

**KATE ALICE  
MARSHALL**

**THE  
NARROW**



**THEY SAY WHAT THE RIVER TAKES NEVER RETURNS.  
THEY ARE WRONG.**



**THE  
NARROW**

**KATE ALICE MARSHALL**



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*For Maggie,  
my editor through five years  
and eight books (so far!).*

*I don't know where I'd be without your plot  
detangling, character wrangling,  
and constant support.*

*THEY SAY THE NARROW* drowns all it takes, but they are wrong.

*It is not the water that kills you, though it fills your lungs.*

*It is not the cold that kills you, though it steals the warmth from your very bones.*

*It is not the darkness that kills you, though it swallows you down deep.*

*Your blood chilled, your lungs burning, your eyes blind in the dark, you are alive when the vicious current slams you against the rocks, again and again. The first impact splinters your leg. The second crushes your ribs. The third is gentle in comparison, your skull clipping a sharp snag of rock, but it is enough to end your awareness of your brief, wild tumble through the drowning dark.*

*The current drags you down, a ribbon of scarlet blood chasing behind you. Down among the caves carved by the relentless rushing of the water, you are spun and tossed until you come to rest, wedged against some outcrop of stone, the endless flow of murky water pinning you in place.*

*Your eyes, empty, stare upward, as if searching for the light. But there is none down here. There is nothing but the cold and the darkness and the drowned.*

*They will search for your body along the shores, but they will never find you. They say that what the Narrow takes does not return.*

*They are wrong about that, too.*

EDEN

# 1

**EVERY YEAR, IN** those last hazy summer days before school begins, the students of Atwood go into the woods to cheat death. It's a tradition as old as the school, observed in the strange, liminal week after students begin to arrive but before classes start. We make our way down in twos and threes and fours, some laughing and chattering, some silent with simmering nerves. Not everyone jumps, but everyone knows who doesn't.

The four of us always jump. Veronica, Zoya, Ruth, and I. Even when we weren't supposed to—Lower School students aren't allowed, but in that first year, Veronica and I sneaked out on our own to fling ourselves over the Narrow.

It's our senior year now. Our last chance to leap. And I've almost missed it.

I'm barely out of the taxi that brought me from the airport when Veronica comes striding across the campus lawn toward me, arms outflung. Her white-blond hair is long on the top and shaved on the sides, which accentuates the sharp angles of her face. She wears a loose white tank that shows off the black sports bra beneath, accessorized with a collection of silver pendants and bracelets. On me, the look would be Witchy Nervous Breakdown, but on her it's pure glamour.

"Thank the goddess you made it! You almost missed the leap," she declares, and I stretch a grin across my face to mirror hers. The cut on my lip has sealed itself to a whisper. The bruise at my lower back is a faint yellow, barely noticeable, but I tug down my shirt anyway. I keep my left hand in my sweatshirt pocket, and as long as I don't jostle it, my arm doesn't hurt.

"I thought about joining the circus instead, but then I remembered there are plenty of clowns here," I tell her. I practiced the joke on the way here, terrible as it was. Fine-tuned it, orchestrating just the right facial expression and tone of voice. I shouldn't have bothered. Veronica is my favorite person in the world, but she isn't exactly observant.

“It’s supposed to rain later, so we’d better get moving if we want to get it done before classes start,” Veronica says, jerking a thumb over her shoulder. Halfway across the lawn, Ruth and Zoya stand together in a pose of expectant waiting. Ruth raises a hand to wave.

“You go on,” I tell Veronica. “I’ve got to get my stuff to my room.” All the way here, I’ve had a knot in my stomach. I’m not ready to face Veronica—or anyone. I can’t explain what happened a week ago—or what was happening all summer while she swanned around Tuscany and sent texts complaining about how much her parents were smothering her.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You can leave it here. It’s not like anyone’s going to steal it,” she says with a wrinkled-up nose. “Come on. It’s senior year. We can’t not jump.”

The taxi driver has finished unloading my suitcases from the trunk. I take a deep breath. I’m here. I’ve made it to Atwood. All summer, I told myself I just needed to get back here, and everything would be okay.

And it is okay.

I’m okay.

“Help me drag my stuff up on the sidewalk, at least?” I say brightly.

Veronica groans at the prospect of physical labor but obliges. She practically flings my roller bag onto the grass. I move more cautiously, forced to pick up each bag one-handed, still aware of the random aches and pains that ambush me when I move the wrong way. I’ve barely set the last bag down when Veronica seizes my hand and starts dragging me toward the woods.

“It’s been so boring without you, Eden. Just me and these losers.”

“I resemble that remark,” Ruth says. Zoya just offers a tiny finger-wave.

The two of them are a study in opposites, and it isn’t just because Zoya is almost six feet tall and the approximate width of an electron while Ruth is five-three and looks like she could flip a steer by its horns. Zoya looks immaculate as always, wearing a boldly printed top and fitted trousers she made herself under a tunic-length cardigan. She and Veronica are the fashion icons of the group. Meanwhile, when Ruth isn’t in her school uniform, she’s usually dressed like she is now, in running shorts and a tank, and according to Veronica, I have the fashion instincts of a nineteenth-century governess, tragically orphaned and tasked with caring for two polite but unsettling British children.

“Why’d you show so late? You’re usually the first one here,” Veronica says.

“I had some stuff to deal with at home,” I say. I paid to have my ticket changed to give the bruises time to heal.

“Everything all right?” Zoya asks softly.

I don’t quite meet her eyes as I shrug. “I’m here now.” The rest of the world doesn’t need to exist, at least for a few months.

“That’s right. You’re finally here, and we can finally jump,” Veronica says with pleasure.

“Say that a little louder, won’t you?” Ruth says, rolling her eyes.

“You mean I shouldn’t talk about how WE’RE GOING TO JUMP THE NARROW?” Veronica shouts. A few people glance toward us, including Mr. Lloyd, our English teacher, but there are no answering shouts of alarm or any rush to clap us in irons. Technically, jumping the Narrow is forbidden, and the teachers are supposed to stop you if they catch you, but they never try to catch you. Most of them did it, too, back in the day.

“Could you please . . . not?” Zoya says with a little burr of irritation. If she and Ruth are opposites, she and Veronica sometimes clash because they’re too similar. Both tall and willowy, the kind of build you could drape a potato sack over and call it high fashion—not that they ever would, since both of them have a keen fashion sense and the bank accounts to indulge it. Veronica is white, and Zoya is Black, but they even have similar bone structure, with sharp chins and big eyes. But Veronica is all brash energy and charisma, and most of the time Zoya seems like she wants to fold in on herself and disappear.

“Sorry,” Veronica says with a toss of her hair, unconcerned.

We start off together, Ruth taking the lead despite her short stature, thanks to her business-like stride, Veronica and me in the middle, and Zoya drifting just behind us.

The only way down to the Narrow is through a gap in the fence behind the old chapel. In my six years at the school, it’s never been fixed.

“Aren’t the boys coming?” I ask, glancing around for a sign of Diego or Remi—Ruth’s and Veronica’s boyfriends, respectively.

“No boys allowed. Just the four of us, one last time.” Veronica throws an arm over my shoulder.

One last year at Atwood, away from the world.

“Are you okay?” Veronica asks. She’s looking down at me with a quizzical expression, and a lie springs to my lips—yes, of course I’m okay. Why wouldn’t I be?

I’ve been lying to Veronica since the first day I arrived at Atwood. There’s no reason to stop now. My tongue nudges the lingering seam where my lip split, and I look away. “I don’t know. It doesn’t feel like I’m here yet.”

“That’s because you haven’t jumped. The real world doesn’t go away until you jump,” Veronica says confidently. And then we’re at the back of the chapel, and we have to break apart to walk single file down the path. We pick our way along in relative silence.

We hear it before we see it. For the deadliest body of water in the county, the Narrow doesn’t sound very threatening—no crash and rush of rapids or waterfalls, just a cheerful babble that suggests a friendly forest creek. At first glance, that’s all the Narrow is: a thin ribbon of water flowing amid moss-covered rocks beneath a swaying canopy of branches, the banks little more than one long stride apart. But appearances can be deceiving.

Only half a mile up, the little babbling brook is a river, wide and shallow. Then its banks tighten. Through some quirk of geology, they cleave together, forcing all that water through a channel only a few feet wide. Over the years, the river has carved a path not out to the sides but straight down. Essentially, the river turns on its side, running narrow, deep, and *fast*. So fast that it snatches anything or anyone unfortunate enough to fall into the water, and no matter how hard you struggle or how fast you swim, there is no way to fight the pull.

Legend says that no one who’s ever fallen into the Narrow has survived. Not only that, but the currents and the pockets and caves in the rock mean that any bodies will likely get trapped, never to emerge. No one who ever goes in comes out again. Or so they say.

Veronica and I know better.

By tacitly letting us get away with the jump, the staff can encourage certain limits. You only jump during daylight when the ground is completely dry, and only at the one small section where the boulders overhanging the water shrink the gap to a manageable four feet. Lower School students—sixth, seventh, and eighth graders—aren’t allowed, and there has to be someone on the other side to grab you if you slip. Officially, no student has fallen into the Narrow in forty years.

By the time we reach the river, there's a crowd gathered. Other students, like us, trying to get their jump in before the rain starts. You can't jump after the first day of classes. It doesn't count.

A little knot of Lower School students clusters along the near shore. A couple of them are already wearing uniforms. A gangly boy in a He-Man T-shirt is bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet, arms swinging as he psychs himself up. I don't recognize him, so I assume he's a freshman—that is, in his first year at the Upper School. Lower School students are either collectively known as Littles or just by grade level. The Upper School is much larger than the Lower School. Not a lot of parents think it's a good idea to ship their eleven-year-olds off to the middle of the woods to learn Latin. Ruth, Veronica, and I are all lifers, as Lower School veterans are called, but Zoya enrolled when she started high school.

"Hurry it up!" Ruth hollers, clapping. "You can do it! Don't think, just leap!"

"Ten bucks says he can't," Veronica calls loudly, and the boy flashes her a panicked look. She folds her arms, one eyebrow raised.

"She's really very nice once you get to know her," I promise him, and Veronica snorts.

The boy gives one last full-body shake, sets his feet, and dashes across the rocks. They're coated with shaggy green moss. Even a whisper of rain could make them treacherously slick, but dry, they provide plenty of traction as he takes three long strides and flings himself across the four-foot gap. He clears it easily, and the crowd on the other side catches hold of him, dragging him in for back slapping, hooting, and hollering.

"My turn!" Ruth yells, and charges forward.

"Go for it, Hwang!" someone yells, but by the time they get out the last syllable, it's already old news. She's on the other side, brushing imaginary lint off her shoulder.

"Let's get this over with," Zoya says, her faint Russian accent sharpening the *th*. She's so tall, she can practically just step over the gap, but she does it in an elegant hop. On the other side, awed freshmen scatter, gawking up at her. She wraps her cardigan tight around herself and stalks over to Ruth.

"Together?" Veronica asks, putting out her right hand for me to take.

Her hand hovers in the air. My left hand stays wedged in my pocket, my forearm pulsing with dull pain. We always jump together since that first illicit mission down to the water. "You go ahead," I find myself saying.

A frown tugs at the corners of her mouth. But then she wheels around, and with a whoop, she runs. She jumps. She lands in an ungainly crouch on the other side, wheezing laughter like a hyena, and bounces to her feet to beckon me.

“Your turn!” she calls.

I’m the last Upper School student on the near side. A group of jumpers are heading upstream, toward the bridge half a mile away. That’s another rule: you only jump once. Jumping back is tempting fate. For the Narrow is greedy and lonely and cruel.

We jump to defy it. We jump to feel alive and free. We jump because the real world can’t follow us across the cold water.

Ruth calls my name. Veronica stares at me, expression unreadable. I’ve been standing still too long. Gingerly, I take my hand from my pocket, gritting my teeth against the zips of pain that follow. I force myself into motion, running up the gentle slope of the big boulder that hangs out over the water. Dozens of feet have churned up the shaggy moss, tearing at it with every step, leaving small slick patches of brown. I plant my foot at the edge of the rock to leap.

Mud shifts beneath the sole of my foot, twisting my heel maybe half an inch to the left. I push off.

I’m in the air, but my balance is off. I hit the other side. My foot shoots out from under me. I pitch back toward the water. Someone in the crowd screams—

And Veronica catches my right arm. She pulls, and I stumble forward into her arms. Into Atwood’s embrace.

“You made it,” she says, eyes gleaming with pleasure.

Finally it feels true. I’m here. I’m home.

Everything is going to be all right.

## 2

**“HOLY CRAP, EDEN,** you almost died,” Ruth admonishes me.

The raw panic of the moment lingers, a tightness in my throat and on my skin, but it’s fading fast. I crack a smile. “I didn’t almost die. I almost landed on my butt in front of a bunch of Lower School students, permanently damaging my air of cool. Which, if you think about it, is worse,” I say, each laughing word a brick in the wall between me and that instant of gut-churning fear.

“If you had died, you would be a legend,” Zoya points out. Everyone is flaking off toward the bridge now, us included.

“It would have been *really* impressive if you managed to fall in when no one else *ever* has,” Ruth agrees, walking backward so she can smirk at me.

“People have fallen in,” I object.

“Tourists,” Ruth says dismissively.

“Not *just* tourists. There was that guy from town a few years ago,” Zoya says.

“And the Drowning Girl,” Veronica says. Ruth makes ghost noises; Veronica rolls her eyes. “Just because you’re a boring skeptic doesn’t mean you get to make fun of the rest of us.”

“I’m not making fun. I find your mysticism endearing,” Ruth assures her. “I hate that story, though. It’s so . . . unfeminist.”

“I think it’s romantic,” Veronica protests.

“Throwing yourself into a river because your boyfriend stood you up isn’t romantic, it’s idiotic,” Zoya says.

“What do you think, Eden?” Veronica asks, but I’m distracted as we pass a group of girls whispering to each other. I catch the name *Aubrey* and *Did you hear what happened?* before we’re out of earshot. I glance back with a frown, but Veronica links her arm in mine, and I don’t slow down.

The legend of the Narrow is probably exaggerated, but enough people drown—one or two every decade or so—to make it clear it isn’t all talk. And it’s true that, often, the bodies are never found. A few corpses do wash

up downstream or near town where the river empties into the Atlantic, though that doesn't make as good a story.

And it isn't true that no one has ever survived falling in. But we never talk about what happened that first night we made the jump.

"White! Hey, Eden White!" a voice calls just as we're nearing the path back up to campus. It's a sophomore girl I vaguely recognize—Martha or Mary or something old-fashioned. She's picking her way along the edge of the trail, dodging bodies. When she spots me, she stops, planting a foot on a tree root. "Oster wants to see you," she informs me, a tad breathlessly.

Geoffrey Oster is Atwood's dean. I've spoken to him maybe three times in the last six years. As much as it is possible to blend in at a school with fifty students to a class, I do. I'm not an Instagram star like Zoya or an artistic prodigy like Veronica or a future Olympian like Ruth. I'm not like most of the Atwood students—I didn't come here because of long family tradition, for the access to influence, the leg up on getting into the Ivies. I came because it was a matter of survival.

