Darklings here than I had at first noticed. The woods were full of them—and they all had questions.

“What about our wings?”

“We keep them but our children might be born without them.”

“What about the shadows?”

“We’ll always fight them, as will our human friends.”

“Can we ever come back?”

“I don’t know,” Falco admitted. “Probably not.”

“Why weren’t we told sooner?”

“We only figured it out for sure a few weeks ago,” Dame Beckwith answered. “We sent out word right away to bring you here. The Elders of Ravencliffe have sent delegations around the world to gather all of you. We’re sorry you have so little time to choose, but at least you do have a choice.”

The weight of her words finally sank in and silenced the crowd. It was noon. We all had twelve hours to decide where to spend our eternities. I turned to Raven—but he was gone.

“I saw him heading into the woods,” Daisy told me.

I thanked her and slipped out of the circle. It was easy to follow Raven’s path. He’d crashed through the hawthorn brambles leaving a broken trail of black feathers. I followed him, thorns snagging on my skirt. The woods were choked with the thorny bushes, the air so sweet with their scent I felt dizzy. Where had Raven gone? Was he already heading for the door to Faerie? Would he want to go there? I thought he’d settled into a human life in our little garret in Paris, but sometimes at night I awoke to an empty bed and I found him perched on the roof, brooding over the city like a gargoyle, his wings bristling in the night air. There was something wild in him that ached for the open skies and deep woods. Would he be satisfied living a fully human life? Would I?

In the end I didn’t need a trail to find him. I knew where he’d gone. The ladder to his tree house was rotting and broken, the floorboards furred with moss, the walls plaited with vines. His lair had become a true nest, a little pocket in the trees. I squeezed in next to him. He was holding a broken willow- pattern teacup, cracked in half between two blue birds fluttering beak to beak.

“I’ll go wherever you want,” I told him. “To Faerie if that’s your choice or here if that’s what you want. I don’t care where we are as long as we’re together. You’re my eternity.”

He turned to me, his dark eyes green with reflected leaf light. It was like looking into my own eyes. There was hardly any space between us at all, only those breathless few inches that quivered between Cupid's and Psyche's lips in that statue in the Louvre. I felt in that space our whole future together—the kiss about to happen, the children we would have, the tears we would shed—our lives, fleeting and shining as a butterfly's wings.



That night I stood in the hawthorn grove with the broken shard in my hand. As each Darkling who wanted the curse lifted approached me I flared my wings out to heat the shard and then I touched it to their foreheads, as Master Quill and Aelfweard had shown me. For a moment I would feel the darkness inside them calling to the darkness inside me, but then when the heated shard burnt away their darkness I'd feel an ease in my own. Perhaps it was just the relief of seeing that we all carried a bit of darkness inside of us that made it easier to bear my own. Even Wren harbored the grief—and not a little anger toward me—she'd felt when Raven risked his life holding the door to Faerie for me. I didn't blame her a bit.

The last Darkling to approach me was my father.

"I wish . . ." I began, but he silenced me by touching his hand to my lips.

"You've made the right decision, Ava. Not because of which world you've chosen to be in, but because you've chosen love."

He wrapped his hand around my right hand and placed the shard against his forehead. I felt all the guilt and sadness he'd felt at leaving my mother and all the self-hatred for not being with me as I grew up. And then I felt it all burn away. What was left was love. For me, for my mother, for the world he was leaving. I felt the darkness in me melt until there was only a drop left.

He kissed me on the forehead and turned to go.

Helen and Daisy were waiting for me at the edge of the circle. "Raven's gone on with his parents," Helen told me. "And Nathan's walking with Uncle Taddie."

As we walked along the hawthorn path to the door, we met other humans who had chosen to go to Faerie.

“This world is getting too modern for relics like us,” Miles Malmsbury said, looking wistfully at Euphorbia. “And I have so much more to learn about the lychnobia people.”

Omar, who had decided to go, walked with Kid Marvel, who had decided to stay.

As we walked, a conflagration of lampsprites flitted around us, sprinkling us with pixie dust. *Remember us*, they sang. *Remember us*.

Another sound joined their song—the bells of Blythewood tolling the Darklings and fairies home. As I listened I heard seven bells. The lost bell, the one under the river, was tolling for all those who had died before they could go home.

Daisy wiped damp pixie dust from her face. Helen put her arm around her and I twined my arm around her on the other side. “Buck up, Daze,” Helen said hoarsely, “I thought *I* was the one who hated change.”

“It’s just . . . there won’t be any magic left after they’re all gone!”

“Don’t be silly,” Helen said. “Not *all* the fairies are going. There’s plenty of magic left in the world—and if there isn’t, well, we’ll just have to make our own.”

And that, in the years to come, is just what we did.



Acknowledgments

Thanks to my intrepid band of early readers—Sarah Alpert, Wendy Gold, Juliet Harrison, Alisa Kwitney, Scott Silverman, Nora Slonimsky, and Ethel Wesdorp, who is the inspiration for Lady Aethelena. Thanks to my daughter Maggie whose webcomic PennyDreadful (Pennydreadfulcomics.com) has been a continual inspiration in the creation of the Blythewood books.

I am grateful to the Hawthornden Castle Retreat for Writers, for providing my own castle in Scotland, complete with dungeons, as inspiration for Hawthorn castle.

Kendra Levin was the lamprite who lit the way throughout this long journey. Thanks, too, to Ken Wright for giving the Blythewood books a happy home at Viking, to Vanessa Han for the beautiful covers, to Nancy Brennan for their stylish interiors, and Janet Pascal for keeping track of the many creatures—human and magical—that populate the world of the Blythewood books. Thanks to my agent, Robin Rue, and her assistant Beth Miller at Writers House for finding these books such a perfect home.

Finally, traveling to Faerie is a perilous business with no assurance of a timely return. My husband, Lee, is always there to hold the door open.

Looking for more?

Visit Penguin.com for more about this author and a complete list of their books.

[Discover your next great read!](#)