I can't imagine what Geoffrey Oster wants with me.

"You've been back for like ten minutes, and you're already in trouble?" Veronica says lightly.

"He wants to see you *immediately*," maybe-Martha says, and I shift uneasily.

"We'll see you at the room?" Zoya suggests.

"Yeah. I'll meet you there when I'm done," I say, feigning a lack of concern.

Could Oster know about what happened this summer? The only people who could have told him are my parents, and there's no way they would.

The dean's office is in the main administration building, a piece of neoclassical architecture utterly devoid of imagination. A few white columns stand in a plodding row and a clumsy frieze depicts an unspecified scholar above the main entry. Inside, things are tidy and functional, with stately wood paneling enlivened with modern art on the walls.

The door to Oster's office is open, the man himself standing in front of his desk with his back to me. He holds his glasses in one hand and is staring at nothing in particular. I knock on the doorframe.

"Miss White," he says in acknowledgment, turning. "Good. Please come in, will you? And shut the door behind you."

I obey, and Oster moves around to sit behind his desk. I take a seat, memories of the last time I sat in this room echoing in my mind.

*It would only be for one night. I have a very important meeting in the morning that I absolutely cannot miss.*

I've barely sat down when there's a knock at the door behind me, and gray-haired Edith Clarke enters, a manila folder in one hand. I catch a glimpse of the letters WHI on the tab, the rest of my name hidden under her hand.

"Edith, thank you for joining us," Oster says. He puts his glasses on, and I resist the urge to fidget. He's a big man, with short white hair and lively eyes. He was the youngest dean in Atwood's history when he was hired, but that was nearly forty years ago, and now his face is lined with deep wrinkles, his scalp flecked with liver spots. I don't know much about him other than the fact that he's friends with Veronica's parents.

"Am I in some kind of trouble?" I ask.

"Should you be?" he asks in turn, brows lifted.

"I know a trap when I hear one," I reply, and he chuckles. But honestly, I can't think of anything. Sure, I break a few rules here and there. But I've never done anything that required being summoned in front of the dean.

Mrs. Clarke has adjusted the other chair so she's sitting off to the side. Suddenly, the significance of her presence hits me. Edith Clarke is the bursar—in charge of tuition and financial aid. I've never had to talk to her myself, but Ruth is on partial scholarship, and I've walked with her to Clarke's office a few times over the years when she had to drop off a form or something.

"Miss White, I'm afraid we have a situation regarding your enrollment," Oster says, drawing my attention back to him. His hands are neatly folded on the tabletop. I find myself staring at the hair on the back of his fingers. "Tuition must be paid in full before the first day of classes. Yours has not been paid, and despite repeated attempts, we have been unable to get in touch with your parents."

My heart drops, and a sour taste floods my mouth. "It hasn't been paid? At all?"

"I'm afraid not."

*I'm afraid, I'm afraid.* He keeps saying that, but he isn't afraid, is he? Sympathetic, yes. His voice is syrupy with that. But the fear here—it belongs to me. "What does that mean? What happens now?" I ask.

“My hope is that you can put us in touch with your parents,” Oster says. “I’m sure it’s just a misunderstanding.”

“Our policies are quite clear,” Mrs. Clarke adds. “If your tuition is not paid, you are not an enrolled student and you cannot stay in the dorms or attend classes.”

Oster looks at her sharply, but I’m grateful to her for just spelling it out. They’re saying I can’t stay here. I have to go home.

And I can’t go home.

“Miss White—Eden. If your family is experiencing some kind of financial hardship—”

I laugh. It’s a horrible, choked sound, and it makes them both wince. “No, we aren’t experiencing financial hardship,” I say. Though if you asked my parents, they might disagree.

Every few months someone posts a rich guy’s monthly budget to “prove” that they’re barely getting by, and the internet falls on their head. Who the hell spends a thousand dollars a month on wine, has a two-million-dollar house, and considers themselves poor?

My parents, that’s who.

I could break down our budget and set the internet on fire for a day, but I know it would only make my parents feel more victimized by the world. *Don’t those people understand that these kinds of expenses are necessary for people like us?* they’d squawk.

So no, we aren’t experiencing financial hardship, but I know exactly what’s happened. You’re not rich if you spend all your money, according to my parents, and they find so many ways to spend it. Normally there’s still enough left over to cover Atwood, but this year they’ve had Luke’s legal bills, dealing with his “slipup.”

Mom is in charge of the bills. She would have been the one to realize that the tuition money wasn’t there. And Mom, believing with all her little heart that if you ignore a problem, it will go away, just rearranged her reality so that “pay Eden’s tuition” was no longer a thing she had to think about. She wouldn’t tell Dad—she wouldn’t want to get screamed at. She wouldn’t call the school because that could lead to conflict, too. She’d just wait and hope the money dropped out of the sky or the school forgot to collect.

“What are my options?” I ask. My throat tightens, but my words are steady.

Mr. Oster is silent a beat. “As I said, we can try to contact your parents again. But if they aren’t able to settle the balance, you’ll have to find other arrangements.”

“Tonight?” I say.

Mr. Oster shakes his head. “We’re not going to kick you out on the street. You can stay in the dorms for tonight and attend classes tomorrow while we sort this out. It’s Tuesday; I can give you through the weekend to get this handled.”

The weekend won’t be enough. You have to schedule in the time for Mom and Dad to yell at each other about whether to sell the Jaguar or take a chunk out of the retirement account again. Maybe, God forbid, forgo their third vacation this year. Not that it would help, since the deposits are paid and they’re already halfway across the world.

“If we could call your parents right now—” Mrs. Clarke begins.

“There’s no point,” I say. “They’re in Bali, for one thing. And I guarantee you the money isn’t there.”

I guess it isn’t entirely Mom and Dad’s fault. They might find all kinds of inventive ways to spend their money, but the six figures on defense attorneys to keep their son out of federal prison were at least genuinely unexpected. After all of that, of course they couldn’t cancel the Bali trip. They’ve been so *stressed*.

I’m rubbing my thumb across my upper arm. I pull my hand away, force it into my lap, hoping no one noticed. The bruises there are long gone, but I swear I can still feel them. “Is there financial aid or something? A scholarship?”

“We have a select number of merit scholarships, as you know, but they’ve been dispersed,” Mrs. Clarke says, not unkindly. “And with your parents’ income, you wouldn’t qualify for need-based aid.”

“Right,” I say numbly.

“There is another option,” Oster says.

Mrs. Clarke makes a noise, almost inaudible. It might be disapproval or merely acknowledgment.

“What other option?” I ask, hope fluttering in my chest.

“There is a parent at Atwood who pays the tuition of another student in full each year,” Oster says.

“Like a scholarship?” I ask.

“Not exactly,” he says delicately. “I’m talking about Madelyn Fournier.”

Madelyn Fournier. As in Delphine Fournier's mother.

My fingers wrap tightly around the arm of the chair. Delphine was in our year. Still is, I suppose.

Delphine was a prim, delicate thing, dressed like a doll. We were assigned as roommates our first year, and from the start, I resented her presence—resented her intruding on me and Veronica, on our private world. I'd wished, fervently, that she would just go away.

In a sense, she did.

Only a day after becoming my roommate, Delphine got sick. Now she lives in isolation in her carefully climate-controlled suite, the only way she can stay healthy. She has her coursework delivered, and teachers tutor her one-on-one outside of class hours. In return, at least as far as the rumor mill goes, Madelyn Fournier shovels money into the school coffers.

Delphine Fournier might as well be a ghost. She has haunted me for six years—the memory of her face, of her pale white hand slipping from mine.

We have never spoken about what happened that night, Veronica and I, but I have thought of it every day since.

"Ms. Fournier has generously offered to pay the tuition of one student in return for their residence in Abigail House," Oster says. "You would serve as a sort of companion to Delphine."

It sounds so Victorian. The Delphine of my imagination is a waiflike girl in stays and a white lace nightgown, carrying a candle. I've seen her at her window a few times since she got sick—the pale oval of her face, her coppery red hair spilling over one shoulder.

"I thought that Aubrey Cantwell was already at Abigail House," I say. My voice breaks.

Oster's eyes jag left. Mrs. Clarke's chin twitches toward him, but she focuses on me. "Aubrey will be finishing her senior year at her local school back home," Oster says.

I don't know Aubrey well. She started at the Upper School—we weren't Littles together—and she spends most of her free time at Abigail House, which makes sense, since that's more or less her job. *Was* her job. Staying there means everyone knows you're a scholarship student.

At the beginning of our freshman year, Aubrey came across as a bit brash, boisterous and energetic. I don't remember whether it changed all at once or bit by bit, but the Aubrey of later years was closed off. She did her

work and vanished back to Abigail House. Sometimes I'd catch her staring off toward the woods, her mouth pressed into a hard line.

I remember suddenly the words I heard whispered on the path. "Did something happen to Aubrey?" I ask.

"There was an accident," Oster says.

Mrs. Clarke shifts in her chair.

"Is she all right? She's not—she's not dead, is she?"

"No, nothing like that," Oster says, though his pinched expression suggests the truth is serious enough. "I'm sure you'll hear rumors, so I might as well tell you that she nearly drowned."

The word *drowned* makes me jolt. "In the Narrow?" I ask immediately, though, of course, that is impossible. No one *nearly* drowns in the Narrow. *Except*, I think, and shove the thought away.

"No. Good lord, we would be planning a funeral then. No student has fallen in the Narrow in decades," Oster says gravely. "It was the pool. She was out for a walk at night and fell in. Luckily, one of the security guards saw her and was able to revive her."

"Thank God," Mrs. Clarke murmurs. There is something oddly rehearsed about the speech and about the haste with which Oster moves on, and it sends a prickle down my spine.

"But in any case, her family has decided that it would be best for her to recover at home. It's left us in a bit of a bind, as it happened so close to the beginning of classes, and Ms. Fournier is adamant that Delphine have a companion for the school year. You would be doing everyone a great service if you agreed. And you wouldn't need to worry about your tuition."

I think of Delphine Fournier in the red beret she wore the day she arrived. I think of her in the window, coppery hair spilling over her shoulder.

I think of her the night Veronica and I sneaked out to jump the Narrow. Mud caking her feet, leaves in her hair.

Cold fingers slipping from my grasp.

*The Narrow drowns all it takes.*

Not all.

"You might prefer to get in contact with your parents after all," Mrs. Clarke says.

Oster lifts one finger from the table as if to restrain her. As if to say *Let her decide*.

But it isn't a decision, is it? It's this or go home.

And I can't go home.

But it's more than that. In the last six years, I have only ever glimpsed Delphine Fournier from a distance, through glass. I've never had the chance to ask her if she remembers what happened. I've tried to put it out of my mind, but it has always been there, the whisper of a question.

"I'll do it," I say, still staring at the unyielding face of the clock. "Abigail House. I'll do it."

Oster sits back, looking relieved and satisfied. Mrs. Clarke's expression is different. She looks down at the file in her hands, which she hasn't even opened, and frowns very slightly. And then something else passes over her face—something that almost looks like pity.

Something that almost looks like guilt.

### 3

**ABIGAIL HOUSE SITS** by itself among the trees. It was a girls' dormitory at one point, then used to house staff with families, and when I started at Atwood it was an unassuming two-story house with peeling white paint that visiting parents occasionally stayed in. Ms. Fournier's money and determination have remade it. The architectural style has been preserved, but the paint and siding are fresh, the windows top of the line. A huge water tank has been installed out back. The house has been completely disconnected from the well-water supply that the rest of the campus uses.

Mrs. Clarke opens the front door with a combination plugged into a keypad over the lock. "I'll make sure to write the code down for you," she notes. A camera mounted above the doorway points a single black eye down at us. I stare at my dark reflection in the convex glass.

Immediately inside the door is a large entryway and another door with another keypad. To the left and right are standing screens, and next to the inner door is a bank of cubbies. From one of these, Mrs. Clarke fetches a set of maroon sweats and a sweatshirt and hands them to me.

"No clothes that have been worn outside can pass through the inner door," she explains. "Put whatever you're wearing into the blue hamper—that one's just for you—or fold it for when you leave and place it in your cubby. You can wear these for now, until your luggage arrives."

I nod as if I understand, though the strangeness of this is starting to hit me.

"One of the perks of Abigail House is that you don't have to do any of your own laundry, at least," Mrs. Clarke says. "It's collected Monday and Thursday and returned the next day."

"Neat," I say, because it seems like I should say something.

Mrs. Clarke raises one shoulder in an almost-shrug, a what-can-you-do gesture, like she knows exactly how disorienting this all must be.

I take the offered clothes and go behind one of the screens. I discover that it also conceals a small shower. I glance over my shoulder to make sure that Mrs. Clarke can't see me before I carefully shrug out of my shirt and pants,

taking care not to jostle my arm any more than it already has been. There's no mirror for me to check the bruising on my back, but I take a paranoid survey of my arms and ribs. Nothing visible, though my ribs still hurt when I twist the wrong way.

I can still feel that weight on my back. The knee grinding down beside my spine, squeezing the breath out of me until lights popped in my vision.

*You've got a foul mouth, Princess.*

It could have been worse. Every girl in the world knows what kind of worse it could have been. There was nothing sexual about what happened to me—Dylan's interest in me had been so bluntly nonsexual, so devoid of attraction or innuendo that it was strangely dehumanizing. I might have been a dog or a piece of furniture, as far as he was concerned. Now I try to feel grateful for that, to tell myself it wasn't as bad as it could have been. It's cold comfort.

I pull on the spare outfit quickly and fold up my clothes. I carry them back out and put them in one of the empty cubbies just as Mrs. Clarke emerges from behind the other screen to do the same. In the Atwood sweats instead of her starched white button-up, she looks younger. It turns her harsh lines soft and seems to shrink her.

"It starts to be routine faster than you think," she says, and puts in the code for the inner door.

A single hallway splits the house down the middle. There's one door to either side, left and right, with a second on the left down near the end of the hall. At the far end is a door with a glass upper panel, beyond which I can see a set of stairs. Every door but one has its own keypad. It makes me think of a laboratory in a zombie movie, set up to contain the outbreak of a monstrous virus.

"Those are Ms. Fournier's rooms," Mrs. Clarke says, indicating the right-hand side. "She spends about half the year abroad or in New York and half here. I'm sure you'll get the chance to meet her soon."

"Doesn't she want to talk to me first?" I say, the thought occurring to me belatedly. "Before she agrees to pay my tuition?"

"We made sure that she was on board before we approached you," Mrs. Clarke assures me. "She's very clear that she doesn't want Delphine to be alone, and Aubrey's departure being so sudden, she understands the constraints."

"When did it happen? Aubrey's accident?" I ask.

“Last week.” That means Aubrey must have arrived early for fall term. Another way that Abigail House has its own rules, I suppose. “I’ve been staying here since,” Mrs. Clarke adds.

“What was she doing by the pool?” I ask. The pool is fenced in. It isn’t like it’s a normal place to go for a stroll.

“That I don’t know,” Mrs. Clarke says briskly. There is something she isn’t telling me. An uneasy feeling scuttles over my skin. “In any case, the door at the end of the hall to the left is the utility room. The stairs lead up to Delphine’s rooms. The door at the bottom of the stairs must be closed at all times. Especially at night. And it *must* be locked.”

She says it as if it makes perfect, rational sense. As if it’s entirely logical that the night would hold hidden threats to a sick girl.

“And these are your rooms,” she finishes.

I make a little sound of half-disbelieving amusement. The suite is huge—at least compared to our usual rooms. Atwood has grown randomly in fits and starts over the decades, with new buildings being added without any real theme or consistency. That means that some buildings have small college dorm-style doubles, while my friends and I claimed the ground floor of Westmore, with four singleton bedrooms sharing a common room, three-quarter bathroom, and kitchenette.

This is more like a one-bedroom apartment, and a spacious one at that. A full galley kitchen sits at one end. A white binder sits on the kitchen table, bristling with tabs.

“Everything you need to know about Abigail House and Delphine’s care is in that binder. Most of it won’t be relevant to you. You’ll want to look at the blue and purple tabs, mostly,” Mrs. Clarke says. “Can I leave you to settle in? Your luggage should be here by the end of dinner.”

I’ve already crossed to the binder and opened it. The laminated sheet at the front reads RULES AND PROCEDURES. When I process Mrs. Clarke’s words, I look up in surprise. “Aren’t I going to meet Delphine?”

“There are additional decontamination procedures necessary before going upstairs,” Mrs. Clarke says. “And it’s almost dinner. I’ll be back in the morning to make the introductions, don’t worry.”

“Can I—” I pause. “What’s wrong with her? Delphine. I’ve heard she’s allergic to water?”

Mrs. Clarke makes a little gesture with her hand, almost helpless. “I believe the official description is an idiopathic aquagenic disorder. Which

means they have no idea why or exactly how it's happening, but exposure to water causes a life-threatening physical reaction. It doesn't happen with distilled, filtered water, but anything with impurities . . . Well. It's been a long time since she had an episode. But that's why we have to be so careful with what we bring inside the house. Especially if it's raining or muddy. That's what the showers are for. The whole system uses distilled water shipped in, to avoid any chance of contamination."

"Can I ask . . ." I stop again, realizing my question is probably impossibly rude, but Mrs. Clarke looks at me expectantly. "Wouldn't it be easier for her to live somewhere else? I mean, she can't even attend classes here."

"Ms. Fournier believes that an Atwood education is still the best thing for her," Mrs. Clarke says.

But when she says it, she doesn't quite look at me. She looks at my left earlobe. It's a trick I learned myself, for when it's hard to look a person in the eye. Most people won't even notice you aren't looking at them directly.

It makes it easier to lie.

"You will pick up on the way things are done. It's a lot of details, but nothing too difficult," Mrs. Clarke says. "But there are a few unbreakable rules. And the most important is this: the door at the bottom of the stairs must stay locked after dark."

"You mentioned," I say.

Her eyes fix on mine. "No matter what you hear or what you see. No matter what happens. You stay in your room and you leave the door locked. Do you understand?"

I stare at her. "Why?"

"Stay in your room and don't let the water in, and you'll do fine," Mrs. Clarke says, and nothing more.

She leaves. I listen as the doors close in sequence: one, two, and then, after a pause long enough for her to get changed again, three. I stand barefoot in the empty suite, unsure of what I'm supposed to do.

Above me, the floor creaks as footsteps pass overhead. Delphine. I stare up at the ceiling. Does she know I'm here?

Does she remember what happened six years ago?

The night that Veronica and I made our first leap and found Atwood's magic waiting for us.

The night that Delphine Fournier fell into the Narrow and lived.

## 4

**GOING TO ATWOOD** was my idea. Luke had always been difficult, but the way he was difficult was changing. Temper tantrums and breaking things and minor acts of theft had turned into running away and drugs and vandalism.

The thing about being the good kid with the troubled sibling is that it's easy to disappear. My parents didn't have time for me because all their time was spent trying to keep Luke from destroying his life. There wasn't a lot left over for the daughter who did her homework and stayed out of the way.

They knew what they were doing, of course, and they felt just guilty enough about it to be pissed off if you pointed it out. So when I showed my parents the online brochure for Atwood and begged them to send me to boarding school, they jumped at the chance, so eager they were to have me gone, to outsource the task of raising me. It sounds like I hate them for it, but I don't. They had to send one of us away, and if it was Luke, it would mean they were giving up on him. I, on the other hand, could go away and come back whole.

More or less.

I arrived a day too early. The dorms weren't even open yet. Mom argued with Oster to let me stay the extra night—she had an important meeting in the morning and needed to fly back—but it was an insurance thing. Unbendable. That's when Veronica's parents stepped in. They'd come for a tour and to talk to Dean Oster—they were overly protective, still are, and wanted to scout everything out ahead of time. They had a room in town for the night, and they offered to let me stay with them.

Veronica and I stayed up whispering to each other, sitting on the hotel room floor between our two beds, talking about all the things we were going to do.

For a week, Veronica and I had belonged entirely to each other, fated best friends. Then Delphine arrived, wearing a painfully pretentious little tweed capelet, skirt, and red beret. Her black stockings had a run in them, splitting open at the back of her calf. Delphine had started following us around,

trying to join our little duo. I wanted it to be just the two of us, forever. So I'd studiously ignored my prim and proper roommate, and when Veronica suggested we sneak out to jump the Narrow, I didn't tell Delphine. I thought the jump would be something for just the two of us, to bond us together forever. I was right, in a way.

We sneaked out together, leaving Delphine asleep in her bed. Or so we thought.

We stood on the banks together and held hands. We counted to three, and then, as one, we jumped—and Atwood caught us. I could feel every inch of Veronica's skin as if it was my own. And I could feel *her* feeling the threads of Atwood's magic wrapping themselves around us. We turned to each other with wonder in our eyes.

"Did you feel that?" Veronica whispered.

"I felt it. What was it?" I asked.

She shivered. "Something wonderful," she said.

That was when we saw her.

Delphine was standing at the very edge of the water, at a place where a boulder jutted out a bit more than the others. She wore flannel pajamas that were a touch too long, the sleeves engulfing her hands.

She must have followed us.

"Oh shit. She's going to jump," Veronica said.

"That's not even the right spot. It's too far," I said, moving on instinct to intercept her.

But Delphine backed up two steps and set her feet. She launched herself forward. One step, two, and then she braced her foot against the rocks and pushed off.

It was obvious from the moment she left the ground that she wasn't going to make it. Veronica screamed. I charged forward, as if I could cover the distance fast enough to stop what was happening.

Her jump almost took her across the gap. She landed half on the rock on the other side, her chest on dry land, her legs in the water. I threw myself toward her, splaying across the ground. My hand closed over the ends of her fingers. Her pale face looked straight into mine, and I saw the panic in her eyes in the split second before the current seized her.

Her fingers slid out from under mine. She was gone. No slow slip beneath the waves but a sudden vanishing. The dark water folded over her as if she had never been.

I would have screamed if my throat hadn't closed up. Veronica pulled me away from the edge, sobbing, and we sat there huddled together in helpless, terrified paralysis. Maybe we should have run for help, but I'm not sure if it was the fear or the horrible knowledge that she was already dead that kept us rooted in place.

Once the Narrow had you, it was too late. There was nothing we could do.

I don't know how much later it was when Veronica pulled me to my feet. Maybe a minute. Maybe twenty.

"We need to tell someone," she said.

"We can't. We'll get in trouble," I said. I was thinking of being kicked out, of being sent home, my newly claimed refuge snatched away as suddenly and thoroughly as Delphine had been stolen by the river. I was young and afraid, and maybe I should be forgiven for those words, but I won't be the one to do it. Then shame flooded me. "We should find Mrs. Wheeler," I said. Our housemother.

We half stumbled to the bridge, too weary to run.

"Her mother is Madelyn Fournier. The actress," Veronica said after a while as we trudged through the woods. "She's not even really French. It's a stage name." She said it like it meant something, but we were just talking to fill the silence.

"Do you think they'll find her?" I asked. "What's going to happen?"

"I don't know," she said. It was all there was to say. We picked up our pace, as if it would matter at all.

Back at the dorms, we climbed through the window into the back hall we had used to sneak out.

Delphine was there.

She stood in the center of the hall, still in her pajamas. She was soaked through. There was mud on her feet and bits of rotting leaves in her hair, and her top had torn at the neckline. She stood there, shivering, staring at us without a hint of comprehension in her eyes.

I almost screamed. I clamped down on the sound and rushed forward instead, even as Veronica staggered back in shock. Delphine's skin was cold, but she was alive. Alive and unharmed, as far as I could tell—not a bruise or a scratch on her.

We should have called for help then, of course. But we were thinking of how much trouble we would be in. They would send us home. We would

lose Atwood. We would lose each other.

And Delphine was fine.

So we stayed quiet. Together, we led her back to the room. With fumbling fingers, I undid the buttons of her pajamas and slipped the sodden shirt off her shoulders. When I pulled down her pants and underwear, she stepped out of them; when Veronica handed me dry clothes, she moved with rote obedience to let me dress her.

We plucked the bits of detritus from her hair and walked her to her bed, and she never made a sound or put up any resistance. I pulled the blankets up under her chin.

“There,” I whispered. “Everything’s okay now.” I wasn’t sure which of the three of us I was trying to convince.

Veronica went back to her room. I could tell she wanted me to come with her, but instead I remained in my bed. I didn’t sleep at all that night. I lay there staring at her back, and the gentle rise and fall of the covers.

The next day I went down for breakfast with Delphine still asleep in her bed. Veronica sat next to me, tense. We mumbled to each other and didn’t say a word about what had happened.

Delphine Fournier eventually walked in. She got eggs and toast and a cup of tea and sat down at an empty table.

Veronica and I just sat there staring at her, not touching our food. Veronica’s nails dug little crescents into my palm, she was gripping my hand so tightly. We must have imagined it, I thought. Except we hadn’t. We’d both seen it.

Veronica turned toward me. Her lips parted as if to speak.

And Delphine collapsed.

## 5

**DELPHINE NEVER CAME** back to our dorm. It was the hospital and then Abigail House instead. Veronica and I never spoke about Delphine or what happened that night again.

And now I'm living in Abigail House.

I force away the memories of that night. The big welcome dinner to mark the beginning of the year is starting in only a few minutes, and I have nothing to wear.

A place as old as Atwood has endless rules and traditions that no one thinks to explain to you, but failing to follow them will mark you out immediately as someone who doesn't belong. For instance: No one tells you that the Tuesday dinner before courses start is semiformal. No jeans, no sweatpants, no—God forbid—pajamas. The girls wear skirts, the boys wear suit jackets, but no one wears uniforms.

I don't have anything to wear except the clothes I came in: jeans and a simple blue top. Nothing suitable for the welcome dinner. And there's no sign of my luggage. At least I still have my messenger bag, with my laptop and sketchbook.

In desperation, I open the closet in the bedroom. It's still full of Aubrey's clothes. Her school uniforms are hung on the right—jackets, skirts, slacks folded over hangers. There's a set of hanging shelves with socks and stockings, and a neat line of shoes along the floor. On the left are casual jackets, along with a few dresses. I run my hands over a wool skirt. It looks expensive.

It seems wrong to wear them, but I can't go to dinner like this. I'd be sent back to change. And worse, my name would be on the list that never gets written down but is tracked precisely nonetheless. The ones who don't belong.

I'm the same size as Aubrey. I pull on a knee-length brown wool skirt, fitted at the hips with a bit of flare. I grab a crisp white button-up blouse hanging conveniently beside it and throw on a soft cardigan that smells faintly of lavender at the collar. I pull my long hair free from the collar and

turn to face the floor-length mirror that stands in the corner of the room. The fit isn't exact. My hips are a touch narrower than Aubrey's, my breasts large enough to make the buttons gap slightly. But it'll do. And I'll write Aubrey a note, I think, to let her know I'm borrowing her clothes. Apologizing for not having the chance to ask. Thanking her.

So it won't be too strange that I'm slipping on her ankle-high boots, which fit me perfectly. That I'm slipping into the hall with her clothes against my skin.

"Aubrey?" a voice behind me says, confusion cracking the syllables apart.

I freeze. Turn slowly.

The door at the top of the stairs is open, visible through the glass of the lower door. A slim figure looks down at me from the top step. The light is behind her; I can barely make her out.

"No, I'm . . ." I trail off. "I'm Eden White. I'm your new—I'm staying here."

A long moment of silence. Then, "Can you open the door?"

"Mrs. Clarke said it's supposed to stay locked," I say. I don't want to open the door. I shouldn't be afraid of Delphine. She's just a sick girl. But I am.

"Only at night," Delphine says. "Because I sleepwalk. I try to get out sometimes, and if I did, it might kill me." Matter-of-fact.

"I don't know the code."

"I do. It doesn't work from this side, though." She rattles it off for me, and, out of excuses, I creep over and punch it in. The handle is heavy, and it's awkward managing the keypad and the door one-handed. When it opens, there is a faint hiss of air.

"There's a light just inside," Delphine says.

I grope to the right and find it, flick it on. It's harsh, washing out all the shadows instantly.

The first time I saw Delphine, I thought she looked like a doll. She still does. My eyes catch at the hollow of her throat, the deep notch of her clavicle, the knobby bones of her wrist. Her skin has a sallow cast to it. Her hair, a coppery red, falls to the middle of her back, most of it loose except for a single small braid down one side. Her clothes seem made for a younger girl or a different time—a green dress with a Peter Pan collar, shoes with silver buckles.

Her eyes, though, they're large for her face and look down at me with a kind of solemnity I've never seen in someone my age. She's thin—gaunt, even—and her lips are thin, too, her mouth wide and set in a straight line.

Looking into those large, serious eyes, something seems to shift, like a camera coming into focus, and I don't know how I could have thought she looked young. Set aside the clothes, the silver buckles on her shoes. Look at *her*. Imagine how you would sketch the line of that long neck, capture the shadows in her gaze. Trace the waves of the copper hair that spills down as if she stepped out of a pre-Raphaelite painting. She is ethereal, almost otherworldly, and there is something feral and fascinating in her expression.

There's a painting of Ophelia I've always loved. Ophelia with flowers in her hair and carried in her skirts, making her way to the water. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia drowns herself, gripped by madness, but in the eyes of the Ophelia of the painting, I've never seen madness or despair. Something more like calm—and condemnation. Delphine looks down at me with those eyes.

I have the abrupt and fierce conviction that whoever has chosen those clothes for her doesn't know Delphine Fournier at all.

"This is kind of awkward, isn't it?" I say, because if I don't say anything I will keep looking at her forever.

"I don't know. Is it?" Delphine asks. She leans against the doorframe at the top of the stairs. "I'm not really a good judge."

"Did they tell you I was coming?" I ask. What I want to ask is if she remembers what happened that night. If she remembers my part in it.

"They said they were going to find someone. I told them not to bother," Delphine replies. If anyone else had said it, it would have sounded hostile. But Delphine's face is untroubled, no blame in her voice for me.

"You don't want a companion?" I ask. My voice sounds raspy, and the light behind her keeps shifting her into shadow.

"I don't want friends who have to be paid to spend time with me," Delphine replies, and again there's no anger in her voice. It's more like it doesn't occur to her not to tell the plain, unvarnished truth.

"What about Aubrey? Did you not want her here, either?" I ask. Her openness makes me intrusive. Her face closes for a moment; she looks away.

"Aubrey was different," Delphine says. Her eyes flick over me. "You're wearing her clothes."

I flush. "I don't have any of my own."

“I thought you were her for a moment,” Delphine goes on. There is a soft, puzzled sadness to her voice. It’s like fingers trailing lightly over the strings of a violin.

“I heard what happened. About the accident,” I say.

“What did you hear?” she asks.

It sounds like she’s asking something else, something deeper, but I can’t work it out. “She fell in the pool and almost drowned. Right?”

“No,” she says softly. “It wasn’t the pool. It was right outside. I couldn’t see it, but I could hear them. I saw the ambulance come.”

“That’s not what Oster said,” I manage, alarm swirling through me.

“They lie,” she says simply.

“Who?”

“All of them,” she says. “But that’s all right. So do I.”

I don’t know what to say to that. I wet my lips. “Delphine, I . . .” I’m not sure what I can possibly say. I came here wanting to see her, wanting to understand, maybe, how she had survived the Narrow six years ago, but now she’s in front of me, and I have no idea how to ask. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to see you when you were sick.”

“Why would you?” Delphine asks, head cocked curiously.

“You were my roommate. I should have—I’m sorry, that’s all.”

Her brow is slightly furrowed as she frowns down at me. “We were roommates?”

“Only for a day. Your first day here.”

She looks thoughtful. “I don’t really remember anything from back then. I remember getting to the school. Then it’s all a haze until the hospital.”

“I’m sorry.” Old guilt twists through me.

Delphine shrugs. “It’s not your fault.”

I’m not sure she’s right about that.

Distantly, the chapel bell is ringing. That means it’s really time to get moving. “I should go. I guess I’ll meet you officially later.”

“Okay.” She pauses. “Can you promise me something?”

“What?” I ask, knowing better than to make a blind promise.

“Don’t pretend to be my friend. Don’t pretend to like me. I don’t care if you hate me, as long as you do it honestly,” Delphine says.

“I don’t hate you,” I say immediately.

“You don’t know me,” she points out. “Never lie to me. That’s all I ask. If you promise me that, I’ll tell Maman I want you to stay.” *Maman*, not

Mom. I remember Veronica whispering to me six years ago, *She isn't even really French.*

"I promise," I say, recklessly, foolishly, and part of me longs for her to ask the questions I have feared all these years. *Why didn't you save me? Why didn't you tell anyone?*

"Then tell me. Why did you agree to live here?" she asks. There's an immense sadness in these words, as simple as they seem. I know, of course, that Delphine lives alone, but the enormity of it hasn't hit me until now, standing a flight of stairs away and knowing this is closer than almost anyone has been to her in years.

If I hadn't promised, I would have lied. The same way I lie to my friends all the time when I talk about home. Instead the truth comes quickly. "I needed the money. Tuition, I mean. I would have been kicked out otherwise."

"Ah." She has a look of satisfaction on her face, like she's just solved a puzzle that's been bothering her. "One more question. Do you think I'm strange?"

Bland reassurances present themselves, and I ignore them. "Probably. But that's not a bad thing," I say. Something that is almost but not quite a smile hooks the corner of her mouth. A quick and blisteringly hot sensation snakes through my belly. *This could be dangerous*, I think. The truth is a vicious thing, and so am I. It's why I lie so much. We look at each other for a long moment, and the silence feels somehow electric.

"You should go," Delphine reminds me.

"I'll see you soon," I say.

"You know where to find me," she replies, and now she does smile, closed-lipped.

I shut the door and turn away. I can feel Delphine watching me the whole way down the hall.

## 6

**OUTSIDE, THE MUGGY** warmth of August hits me. I don't need the cardigan, but I wrap it around myself as I hurry along the walkway toward the dining hall.

The dining hall is an austere brick building, ivy climbing up one side. It looks like something out of a boarding school brochure, and it is in fact plastered over the front of the booklets Atwood distributes.

I worried I would be too late, but I'm right on time, with a steady stream of students still arriving. I look with sympathy at the nervous freshmen and Lower School students—bouncing on the balls of their feet, glancing around, trying to work out the arcane rules of this ritual, which for some reason no one ever explains.

I slip past a petrified Lower School student, her sweater buttoned in the wrong hole and her hair a helpless frizz around her cheeks. "Back circular tables are for Littles, and don't sit until all the upperclassmen are sitting," I murmur to her, and she flashes me a grateful look.

The dining room is done up formally, with white tablecloths and seat covers, boisterous centerpieces dominating every table. At the very back of the room are two long rows of tables where the Lower School students are relegated. Upper School students get the large circular tables instead. As seniors, we're allowed to use the front tables. The best table—the one by the window—is unofficially reserved for Atwood royalty, the Clarkes and Vaughans and Ryders and their crowd. I can already see a couple of freshmen being ousted.

Veronica and the others have staked out most of a table, with Diego and Remi joining them. Diego has scooted his chair in close to Ruth, and Remi has his arm slung around Veronica's shoulders. She has her fingers threaded through his.

Remi—Remington Joseph Toombs—comes from a whole other kind of money than Atwood is used to. The kind built with land and cattle and oil rights. That drawl and the Texas flag on his wall made it easy to make assumptions when we first met that turned out to be totally off base. He's a

smart, shy guy with a keen sense of injustice and a burning desire to do good in the world. Plus, he's utterly devoted to Veronica, which means I have to like him, at least a little.

"Hey," I say, dropping into my seat next to Zoya—the singles side of the table.

"Hey, yourself," Veronica says. "Where have you been?"

"It's complicated," I allow. "Nice to see you, Remi. How's it going?"

"Going great," Remi says, his Texas drawl shaping the words. "The sun's shining, the food smells amazing, and I get to sit next to the most gorgeous girl in school. What could I possibly complain about?" he asks, giving her an affectionate squeeze.

"When he says gorgeous, he means I have big boobs," Veronica says with a wicked grin, and Remi predictably turns bright red.

"That's not what I said at all," he protests as Veronica snickers.

"I know. You've had a crush on me since eighth grade, and I was flat as a board back then," Veronica assures him, which doesn't help the pure scarlet shade he's turned but does quell the panic in his eyes.

"Though they are absolutely fantastic tits," Ruth says, lifting her water glass in a salute.

"Aww, thank you, sweetie," Veronica purrs. She turns her attention to me. "What did Geoffrey want?"

I blink, confused, before remembering that's Dean Oster's first name. Right. Her folks are close with him.

I could tell them. Admit to them that my parents can't pay my tuition and why. But I've kept my worlds so carefully separate. I've told a hundred white lies over the years, papering over the dysfunction with distraction. If I tell them, that all breaks down. And they'll want to *fix* it. Veronica will try to suggest that her parents pay. Ruth will start researching scholarships like it's her job. Zoya would give me space, I think. She understands the need for a private part of your life. But the others wouldn't be able to help themselves.

"He needed a favor," I say carefully. "You know Aubrey Cantwell?"

"Wasn't she in some kind of accident? She had to leave," Ruth says.

The others look surprised, so they must not have heard.

"Yeah. She's okay, but I guess she's not coming back to school," I say. I look at Ruth instead of Veronica. I don't want to see the expression on

Veronica's face. "Anyway, with Aubrey gone, they need someone to help Delphine Fournier out."

"The sick girl?" Diego asks.

I nod. "So I'm staying in Abigail House for a little while," I say briskly.

Ruth looks skeptical. "Why you?"

Veronica doesn't give me the chance to come up with an answer. "But that means you won't be in Westmore with us."

"I know. I'm sorry," I say, raising one shoulder. I look at her at last. Her face is screwed up in an expression of bafflement and anger—and maybe a touch of fear.

"It's senior year. We're all supposed to be together," she says. "That's why we *got* Westmore."

"We got Westmore because your parents paid for the new gym," Ruth points out.

Veronica doesn't even glance her way. "It's our *last year* together," she says. "Why would you agree to that? What are we supposed to do now? Pick some rando to fill the fourth room?"

"If Aubrey's not coming back, there isn't anyone who needs a room, though. It'll just be the three of us," Zoya points out. Our bread has arrived, and she snags a slice, slathering it with butter. Her tone is casual, but I can tell she's trying to defuse the tension. "And it's not like Eden is going to vanish into thin air just because she's a three-minute walk across campus. We'll just have to do plenty of sleepovers."

"I've always wanted to check out Abigail House," Ruth says, mulling it over.

"Are visitors even allowed?" Diego asks.

"I think so. There are just some extra rules," I say. "A lot of them, actually. But I haven't gotten the chance to learn them yet. It happened pretty fast."

Veronica is still staring at me. "This is such bullshit. He could have asked anyone," she says, but at least she sounds more petulant than furious now. Zoya and Ruth look uncomfortable at her vehemence, and Zoya clears her throat unsubtly.

"I've always wondered what Delphine is like," she says. "It's strange, isn't it? Such a small school, and there's this girl we don't know at all."

"She has to be weird," Ruth says. She seems the least concerned with the whole thing, but then, Ruth isn't big on vulnerability. "It's inevitable, right?"

Being that isolated? Not even allowed to go outside? She's got to be at least a little eccentric. I bet she collects dead bugs or something."

"What, to eat or display?" Diego asks, and she laughs.

"She's got to be so lonely," Remi says.

The table goes quiet for a moment.

Then Veronica grabs a piece of bread and tears the middle out of it, tossing the crust down onto her plate. "Well, she won't be lonely anymore. Now she's got Eden," she says. She flings her weight back in her chair, slumping down and tearing into the soft heart of the bread with her perfect white teeth.

After so long, I can read Veronica. I know that the anger in her voice masks the fear in her eyes.

We saw Delphine Fournier die that night. She couldn't have survived, and yet she did.

And now I'm going to be living in her house.

**WE GET THROUGH** the usual welcome speeches and hearty if unimaginative food, and by the end of the meal, things seem almost normal. Curfew is early and strict the night before classes, breaking everyone out of the bad habits formed over the past week. Still, it stings that no one suggests I come back to Westmore as we get up from the table and filter outside.

“I’d better head off,” I say.

Zoya nods, and Ruth gives me a jaunty wave, her other hand fitted neatly in Diego’s. I try not to be jealous about it. Ruth and I dated for about ten seconds sophomore year, and it wasn’t my idea to break up. We’ve mostly moved past it, but I still find unexpected raw places now and then. Veronica doesn’t look at me at all.

“See you, then,” I say, throat tight, fighting the sensation that I’m losing them somehow.

“Catch you later,” Remi offers in that bass voice that always makes me imagine him tipping a Stetson.

I swing around and start off, and no one stops me. Is it really that quick? I’m not rooming with them anymore, so I’m out of the girl squad? I tell myself I’m overreacting. That they’re tired, like me, and just want to get back to their rooms, like me, and get ready for the first day of classes. Atwood doesn’t take things easy its first day. The teachers like to toss you in the deep end.

I’ve gotten about fifty feet away when I hear footsteps hustling up behind me.

“Eden, wait,” Veronica says.

“What is it, Veronica?” I ask as I turn, speaking more snappishly than I mean to. My arm hurts like hell, and I’m drowning in the sensation that I’ve made a huge mistake agreeing to Oster’s plan.

“Why did you really say you’d do it?” Veronica asks.

I set my jaw. “Does it matter?”

“Of course it matters. What we saw . . .” She bites her lip.

“We don’t know what we saw.”

“Yes, we do,” she whispers. “It was real. It was her. We both know it.”

“She couldn’t have fallen in the Narrow and gotten back out like nothing happened,” I say, but it’s less a denial, more a plea for reassurance.

“Yeah. So, how did she?” Veronica asks. She steps toward me, dropping her voice as a trio of freshmen flit by, giving us awestruck looks. “Something happened.”

“She’s just a sick girl,” I tell her. What we saw was impossible, and so it didn’t happen. It’s as simple as that.

I have learned to lie to myself just as well as I lie to my friends.

“Sometimes I consider your lack of imagination and whimsy a personal failing of mine,” Veronica says with a sigh. “I’m scared, okay? I’m scared for you. And I really need you, Eden, because it’s senior year and you’re my best friend and I need someone to talk to about stuff.”

“Stuff? Like a certain Texan gentleman?” I ask. “You two look pretty happy.”

“I know. That’s the problem. Everything is going great and he’s so nice. So nice. I’m worried I’m going to ruin him,” Veronica says.

“You don’t want to seduce him over to the side of sarcasm and cynicism?” I ask teasingly.

“No! He’s so sweet! And I feel like I’m suddenly in charge of protecting this, like, tiny fluffy baby bird from the big bad world or something. I need you to be around to snark at dating shows and indulge in pessimism or I’m going to *actually* lose my mind,” she says, and I laugh.

“You know I’m here for it,” I say. “And you don’t need to worry about me, Veronica. Delphine isn’t dangerous. She’s actually . . .” I have no idea how to end that sentence. Fascinating. Unexpected. Magnetic.

She is a mystery that has haunted me for years, and I cannot turn away now.

“At least take this, okay?” Veronica unclasps one of her necklaces, a silver pentacle, and settles it around my neck. I bite the inside of my cheek so I won’t flinch away. A hug is one thing, but this sustained close contact, her face so near mine—I don’t want to think about what happened the last time someone was this close to me. But Veronica’s breath smells of the mint she popped after dinner, not weed and stale beer, and her touch is light and feathery as she settles the chain into place around my neck.

“You know I’m not into all this witchy stuff,” I tell her fondly.

“It’s for protection,” she says. “Please keep it, Eden.”

I fold my good hand over it. The metal is still warm from her skin, and even if I don’t believe it holds any special magical properties, I like the idea of having it with me. Because it’s Veronica’s, and we’re supposed to stick together. “Thank you,” I say, and tears prick my eyes.

She gives me an odd look. “Are you going to cry, White? You never cry.”

“It’s never too late to pick up a new hobby,” I say.

“The sisterhood’s still in screaming distance if anything tries to go bump in the night over there,” she reminds me. “You let us know if anything’s wrong. Anything at all.”

“I will,” I say. I give her a quick, one-armed hug.

We part at last, and I walk back to Abigail House alone.

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I go through the ritual of entering Abigail House once again: stripping my clothes off, changing into the sweats. I open my door expecting to find my luggage waiting, but the room is empty. I groan. I’ll have to ask Mrs. Clarke where it is, but she won’t be in her office this time of night. I’ll have to deal with it in the morning.

I get myself a glass of water from the tap. It’s odd, drinking water so flat and flavorless. I’m used to the slightly metallic mineral taste of the water on campus.

I sit at the table, idly flipping through the binder between sips of water. *No outside food or drink unless prepared and sealed off campus. Normal rules regarding visitors and sleepovers apply. All guests must follow Abigail House procedures. No guests are allowed upstairs without permission from Ms. Fournier or senior staff.* I glance at the procedures for going upstairs but don’t read them in depth. Just a more extreme version of the airlock system at the entrance, it looks like.

This won’t be hard. Delphine Fournier is probably a perfectly lovely girl. I’ll miss my friends, but it’s not like we won’t see each other every day.

There’s a small, relieved part of me that thinks it will be easier this way. I don’t have to worry about friends noticing I’m sleeping with carefully piled pillows to hold my arm, or that getting dressed has turned into a series of slow contortions to try to avoid the pain. It’s just a bad strain. It will be better soon enough.

The nightmares might not go away so easily.

I check my phone. Nothing from Mom and Dad. Not that it's a surprise. I don't even know what time it is where they are, and they never check in while they're on vacation. They need "grown-up time."

I'd need time to myself, too, if my whole existence was wrapped around keeping a child like Luke from self-destructing. But at some point, I think bitterly, you have to cut your losses.

For a moment, my chest constricts. I feel that knee on my back again, the hand on my wrist wrenching my arm behind me. I hear Dylan's voice echo in my mind. *You've got a foul mouth, Princess.*

I shake off the memory. It's over. I am never going to see Dylan again, and Luke is at home, far from here.

Looking for a distraction, I open up AtChat, the Atwood School social network. I search for Aubrey, but her profile is disabled. All outside social media is blocked on the school Wi-Fi, so I can't check Facebook or anything. I'll have to find another way to cyberstalk her if I want to find out how she's doing.

*They lie*, Delphine had said. But why would Oster lie about Aubrey's accident? Unless Delphine was wrong about where it had happened—but Oster's story didn't make sense. To get to the pool, she would have needed to unlock the gate. And why would she be in there in the first place? Besides which, Aubrey was a good swimmer. I remembered seeing her doing laps, freckled shoulders breaking the water.

Footsteps creak above me. Delphine again. The promised rain patters against the window, and I realize that I'm exhausted.

I check the drawers in the bathroom. I find a normal teenage assortment of toiletries. Hair products and moisturizer, a foundation one shade lighter than my own. I'm hoping for a fresh toothbrush still in the package, but I strike out. I put the toothpaste on my finger instead.

It's weird brushing my teeth alone, without Veronica and Ruth and Zoya popping in with one last thing they wanted to say, asking me questions with my mouth full of foam, shoving a phone in front of me to show me some funny screenshot.

One of my lower front teeth shifts under the gentle pressure of my finger. I pinch it gingerly, testing it. A slight wiggle. I'm lucky I didn't lose it or any other teeth. A fist to the mouth can do a lot more damage than a split lip.

Lucky, lucky, lucky.

In bed, burrowed under the covers, I reach over for the light. The bedside table is set awkwardly far away, and I have to lean out to reach the switch. My hand on the ridged plastic knob, I pause, staring down. Then I get out of the bed and walk slowly around it.

The hardwood floor is blotchy, mottled with darkness. But only around the bed.

A ring of water damage. As if a flood spilled around the bed and seeped into the wood. I bend and press a palm to the floor.

It's dry as a bone.

## 8

**THE PAIN IN** my arm keeps me dipping in and out of sleep all night. Each time I wake, I hear the steady drumming of the rain. It almost sounds like someone tapping against the windows. When I finally wake, I feel like I've been dreaming, my heart hammering and my hands reaching for something, but I can't remember the dream.

It's too early for breakfast in the dining hall. To kill time, I look around my new abode. There isn't much to see. A linen closet with fresh sheets, blankets, and towels. The bedroom closet with Aubrey's forgotten clothing. I open the dresser, worrying that I'll find more, but these at least have been cleared out except for a single stray sock.

I'm closing the bottom drawer when it sticks. I shove at it, thinking it's gotten off track, and try opening and closing it again—but it still sticks four inches shy of closing. Grumbling, I lever it off its tracks and peer back inside to see if there's something blocking it.

A slim red book is wedged behind the back of the drawer, preventing it from closing all the way. I reach in and lever it free. Gold text on the cover reads JOURNAL. Was Aubrey the kind of girl to keep a diary?

I sit with it in my lap, my fingers tracing the edge of the cover. I shouldn't open it. But I can't stop thinking about what happened to Aubrey—and what she might have known.

Before I can think twice, I open the diary. Where I expect to find writing, there are blotches of ink, the ghosts of words bleeding across the page. The paper itself is rippled and stained, as if it's been soaked through and dried out. The pages stick to each other stiffly, and as I ease them apart, some of them rip. Most of the writing has been completely destroyed, but here and there a few lines and phrases remain. Fragmented, they're even more unsettling.

*rain again, but it didn't  
hear her  
don't let it in*

she knows  
don't let it in  
again  
watching me  
cameras everywhere  
does she know?  
know  
DON'T LET IT IN  
here she's here she's  
she's here  
here  
Delphine know  
can't trust her  
the Drowning Girl  
Grace

The word *Grace* is circled and underlined three times.

The pages at the back of the journal are untouched by the water. There's one more entry scrawled across the page without following the lines.

*She is trying to get in. She is trying to get in like she never has before and she is all that I dream about she is trying to tell me something but I can't understand her. It isn't just dreams anymore; I feel like I'm drowning all the time. She won't leave me alone.*

*I don't know what to do.*

A drop of crimson splashes onto the page. I curse, pressing the back of a knuckle to my nostril. Bloody nose.

In the bathroom, I staunch the blood, the taste of it filling the back of my mouth.

Those words don't mean anything, I tell myself. They're a creative writing exercise. A dream diary. Something innocuous.

My phone chimes. Veronica, texting to ask where I am.

I grab the diary and shove it into the drawer in the bedside table, out of sight. I'll give it to Mrs. Clarke to mail back to Aubrey, whatever the hell it's supposed to be.

It's time to get to breakfast and to class. Only, I don't have my things. Which means I don't have my uniforms.

Aubrey's are still hanging in her closet.

I tell myself it's not as strange as borrowing her day-to-day clothes. All our uniforms are the same. We could have traded and no one would know. The skirt and blouse and jacket are all exactly the same size as mine.

Yet as I pull them on, I can tell they aren't. The way the jacket sits on my shoulders, the way the skirt settles around my hips—just subtly wrong. Shaped by a different body, a different girl. It's like fitting into another person's skin. And in a way, isn't that what I'm doing? Slipping inside Aubrey's life?

*Don't let it in.*

"It's fine," I whisper, as if there is anyone else here who might need convincing.

Something thuds upstairs, loud and sudden. I jump, startled, and look up toward the ceiling. I wait for the creak of footsteps, but there's nothing. Was that the sound of a body falling? Has Delphine collapsed?

I don't think she's in danger of another attack, not if they're letting her stay here functionally alone, but what if I'm wrong? What if she's collapsed and I'm supposed to go up there and save her?

I pad cautiously out into the hall. The door to the upstairs stands before me. I could put in the code. I could go upstairs. But I stay, hands at my sides.

"Hello?" I call. My voice is weak. I try again, louder. "Delphine? Are you all right?"

She appears at the top of the stairs. "I'm fine," she says.

"I heard a thump," I explain.

She looks behind her, as if considering what it might have been. "I can be a bit clumsy," she says. "I tripped. But I'm not hurt."

"Good," I say.

She leaves me off-balance with that direct, steady voice of hers. The way she watches me intently, not bothering to conceal the fact that she's picking my every word and movement apart. The strangest part is that I don't mind at all. The idea that she can see my secrets isn't frightening. It's enticing.

"I'm heading out to breakfast," I say when the silence has stretched too long.

“Mind if I come?” she asks. I blink, and a smile curls the corners of her mouth. “Just kidding.”

So she has a sense of humor. It’s another glimpse under the mask, and it feels almost like she’s let me have it deliberately—an offering of sorts. “I’ll see you around,” I say. I start to leave.

“Eden?” she says. I pause. “Did you hear the rain last night?”

I frown at her a little. “Yeah,” I say.

“Me too,” she says solemnly, and turns away.

It isn’t until I’m three steps out the front door that I realize—the sidewalk isn’t wet. Neither is the grass or the leaves on the trees. The sun shines from a clear sky, yesterday’s clouds nowhere to be seen.

The only sign of dampness is a line of faint dark patches along the sidewalk. They’re indistinct, half evaporated already. But as I make my way past them, I think they almost look like wet footprints.

Footprints leading right up to the door of Abigail House.

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On the first day of classes, we array ourselves in uniformed splendor. As the weeks wear on, the dress code will surrender to entropy. Blazers will be replaced with sweatshirts, stockings with leggings. Socks will slouch and buttons will be left artfully undone. But on the first day, we are all polish and shine, and sharp eyes—among staff and judgmental students alike—keep on the lookout for the inappropriately unkempt.

“I hate maroon,” Zoya laments as we head out from the dining hall. “It makes me look like a tube of lipstick.”

“You look like a goddess in anything you wear,” Ruth assures her.

“A goddess dressed like a tube of lipstick,” Zoya replies, unfussed, adjusting one of her fan-shaped earrings. Today, her hair is tight at the sides with a stylish faux-hawk of curls up top.

“In these uniforms, we all either look like plums or lipstick,” Veronica tells her.

“Team Plum,” Ruth says, pumping her fist in the air.

I chuckle but don’t join in the friendly banter, my thoughts still back in Abigail House.

“Where’s everyone off to first?” Zoya asks as we enter the dining hall. “I’ve got creative writing.” Not content with her fashion design, which she

considers a hobby—a hobby that’s earned her glowing magazine profiles about being a “teen fashion prodigy”—Zoya is a prolific writer. She’s been feeding us chapters of her fantasy epic since sophomore year, and we’re all quietly dying inside waiting for the next installment.

“AP Calc,” Ruth says. She could coast on her athletics—she’s quite possibly headed to the Olympics with what she calls the “Trunchbull trifecta” of shotput, javelin, and hammer throw—but she wants to be a doctor once she’s done chucking spears for fun, so her courseload is the most intense out of any of us.

“I have my painting mentorship,” Veronica says, excitement bubbling in her voice as we queue for the breakfast buffet. It seems like anytime Veronica comes within a hundred yards of something artistic, it suddenly becomes her life. She was all about collage in first year, and Zoya seduced her over to textile design in second year. Now she’s moving on to drawing and painting, and she’s scored a coveted mentorship with Atwood’s resident artist.

In other words, my friends are all incredibly talented. I get decent grades, but I don’t have a *thing* like they all do, something to define my life.

It’s only when I realize they’re staring at me that I stammer out, “R-Russian lit.” I picked it because Zoya took it last year and offered to lend me her notes.

“Lunch together today?” Veronica asks.

“I should probably plan on tracking down my luggage,” I say, making a face. “With my luck it got left outside in the rain last night.” It’s only then that I remember it didn’t actually rain.

I feel something slide down my upper lip, a warm wetness, the moment before blood splatters the front of my blouse. I swear before jamming the back of my finger against my nostril to stop the nosebleed.

“Here,” Veronica says, handing me a napkin.

I press it to my nose. “Sorry, I have to—” I say, and that’s all I get out before I flee. In the bathroom, I trade the napkin for wads of toilet paper, but this nosebleed is more persistent than the one I had back in the room, and it’s several minutes before it stops. When it’s finally done, I’m left with bloody hands and a blood-streaked face—and a ruined shirt. I shrug out of my jacket and unbutton my blouse one-handed. I rinse the bloodied part in cold water.

The door opens as I'm laying out the blouse to blot it dry. If I hadn't spent the last six years living communally with other girls, I might be startled to be caught with my shirt off, but I don't even flinch.

"I brought you a T-shirt," Veronica says.

I give her a grateful look in the mirror as she holds out an Atwood-maroon gym shirt. I take it from her, then hesitate. Pulling on a shirt is a little awkward these days, and I don't want Veronica to see that I'm hurt.

"Aubrey got nosebleeds a lot, too," Veronica says, frowning. She has one arm crossed over her ribs, fingers wrapped around the opposite forearm as she studies me. "I remember. I used to have history with her first thing in the morning, and she'd get them all the time."

She sounds spooked. I swallow, tasting blood and mucus. "There are a million dehumidifiers in Abigail House," I say. "It's probably just the dry air."

She looks relieved at the simple explanation. "I think I remember she had these nasal spray things—saline, maybe? We could check if the commissary sells them."

"What did you think it was? Malevolent spirits?" I tease, and her grave look makes me regret the joke.

"There are some seriously *off* vibes around that place," she says. "I really wish you weren't staying there."

"You just want me all to yourself," I say lightly. Maybe I should regret agreeing to live in Abigail House. There's something strange about it. And *something* happened to Aubrey. But Delphine is there, and I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to talk to her more.

"Obviously," Veronica says. "You're going to be BFFs with Delphine Fournier, and I'm going to be all alone and tragic and die of consumption like a Victorian heroine, which is really more your thing anyway."

"You've got Remi," I remind her.

"Mm. I do have Remi," she says with half-lidded eyes, and I make an *ew*, *gross* expression so she'll laugh.

"Thanks for the shirt," I say, hoping she'll leave me to maneuver my way into it on my own.

Then Veronica's eyes widen. "What happened to your back?" she asks.

I put my hand to the base of my spine instinctively, and the skin twinges, tender. I twist around, looking at my reflection.

A circular bruise, dark and mottled, marks the skin at the base of my spine. It looks only a few days old, but it can't be. That was almost two weeks ago.

Yet here it is. The imprint of a knee in vivid purple. I swallow, feeling sick. "I fell," I say. "I'm fine."

I fell and I lay there, cheek pressed against the sticky carpet.

"You're sure?" Veronica asks, eyes troubled.

"I'm sure. Go back to the dining room. I'll be right there," I tell her.

Reluctantly, Veronica obeys. I brace my hands on the counter. "I'm fine. I'm fine," I whisper to myself.

My phone chimes. I've left it on the counter next to my bloodied shirt, and I can read the notification from here. It's a text from a number I don't know. Five words that send an inexplicable shiver of dread down my spine.

Have you seen her yet?

## 9

**I SIT THROUGH** Russian lit, barely listening. The text from the unknown number still glares from my phone screen. The bruise at my back makes it hard to find a comfortable way to sit, and my arm throbs, as if the pain has been awakened again. Staring at *The Brothers Karamazov* without comprehending a word, I wonder wildly if it will ever heal or if it will always hurt. A thing like that shouldn't heal cleanly beneath the skin, unseen. It should make its presence known.

*You aren't going to tell anyone, are you?*

They all said those words. Dylan, voice sickly sweet as I breathed in ragged, whining gasps. Luke, expression teetering between pale panic and indignant rage and finally shuttered indifference.

My mother, leaving for the airport, fretful.

*You know what I'll do to you.*

*You know what would happen.*

*You know this is his last chance.*

No one can know that Luke broke his probation by hanging out with Dylan, and so no one can know what happened to me.

Class is over. I don't think I've said one word the entire time. Not good. Loud gets you noticed but so does quiet. The key is to be middling at everything. Good enough; never great. I have to pay more attention.

Have you seen her yet? the text asks as I check the time.

Seen who? I ask. Who is this?

There's no answer.

I find Mrs. Clarke in her office. She's wearing reading glasses and *hmming* over a stack of forms, which she shuffles out of the way when I come in.

"Eden. What can I do for you?" she asks, all brisk and professional.

I think of water stains on floorboards, obscured ink on rippled pages, phantom rain against the windows. "I was wondering about my luggage?" I

ask, my voice lifting up at the end in that way my father hates. It makes me sound like a teenage girl, he'd say, smirking.

"Oh dear. Is it still not in your rooms? I did confirm it was picked up. I'll have to chase it up myself. You're in uniform, so I assume you have enough clothes for the day, at least?"

"I borrowed some of Aubrey's things," I say.

Her face freezes, and an uneasy expression flickers over it before she clears her throat. "I see. Well, I'm sure she wouldn't mind. It's not as if she needs the uniforms, anyway."

"You're sure she's not coming back?" I ask. "Was the accident that bad?"

She fiddles with her reading glasses. "She's recovering well. But after a scare like that, you can imagine that she wants to be with her family—and they want her close by as well."

I can imagine it, sure. Envy it a little. But home has never been my refuge.

"If you have the time, perhaps I can take you to meet Delphine now," Mrs. Clarke says. "And I can clear out Aubrey's things while I'm there."

Mrs. Clarke explains the procedures for visiting Delphine as we walk. It's pretty much the same as the entrance to Abigail House, except that you have to change into specially provided scrubs and put your hair up in a plastic shower cap, and first you have to towel yourself down completely, even if you're totally dry already.

"Make sure you get the soles of your feet," Mrs. Clarke reminds me.

The scrubs are, perhaps predictably, Atwood maroon. They turn us shapeless and blocky, and the booties we have to wear make our steps unbearably loud, rasping and crinkling as we walk.

The door at the top of the stairs stays shut the whole time we're changing. Mrs. Clarke knocks twice before entering the code and pushing open the door.

The first thing I notice isn't the expensive furniture or the lush, soft rug beneath my feet. It's the air. The air inside Abigail House is dry, but upstairs it's stripped of any hint of moisture. The faint whirring I took for air conditioning is, I realize, a combination of AC and built-in dehumidifiers and air purifiers, bulky appliances with complex digital displays.

Delphine is at a desk in the main room, her back to us as she types on a laptop.

"Delphine, dear. Can we say hello?" Mrs. Clarke calls.

Delphine keeps writing for several seconds without responding. Then she pushes her laptop back an inch, stands, and walks out to us. She's wearing an Atwood uniform, which I suppose shouldn't surprise me. She's a student, after all. But I didn't expect the dress code to apply, given that she never leaves her rooms.

She folds her hands behind her. Her hair is in a single braid, tied with a maroon ribbon to match her jacket. She stands with one ankle crossed behind the other, her head tilted slightly—everything about her clothes and her stance and her appearance makes her seem much younger than she actually is. But I can see the sharp and canny edge to her gaze.

“Hello,” Delphine says shyly, looking up at me through her lashes. “I'm Delphine.”

She's pretending, and the secret between us feels like sugar dissolving on my tongue, sweet and insubstantial. I'm not supposed to lie to Delphine, but apparently Mrs. Clarke is fair game. “My name's Eden. Nice to meet you,” I say, extending my hand.

“We try to avoid physical contact unless it's strictly necessary,” Mrs. Clarke says. I drop my hand. “Better safe than sorry.”

“When infant monkeys are deprived of touch, they become completely psychotic,” Delphine says mildly. “They don't even do those experiments anymore. Too unethical.”

Mrs. Clarke doesn't seem to know how to respond. “Well,” she says, putting her hands together. “Why don't I let the two of you get to know each other a bit? I'll go gather up Aubrey's things. And I'll make sure to send over a couple of spare uniforms in your size and whatever else I can scrounge up, until we find your luggage.”

She heads downstairs, leaving us alone. Delphine's stance changes subtly as soon as she's gone. Her shoulders relax, her gaze grows more direct.

“So,” I say awkwardly. “How's the first day of classes going?”

“You don't have to do that,” Delphine says. Her voice still has a softness, like morning fog, but with Mrs. Clarke gone, it takes on a quality that makes you wonder what might be hiding in the mist.

“Do what?” I ask.

“Small talk. I told you, we don't have to be friends.”

“Small talk isn't for friends, it's for everyone else,” I say. “Besides, I like small talk. It's an easy way to get people talking about themselves. And when people are answering questions, they're not asking them.”

“You don’t like answering questions?” she asks. She leans back against the doorframe, her fingertips hooked around the edges of the trim.

“I don’t like lying,” I say. “Answering questions means I have to do more of it.” I told her I would tell her the truth, and now I am. It’s a heady feeling. I feel almost drunk.

I have to stop.

“What do you lie about?” she asks. Every word she speaks is precise, enunciated perfectly. There is something about her that I cannot look away from—this strange tension between her delicateness and something dark and deep beneath.

“Lots of things,” I say. “What do you lie about?”

She considers me, chin tilted up. “I lie about almost everything,” she confesses. “How I’m doing. If I’m happy. What I’m thinking about. Sometimes I lie so that my mother won’t worry, and sometimes I lie because I like to pretend my life is something different. Sometimes I lie because I like lying, or to practice. I lie about everything and I lie about nothing at all, just for fun. Your turn.”

She said it so plainly. She didn’t promise not to lie to me, I realize, but why would she tell me all of that if she was planning to?

“What do you lie about?” she presses.

“No,” I say. I shake my head. “I told you I would tell you the truth, but that doesn’t mean I’ll tell you everything.”

“Okay,” she says. I was worried she’d be upset, but she accepts this, an understandable limit on our arrangement. She’s quiet; the room is quiet, except for the humming of the machines that keep the air pure and dry and cool. She doesn’t seem to have the same urge as most people to fill up a silence with chatter.

“Is this what we do?” I ask, looking around the room. The walls are stark white; black-and-white photographs of buildings are the only decoration. “Just sit up here and talk? What do you do for fun?” She must be bored out of her skull, trapped up here by herself every day.

“Read, mostly,” she says. “Or hang out with Aubrey. Or snoop.”

“Snoop? How do you manage that from here?” I ask.

She waves me toward the office. I follow, curious and a bit apprehensive, as she goes over to the laptop. She sits down and pulls up a private browser window. A few keystrokes later, AtChat appears on the screen.

“I looked for you on AtChat. Your profile is totally blank,” I say. Then I realize that she isn’t logged in as Delphine Fournier but as someone named Jane Crowley—an administrator account.

“Who’s Jane Crowley?” I ask.

“I think she’s tech support at FellTech,” she says.

It’s the company that makes AtChat. The owner is a legacy, so the school gets a special deal on everything.

“And how do you have her log-in?”

“She came up here to set up my computer and stuff,” Delphine says. “I watched her type it in.”

“So that’s what you mean by ‘snoop’? You look at people’s AtChat pages?”

Delphine clicks through to a profile. On the admin account, there are buttons I’ve never seen before. JOURNAL, one reads.

“Whoa, hold on. Is that the private journal?” I ask.

She nods and clicks. It’s Jennifer Danforth’s profile, and the most recent entry in her journal is all about losing her virginity over the summer to the neighbor’s hot college-aged son. I look away before I get more than the gist of it, cheeks heating up, but Delphine doesn’t seem fazed.

They encourage us to keep those journals. Your private thoughts, all in one place. “The teachers all have access to this?” I demand.

“Not all the teachers. Senior staff,” Delphine replies, backing out of the journal. She looks up at me, untroubled. “And Jane Crowley.”

“And Jane Crowley,” I echo weakly.

“Everything. Private chat logs. Personal files.”

I think of parties that have been busted, contraband confiscated. At least one mental breakdown that no one noticed until suddenly the boy was being sent to in-patient treatment. Did he post something in his journal?

I feel foolish for ever having believed it was private.

“It doesn’t work for everyone. I think they have to have permission from parents for minors, and it stops working when people turn eighteen,” Delphine says. She’s navigating to another profile. Aubrey’s. She opens the journal, but it’s empty. She lets out a sigh. “I know she never uses it, but . . .”

“Have you heard from her?” I ask. I think of the diary downstairs. Maybe I should say something. But until I understand what those fragmented

words mean, I'm not sure telling Delphine about them is the right move. *She knows*, it said.

Delphine shakes her head. "I've been trying to reach her, but she doesn't respond. I keep thinking she's dead and no one wants to break it to me."

"She's not dead," I say with more confidence than I feel. They wouldn't lie about *that*, would they? A new thought strikes me. "Have you looked at my profile?"

"I've looked at everyone's profile. I have a lot of time on my hands," Delphine says without a hint of embarrassment. "I probably know more about your classmates than you do."

"What do you think you know about me?" I ask, trying to keep my rising anger in check. Who does she think she is, prying into our lives? Who do our teachers think *they* are, pretending we have a shred of privacy?

"You don't use AtChat very much, so I don't know as much about you as I do about other people," Delphine says. She opens up a photo I'm tagged in. Me, Ruth, Zoya, and Veronica, Ruth beaming as she holds up a track medal, the rest of us giddy. "These three girls are your friends. You only ever show up in photos with at least one of them, and almost all of your comments are on their posts. You like other people's posts a lot, but you don't comment. You never post anything while you're at home. I like your comics."

"What?" I ask, startled at the seeming non sequitur.

"*Grave Belles*," she says, and my stomach twists. "You uploaded a few pages to your private journal freshman year. It's cool. Are you still working on it?"

"Yeah," I say, voice hoarse. "You saw those?" I've never shown them to anyone.

"You're angry." Her brow furrows.

"It's a pretty serious violation of privacy, don't you think?" I choke out. "If I wanted people to see those, I would have shown them."

Her eyes are huge and dark and still. "You feel like someone saw what they shouldn't have, but it isn't true. I'm no one. I don't talk to anyone. There's no one I could tell. I would just get in trouble," she says, like this makes all the sense in the world. She turns away from me, back to the screen. "I wouldn't tell, anyway. I keep everyone's secrets."

With a few quick keystrokes, she logs out and shuts the computer. Her fingertips run along the seam, and she stares down at it for a moment. Then

she looks back up at me.

“I won’t look at your profile anymore. Since we know each other now. And since you aren’t going to lie to me.”

I have no idea what to say to her. Her eyes are pale blue, but the pupils are large, and the darkness in them reflects my own shadowed figure back at me. I am struck again by what a contradiction she is—naive and canny, delicate and dangerous. *Dangerous?* The word springs to my mind, and I can’t explain it or dismiss it.

*She knows*, the words in the journal say. *Have you seen her yet?* the text asks.

Mrs. Clarke is calling. I excuse myself, and Delphine doesn’t say a word as I go. Mrs. Clarke is in the hall. In her arms are Aubrey’s neatly folded clothes, gathered into a laundry basket. “Was this everything?” she asks.

I think of the red diary, still in the bedside table. “Yes,” I say. “That’s everything.”

## 10

**I SIT UP** that night with my sketchbook. In its pages are my latest work on *Grave Belles*. Usually I work on it during my free time, but I haven't touched it in weeks.

Back in the Victorian era, sometimes people got buried who weren't really dead. People got so paranoid about it that they rigged up bells that could be rung from inside a buried coffin in case you woke up buried alive. *Grave Belles* is about a young woman, the gravedigger's daughter, who hears a bell ringing by a fresh grave and discovers a living girl inside. I started it in my freshman year, though I've revised and redrawn most of the pages from back then. I add to it slowly, in fits and starts, whenever I have the time.

Flipping through to find the first blank page in the sketchbook, I linger on a sketch I'd made of an important moment between the two heroines. Lenore, the gravekeeper's daughter, standing with her back to the viewer, her face turned just enough to see the sweep of her dark eyelashes. Belle, facing the viewer, but with her face turned away and downward. Their hands stretch behind them, fingertips almost—but not quite—meeting.

In the story, Belle has just discovered that Lenore has been lying to her, concealing the fact that Belle's brother has been arrested for her murder. Lenore believes he should hang, given that he did *try* to kill Belle, but Belle thinks that she should reveal her survival and spare him.

I don't yet know how it will all work out.

There is rain drumming on the windows. At first I don't notice it—a steady, soothing sound. And then I remember the clear skies we've had, hearing the sound of rain only to wake to nothing, and a chill goes down my spine.

I rise from my bed and walk to the window. None of the windows in Abigail House open; they're sealed shut, every one.

It's not raining. I can't hear it anymore, either, and I tell myself I must have imagined it. There isn't even a drop of water on the window.

Except for the faint, almost-imperceptible imprint of a hand. It fades so quickly, I cannot be sure I saw it, but I fall back from the window, my breath caught in my throat.

*Have you seen her yet?*

I stand frozen. I am trapped in this house. I feel besieged, as if there is something just outside waiting to snatch me up if I stray, if I break the rules. But that's ridiculous, isn't it? I am not Veronica; I have never had faith in spirits and energy and higher powers. The rain is only the rain and the dark is only the dark, and so I force myself to stride to the door and step out into the hallway. There, I stop, listening.

Faintly, oh so faintly, comes the patter of raindrops. So quiet it might only be that my mind has invented the sound to fill the silence. I steal toward the end of the hall, slip into the foyer. Still those soft raindrops taunt me.

I open the door. The night is quiet. Not troubled by a single drop of rain.

I step out onto the porch, feet bare, and stretch out my hand, waiting for a cold drop to land on my palm.

Nothing.

Nothing except the footprints. Bare, wet feet walking up to the door—and away again.

My heart beating wildly, I follow. Fear and fascination both wrap their thorny vines around my limbs.

The footprints follow the path. The concrete is rough against the soles of my feet. I pass the hedges that mark the edge of the yard outside Abigail House and keep going, though the lighting here is poorer, the tracks harder to follow. Then, abruptly, they turn from the path, vanishing as their trajectory takes them onto the grass. I peer in that direction, searching the shadows.

Among the trees, I think I see something. *Someone*. A figure, standing perfectly still. In the darkness, I can't tell if it's a man or a woman, but I know, I *know*, that as I look at them, they are looking at me.

"Miss White."

I almost scream at the voice. I whip around to find Geoffrey Oster. He is standing fifteen feet away, under the puddled light of a lamppost. He's carrying his jacket over his arm, a briefcase in his hand. The light washes him out until he looks almost like a ghost himself.

"Dean Oster. You startled me," I say.

“My apologies,” he says. “I was just heading home from a late night at the office.”

Very late. It’s past ten. “I stepped out for some fresh air,” I say.

“I imagine Abigail House can feel a touch stifling,” he says. He glances down, sees my bare feet. “Is everything all right? With your new accommodations?”

“Great. Perfect,” I say, too brightly. I’m still jangly with adrenaline, off my game.

He looks at me steadily, and I don’t think I’ve fooled him at all. “You don’t have any concerns?” he asks. “You’re comfortable there? You feel safe?”

“Why wouldn’t I feel safe?” I ask. “Because of what happened to Aubrey?”

“What happened to Aubrey was a terrible accident,” Oster says. “And perhaps a reminder that one shouldn’t wander the grounds alone at night. Can I walk you back to Abigail House?”

“I can find my way,” I tell him. He nods and doesn’t move, and I realize he’s waiting for me to leave. I steal one last glance at the trees, expecting to find that a few minutes and the presence of another living human has transformed the mysterious figure into a stump or a sapling.

Instead, it has vanished entirely, leaving only a gap between two trees.

I feel Oster’s eyes on me the whole way back to Abigail House, and it is only when I have shut and locked the door behind me that I realize that there is nothing on the path except this house. The only place Oster could have been going, this late at night and all alone, is here.

I left my phone in my room. By the time I get through changing and get back to my bed, the text messages have already been sitting there for several minutes.

She’s called the Drowning Girl.

I didn’t see her at first.

It’s not safe there. Be careful.

Keep the water out.

I type a single word in response. Aubrey?

I wait for a long time, but an answer never comes.

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I dream, again, of rushing water and blinding pain, and the next day I move through classes sluggishly. I do not believe in ghosts, but I cannot deny that I have seen the impossible. And *something* was out there last night.

The Drowning Girl, whoever that is?

Or someone playing a cruel prank.

The smart thing would be to forget about all of it—what I saw six years ago, the diary, what happened to Aubrey. But Delphine is the question that has haunted me for six years, no matter how many times I tried to forget.

I have to know what happened. What *is* happening.

When classes are done for the day, I automatically head toward Abigail House, but Zoya intercepts me. “Hey,” she says. “We missed you at lunch.”

“I wasn’t feeling great,” I say truthfully. “Did I miss anything spectacular?”

She makes a face. “The boys were there. Veronica and Ruth were mostly all over them. I don’t get it. Remi spent most of the summer with Veronica. It’s not like they’ve even had time to miss each other.”

“He’s so in love, he misses her when she goes to the bathroom,” I say, and she giggles.

“He’s sweet, at least,” she says. “She needs sweet.”

“Sweet and steady,” I agree. Someone to ground her.

“You’re coming to debrief, right?” Zoya asks. At the end of our first week of classes, we always gather for a sacred ritual that involves placing bets on final grades and which class each of us will have a meltdown about first. There’s ice cream and usually a smuggled bottle of wine.

“Lest I surely die,” I tell her, though the gathering does not hold its usual appeal. There’s something stifling about the idea of sitting there and listening to everyone talk about their wonderful summers. I’ll have to make something up. Plaster a smile on my face.

“Lest Veronica actually murders you,” Zoya corrects. “She has not shut up about it all week. In the meantime, I’m hitting up the library. Want to come?”

When I hesitate, Zoya grabs my hand in both of hers. “Come on, Eden. I haven’t seen you all summer, and I’m stuck in a dorm with the biggest pair of extroverts in the world. Please stand in companionable silence two aisles away from me?”

I force myself to smile. I love my friends; I should want to spend time with them. “Sounds like a good time.”

“The *best* kind of friend-date,” Zoya confirms.

We walk together without the particular need to talk. I’ve always appreciated that aspect of our friendship—we spend a lot of time reading, Zoya’s legs draped casually across my lap as I balance my book on her shins. Or watching a movie together while I braid her hair—neither the salon on campus nor the one in town are up to her standards, so between YouTube and her instructions, I’ve trained myself to a serviceable level of expertise. I was surprised to discover I really enjoyed it, and I’ve been doing Veronica’s and Ruth’s hair for years, too.

Zoya’s watching me out of the corner of her eye. “What?” I ask her.

Her lips press together briefly. “Look, it’s probably nothing,” she says.

“What, Zoya? Now you have to tell me,” I say.

We’re approaching the library. She cups her elbows in her hands, hunching as she walks. “It’s just, people have been gossiping. About what happened to Aubrey and you being in Abigail House.”

“There have always been rumors about Abigail House,” I say. Usually, they have to do with Delphine not really being sick, Madelyn Fournier being a Munchausen-syndrome-by-proxy villainess, that sort of thing. And of course people occasionally say that Abigail House is haunted, but every brick and stone at this school has a haunting to its name. It’s the sort of place built to breed ghost stories.

“They’re saying that Aubrey was never anywhere near water when she drowned. They found her on the front steps, and she had a bunch of broken bones,” Zoya says. Goose bumps rise on the back of my neck. “Some people are saying she’s dead.”

“She’s not,” I say. “I think she texted me, actually.”

“Seriously?” Zoya asks.

“I can’t be sure, but I think so. She said she saw the Drowning Girl.”

“The ghost,” Zoya says, not quite a question. “The girl who drowned in the Narrow because of some boy, and now she climbs out to drip on people.” She gives me a sidelong look. “Have you seen something?”

“I don’t believe in ghosts,” I say. It’s true. I’m pretty sure. “But I don’t know. There’s something weird about that place.”

Zoya looks thoughtful. “You know who I bet knows something about it? Mr. Campos.”

“We don’t have to talk to Mr. Campos,” I say at once.

“Why not? He’s all about Atwood history, and he teaches that ghost story elective during Free Week.” Free Week is the week between semesters. The teachers and some of the staff offer short classes on niche subjects—there’s Mr. Campos’s ghost story class, a baking class, even a class that consists entirely of watching the movie *Hot Fuzz* every day for five days.

“I just . . . don’t think it’s necessary,” I hedge.

Zoya snorted. “Riiiiight. I forgot you have a thing for him.”

“I don’t have a thing for Mr. Campos. He’s almost twice our age,” I say unconvincingly. “Besides, he’s had a hit out on me since I spilled a mocha on a copy of *The Odyssey* in first year.”

“My bad. Thirty is *ancient* and you have *zero* interest,” she says, patting me on the head. “You know he knows every ghost story and urban legend about Atwood. So if you want answers, you’re just going to have to deal with your absolutely obvious and embarrassing crush.”

I roll my eyes at her.

“Besides, I’ll be there to protect you if he goes after you with a hole puncher.”

I allow her to cajole me into the library. Even this early in the semester, it’s pretty busy—seniors doing college application prep, panicky freshmen grabbing giant stacks of books as they realize just how academically intense Atwood is.

Mr. Campos is at his desk. He’s fat, with thick black glasses and dark curly hair that makes him look boyish, though his beard and piercing dark eyes balance that out. Today he’s wearing a sweater vest over a tailored shirt, his standard uniform—sometimes spiced up with a semi-ironic bow tie, though not, to my disappointment, today.

I always instinctively like men with sweater-vests. Veronica claims that someday, in a moment of dramatic irony, it will be a man in a sweater vest who betrays me to my doom.

Truthfully, I absolutely have a thing for Mr. Arturo Campos. It’s why I spilled the mocha, since I was sitting there daydreaming about impressing him with my knowledge of the classics when he asked me if I was finding everything okay, and I screamed aloud and smacked the cup over.

Zoya approaches his desk, her shoulders curled forward the way they always do when she’s talking to someone she doesn’t know well. I hang

back and hope vaguely that he's sustained a head trauma over the summer and won't remember me.

"Miss Ivanova-Smith. Miss White. What can I do for you today?" he asks cheerfully. His voice is warm and friendly, and I want to sink into the floor.

"Eden has a ghost problem," Zoya says. Her voice totally changes when she's talking to other people—thin and quiet, like a layer has been stripped out of it. She looks back at me, beckoning me forward.

"I believe you want the Ghostbusters for that," he says, a twist of humor on his lips.

"She means I'm trying to find information about ghosts," I say.

"Of course," he says, and his eyes glitter. I flush. "So are you looking for a particular specter or will any old haunting do?"

"I'm looking for information about the Drowning Girl," I say, more confidently this time.

"Oh, good choice," he says, like a waiter complimenting your wine selection. "That's an intense one."

"So you do know it?" I ask. I find myself leaning forward eagerly, an anxious excitement thrumming through me.

"There are all kinds of ghost stories associated with the Narrow, going back to before the school was even here. But the Drowning Girl, specifically, is more recent. Basically, the story goes that there was a young woman in love with a young man. This young man was someone she wasn't supposed to be in love with—the details vary on why. He was older, or poor, or his skin was the wrong color. Her parents forbade her to see him, and the school attempted to intervene, but of course that only made them love each other more. And so the two of them decided to run away together."

"Idiots," Zoya mutters.

"It's not my place to judge," Mr. Campos says, though he looks amused. "Anyway, they were supposed to meet up at the Narrow."

"Again, idiots. Who goes down to the Narrow at night to meet up?" Zoya asks. "It's a good way to get yourself killed."

"An excellent way, as it turns out," Mr. Campos agrees. "Apparently, her lover never showed up. The girl, in her grief, threw herself into the water and was pulled down below. But legend says that she climbs out of her watery grave at night to find him. She leaves wet footprints in the halls, and

a few students have glimpsed her. She's called the Drowning Girl because she's always in the process of drowning. Choking on water. Gasping for air."

"That's horrible," I say, clutching the strap of my backpack tightly. I can imagine it vividly: The constant sense of striving for air, your lungs filling with water. The thrashing panic of it. Only the release of unconsciousness never comes.

"That's ghost stories for you," Mr. Campos says. "At their core, every ghost story is a tale of loss and destruction."

"Who was she? When did it happen?" I ask.

Mr. Campos spreads his hands. "That's trickier to pin down. I *think* the earliest iteration of the Drowning Girl story is from the late eighties, but there are so many 'drowned in the Narrow' ghost stories that it can be hard to be sure. The choking, though—that definitely shows up in the eighties, from what I've found."

"Is that when you were a student here?" Zoya asks.

He looks over his glasses at her. "The eighties were the decade *before* I was born, so no, I did not attend Atwood then."

"Right," Zoya says, and looks at the floor, embarrassed.

"Work with teenagers, they said. It'll be so fulfilling, they said. Never mentioned how they'd make me feel like a crypt keeper all the time," he mutters, staring up at the ceiling and heaving a sigh. I stifle a laugh, and he grins. "I had a working theory that the Drowning Girl was inspired by a real disappearance in the eighties."

"Disappearance?" I echo, interest piqued.

"Well before my time, as mentioned." He gives Zoya a mock glare. "It was a young woman, a student at the school. She went missing, and there was speculation she ended up in the Narrow. That's about as much as I know off the top of my head."

"Do you know who's seen her? Or where we could find out more about the missing girl?" I ask.

"I don't know of any specific sightings. You could try a classmate's cousin's roommate's aunt—they're usually the ones with the firsthand knowledge," Mr. Campos says with a wink, and we chuckle obligingly. "As for the missing girl, you could ask Dean Oster. He was a teacher here during that time period."

A jolt goes through me. It's hardly sinister—I already knew Oster was here in the eighties. But I think of him out on the grounds at night, the questions he asked, and I wonder.

“You could also check out the local paper archives on campus,” Mr. Campos adds. “Just say the word, and I can get you the keys to the kingdom. The extremely nerdy, niche-interest kingdom.”

“Thank you,” I say, feeling a bit faint. “This is really helpful.”

“That's my job. Helping students with weird questions and not asking too many of my own,” he says cheerfully, pushing up his glasses. “Oh, and Eden? Watch out for rogue mochas.”

My cheeks turn red, and I hurry away.

# 11

**WE'RE THE FIRST** ones to get to the dorms. Zoya goes into hostess mode, and by the time Ruth arrives, I have a cup of tea and a plate of beautiful little shortbread cookies made by Zoya's tiny Russian grandmother.

"Well, this year is going to suck," Ruth declares, dropping onto the couch next to me. She snags a pair of cookies and nibbles at the edge of one with a deep, contented sigh. She strictly limits her sugar during the school year for training purposes, but there are exceptions for Tiny Russian Grandma Cookies.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"I just overcommitted," Ruth says.

"A shock," Zoya notes, folding her long limbs into a cross-legged sit on the floor and setting her own cup of tea delicately on the edge of the coffee table. "Who knew that trying to become a doctor and go to the Olympics at the same time would be challenging."

"Yeah, I know," Ruth says. She sounds defeated, and that isn't like her. Ruth is driven—the most driven person I know. She's only ever seen *too much* as a challenge to be overcome, but as she slowly nibbles away at the shortbread, her gaze is unfocused and weary.

"Do you still want to do both?" I ask. "It is a lot. You're basically superhuman for even trying."

She bites her lip. "I got a B in Chemistry last semester. I brought it up to an A minus with some extra work over the summer, but I had to scramble."

"A B is perfectly respectable," Zoya says. She's right, of course, but it's not up to Ruth's own standards for herself. Not with applications due soon and her GPA on the line. She looks at me, and I give a little nod to show I understand.

"I'm not sure I actually have the time and the sheer physical energy to manage both, short of bending the space-time continuum," Ruth goes on. "Getting that B made me panic, and then I realized that if I have to pick

one, it'd be the academics and medicine. And then I started to think, do I even want to go to the Olympics?"

I tilt my head in surprise. The Olympics have been all she's talked about since we were twelve and she realized there was more to the Olympics than being a pint-sized gymnast. She could be big, strong, and a champion, and she's been driving toward that goal ever since. "Do you want to stop competing?" I ask.

"No, I don't think so," she says. "But going to the Olympics basically means giving up a normal life for a long time. The training, the money, the politics . . . I don't know if I'm up for that just to say I did it."

"You don't need an external marker of success to prove that you're a badass," I say.

"Are your parents going to be disappointed?" Zoya asks.

"I imagine they'll be relieved," I say, and Ruth nods.

"They've always been worried I'm pushing myself too hard," she says. "There's a line between overachieving and working yourself to the bone, and you crossed it in fifth grade!" she says in an exaggerated rumble that I imagine is supposed to be her father's voice.

"At least they've always known that if they tried to slow you down, you'd only push harder," I point out. "You're like a cat. It has to be your idea."

"Ouch. Stop knowing me so well. It's hurtful," Ruth says.

I stick my tongue out at her, and she puts a hand on my knee for a brief moment, affectionate. My heart gives only a tiny squeeze. I am very nearly over Ruth Hwang.

It feels good being back. But I keep wondering what Delphine is doing, all alone in Abigail House.

"Hey, losers," Veronica says, practically dancing through the door, her face aglow. "Did I miss anything?"

"Just Ruth destroying our fundamental understanding of her life goals," Zoya said.

"Also Tiny Russian Grandma Cookies," Ruth says, pointing.

"Sweet," Veronica says, plopping down on the couch beside me. "And what?"

"Ruth has decided not to pursue Olympic glory, but reside with us mere mortals," I explain.

“Excuse me? And I’m only hearing about this now?” Veronica asks, genuine surprise mixed with exaggerated offense.

“To be fair, I’m just hearing about it now myself,” Ruth says.

Veronica fixes Zoya with a look. “You’d better not tell me you’ve decided to only dress in sweats or something.”

Zoya laughs. “You’re safe, I promise.”

“How is the fashion stuff going?” I ask, casually as I can. I’ve been worried about Zoya this summer. Her usual flowery captions have shrunk down to the emoji-only level, and her photos have been of cute dogs and flowers, with only a few of her usual fashion shots.

Zoya sighs. “It’s complicated.”

“I noticed you haven’t been posting much on Instagram,” I say.

She makes a face. “Yeah, I’m having kind of a weird relationship with it right now. I still love *making* clothes, but I’ve never been totally comfortable being my own model. It’s like . . .” She trails off.

“Like it’s about you instead of the clothes?” I guess, and she makes a sound of agreement.

“Your DMs have to be a nightmare, too,” Veronica notes.

Zoya gives a full-body shudder. “A wretched hive of scum and villainy,” she declares, putting up a hand. “It used to be *fun*, you know? Then it started to be about getting noticed and getting likes and getting sponsors and it’s this whole little business empire, but why? I’ve never wanted to run a business. I suck at it. And I’m seventeen, I should not know this much about taxes.” She waves a hand. “Anyway, that’s way too much about me.”

“I miss hearing about you. All of you,” I say, and I’m taken aback by the raw note of longing in my voice.

Zoya gives me a look that simmers with surprise, but Veronica just pops another cookie in her mouth.

“In that case, can it be my turn to make it all about me for a hot minute?” Veronica asks.

“Please. All this introspection is giving me acne,” Ruth says, and Zoya gives a nod of permission.

Veronica launches into an explanation of why she was late, which involves an extra meeting with her painting mentor—who is apparently the coolest and most brilliant woman to ever grace the earth. She lights up as she talks, gesturing wildly. It’s good to see her so happy. She worked her

ass off last year to land the mentorship. I curl into the corner of the couch, arms wrapped around a throw pillow, and just listen.

Rain hits the window with sudden force. I jump in my seat. I can see the drops against the window. Real rain, not . . . not whatever it's been at Abigail House. No need to freak out.

I try to focus on what Veronica is saying. The rain picks up. It seems to fill my hearing. Beneath it is another sound—the wind? No, a voice. A whisper.

*They took her.*

The words are as clear as if they were whispered in my ear. My breath catches. My eyes fix on the window.

Veronica pauses midsentence, looking over at me.

“Eden? Everything okay?” she asks.

For a dizzying moment, it's like I've never seen any of them before. Then their names slide back into my mind and I shiver. “I'm fine,” I croak.

“You sure? It is your turn to share your big life crisis,” Veronica says.

I shake my head. I can't tell them. I've never told my friends anything about Luke and home. There is a clear, bright line between Atwood and the real world. If I tell them, it frays. Blurs. Breaks. The Eden who is here is not the Eden who's had a dead bolt on her bedroom door since elementary school.

But she has followed me here, that other Eden. The Eden who goes to sleep afraid. The Eden with anger like acid eating away at her slowly from the inside out. I have carried her wounds with me here, and they refuse to heal.

“Hey, Eden,” Veronica says, and she reaches out toward me, hand closing over my arm, and in that instant, I am the wrong girl entirely, in the wrong place, and I jerk away from her with a sound in the back of my throat that is almost a snarl. Veronica stares at me, hurt and mystified.

“I'm sorry,” I stammer. I'm here, I remind myself. I'm safe. Except Atwood doesn't feel very safe anymore. “Let's just do the debrief.”

Veronica looks skeptical, but she doesn't press.

I try to settle into the rhythm of conversation again, laugh along at Veronica's tale of accidentally stealing a moped in Rome and Zoya's comedy of errors trying to get from Europe, where her diplomat mother is currently assigned, to the US. I keep bracing myself for the moment when

I'll have to lie. But Zoya is the one to ask, "What did you get up to this summer?" and I shrug and say, "I just bummed around at home."

And that's it. The conversation moves on; everyone is eager to get in another story. Part of me longs for them to ask more. To insist. Confession builds like a pressure in my throat, but as I grow quieter, shrinking against the cushions, no one seems to notice.

Their faces shine when they talk about the classes they're taking, the schools they're applying to. I haven't thought beyond the end of the year because I can't bear to. I'm losing Atwood.

I've maybe lost Atwood already.

With each minute the distance between us seems to grow. Already I'm realizing I have to ask them to explain things that they've clearly talked about, tell me things I've missed. I thought that I could leave the summer behind. But the memories are as vivid as the room around me, the pain in my arm an unshakable reminder of what happened. I can still smell it—the stink on my clothes when I stripped them off at the end of the night. I can still taste the scorch of cheap alcohol, which I refused at first, before I realized it made the hours more tolerable. I can feel the weight of his arm across my shoulders, and when Veronica casually leans over, arm across the back of the couch, I lurch to my feet.

The conversation grinds to a halt. The others look at me, curious and concerned.

"Eden?" Veronica says.

"Sorry. I'm not feeling well," I say. Now that I'm on my feet, I feel trapped, panicky. I need to get out of here.

"We haven't gotten to the good stuff," Ruth says.

"I know. I'm sorry. We can catch up this weekend or something? I'm feeling really gross," I say. I want to run. I don't know why this is happening now. Why these memories have woken inside my body so suddenly, so strongly.

"Do you want us to walk you back to Abigail House?" Zoya asks.

I shake my head quickly. "No, stay. Have fun. I'll see you tomorrow," I insist. I don't give them the chance to object. I grab my bag and head for the exit.

The first part of the summer was normal. Lonely but normal. I haven't attended school locally since fifth grade, so I don't really have any friends back home. I spent my time chatting online or working on *Grave Belles*,

redrawing the early pages now that my art has improved so much, revising some things I changed in the story. Then my parents took off—Mom on a business trip, Dad off fishing to prove his manhood to his outdoorsy father.

Luke was staying in the pool house. We'd managed to avoid each other most of the summer. He seemed to be doing better. I was glad—but it didn't mean I was suddenly filled with sisterly affection for the brother who'd once put all my books in the bath and filled it up because of some minor slight.

When I heard someone rattling around in the cupboards downstairs, I assumed it was him, but when I went down, Dylan was there instead, standing in the kitchen holding a box of crackers, crumbs scattered over the counter.

“Hey, Princess.”

I knew Dylan, of course. He was Luke's friend; eventually, we realized he was Luke's dealer, too. He was a big white guy with a thick chest and huge arms. He would be handsome if it weren't for the ugly expression he always had on his face, superior and sneering. He always had girls hanging around. Not now, though. Now it was just him, in my kitchen, exactly where he wasn't supposed to be. Because Luke was on probation after being caught breaking into a gas station, wasted and high, and attacking the cop who came to arrest him.

If Luke was anything but rich and white, my parents would be paying for a casket, not the best defense attorney in the state. As it was, he hadn't been charged with the assault and had just been given probation for the break-in. But if he violated it, he went to jail, and the assault charges would be filed. The terms of his probation required that he not associate with known criminals, including a whole list of his friends.

Dylan was at the top of that list.

“You can't be here,” I said stupidly, staring at him.

“It's cool. Luke invited me,” he said.

“He's not allowed to be around you,” I shot back. “I'm calling my mom.” I turned to head back upstairs.

Before I even heard him move, he had spun me around and shoved me up against the wall. His hand was on my chest, his fingers almost at my throat. It didn't hurt, really. It was more the weight of him, the instant understanding that I was trapped, and that whatever happened next, it was entirely up to him.

“So here’s what we’re going to do,” he said cheerfully.

That was the first day. The last day didn’t really come until I stepped out of the cab and saw Veronica striding toward me.

Or maybe it hadn’t come at all.

*I am alone now* comes the whisper in the rain, and the words write themselves on my bones.

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When I get inside, I rush my way through changing. I pause in the hallway, listening for Delphine’s footsteps, but the upstairs is silent.

I climb into bed, prop my arm up, and fall asleep to the sound of the rain.

I wake to darkness. I’m staring at the ceiling. My limbs feel leaden, paralyzed. I can’t move. I try to speak, but I can’t. My mouth is locked shut, my words dying in my throat.

At the edge of my vision stands a dark figure. Fear jolts through me, sudden and total. I can’t turn my head, but I make out stringy wet hair dripping onto the floorboards. She’s steeped in shadow. I can’t make out the details, only the shape of her.

The floorboards creak. She comes closer.

I shut my eyes. I can’t even whimper. I can *feel* her—the cold of her against my skin. I can hear the dripping water, and then *guh, guh, guh*, the wet choking.

I can’t scream. Can’t move. The only decision I can make is to look, and so I squeeze my eyes shut against the sight of her.

The bed creaks. A cold presence hovers over me. Cold water drips onto my cheeks in an unsteady rhythm.

*Guh, guh, guh*, comes the awful choking sound. Frozen fingertips brush across my arm—

I sit up with a cry of alarm, my heart hammering.

The room is empty. I press a hand to my cheeks. They’re wet, and for a moment, fresh panic surges, but then I realize—I’m crying.

There is no ghost. I am alone and I am unharmed, except for the pain in my arm, suddenly sharp, worse than it has been in days. I must have rolled over on it in my sleep. The dripping of water—it’s the rain against the window.

That’s all.

“Eden?” Delphine calls. A knock sounds from the hall. “Eden, are you okay?”

I stumble from my bed and into the hallway, my arm held close against my side. The lights upstairs are on, spilling down to illuminate Delphine, who stands on the other side of the door.

“I’m fine,” I tell her.

“You yelled.”

“I had a bad dream or something,” I say. “It was like I couldn’t move. There was someone standing over me.”

Delphine nods, concerned but calm. “Sounds like sleep paralysis. Aubrey used to get that. It feels like you’re awake, but you aren’t. You’re sort of dreaming and awake at the same time. It’s supposed to be terrifying, but it isn’t real. You’re awake now. You’re okay.”

Her tone is soothing, almost melodic, and I realize it’s intentional. She’s talking me down. There’s such an exquisite kindness in her voice that it’s easy to believe her.

Sleep paralysis. It fits. I close my eyes, trying to ignore the pain in my arm. My brain summoned up the specter of the Drowning Girl because I’d been thinking of her. It makes perfect sense. “I’m sorry I woke you,” I say.

“You don’t need to apologize. I wasn’t sleeping.”

“Insomnia?”

“Some nights I can tell I’m going to have nightmares,” Delphine says. She rests her fingertips against the glass, her eyes fixed on them.

“I don’t think I want to go back to sleep either,” I confess. I sit against the wall and sink down until I’m sitting cross-legged on the floor. I cradle my arm in my lap.

Delphine looks down at me a moment. Then, without a word, she sits as well. I hear her settling against the wall right on the other side of the door.

“What do you dream about?” I ask. Focusing on Delphine makes it easier to breathe steadily. To tell myself the pain will fade and the sun will rise and all of this will be over.

“Drowning,” Delphine says. A sharp hiss slips between my teeth. She doesn’t know what happened all those years ago, but some part of her must remember. “It’s always the same. I’m falling, and then I hit the water. I try to get free, but I’m being pulled under. I don’t mean to gasp, but I do, and the water fills my lungs. But I’m still alive when I hit the rocks. It hurts. It always hurts.”

“I’m sorry,” I say, because I can’t think of what else I could offer.

“Do you have nightmares?” Delphine asks, as if eager to shift the attention away from herself.

“Other than this one?” I ask. She makes a soft noise of affirmation. I wet my lips. “I’ve been having this dream lately. There’s a room. The lights are bright, and there are people talking, but I can’t understand what they’re saying. I stand up and walk away, but when I get outside, there’s nothing there. The world is just a black, scorched husk. And I keep walking, on and on and on, hoping to find someone. Just one person. But there’s no one. And no matter how far I go, when I look back, I can see the room I left. The whole world is dark except for that room, and it’s bright, and I can see everything in it perfectly, even though it’s far away.”

“Why don’t you want to go back?” Delphine asks.

Because it isn’t just any room. It’s the pool house. It’s Dylan and Luke and the bright little pills on the glass table. “Something happened to me,” I say. I shouldn’t tell her. I know I shouldn’t, but the pull of confession is hard to resist.

“Is that how you hurt your arm?”

“You can tell?” I thought I was doing a decent job of hiding it.

“Did someone hurt you?” she says instead of answering.

I open my mouth to lie. But then I remember my promise. “I’ll tell you, but you can’t tell anyone,” I say.

“Okay.”

The plainness of her words is hiding something. It isn’t deception, exactly. It’s more like ice over the water. You might see the whole surface and never guess how deep the water is below or how swift the current. But I want to test those waters. Perhaps it will be worth it to fall through them, to find what lies beneath.

“How did you hurt your arm?” Delphine asks. Softly, deliberately. Not a demand but an invitation—permission.

“Someone twisted it,” I say. *Someone*. A word of hesitation. Someone could be anyone, faceless, nameless.

“Was it an accident?” she asks.

“No.”

Silence. I can feel her fitting this piece of information into the rest of the puzzle of me, but I find, oddly, that I don’t mind.

“What happened?” Delphine asks.

I make a noise in the back of my throat, remembering. “My brother, Luke. He’s out on probation. Part of that is he’s not supposed to be around his old friends. But this guy Dylan, he was at our house. I found out. Dylan . . . Dylan made sure I couldn’t tell.” I don’t say anything about the pills, the photos, the blurred hours.

“By hurting you.”

I rub the back of my neck. I grope for words, not wanting to lie, not ready to tell the truth. “It’s my fault, really. It was stupid. It was the day before my parents got home. All I had to do was shut up, but I told Dylan . . . Actually, I don’t even remember what I said. I’m not sure I know what I was saying in the first place,” I say, staring at the sharp wedge of light the window throws against the wall. I try to speak the words, to explain what happened next. But they don’t come. “I think it’s broken.”

Saying it out loud, I have to admit it’s true. A sprain wouldn’t still be hurting like this. There’s a crack in the bone, a fault, a fracture.

“Why haven’t you told anyone?”

“My parents asked me not to,” I say. Then, quickly, “I didn’t tell them how badly it was hurt. My arm, I mean. I told them I didn’t need to go to a doctor. And Luke—if anyone found out Dylan was even there, it would be . . .” I trail off. She hasn’t said a word, and yet I’m scrambling to defend my parents. “It’s his last chance.”

“I see.” Her voice is so quiet, I almost can’t make it out.

“You must think my family is horrible,” I say. “But it’s more complicated than that. Other families would have given up on Luke. My parents put *everything* into getting him diagnosed, getting him treated.”

“What does he have?” she asks.

It’s not that simple, I could tell her. The diagnosis is a line you draw around a set of behaviors to give them a shape. A dozen doctors have drawn a dozen shapes. Their names have changed as he’s aged, doctors have disagreed, my parents have rejected the ones they don’t like and shopped around for others. It’s never clear if they’re looking for an explanation or an excuse for the things he’s done.

“Basically, he hates authority, and he doesn’t form bonds with people. He can’t regulate his anger, and he perceives pretty much any kind of criticism as a threat. Sometimes he has sudden rages. Other times he does something to you, and it’s because of something you said six months ago that you

forgot about, but he's been holding on to it this entire time because he keeps this exhaustive list of every bad thing anyone's ever done to him."

"That sounds hard to live with," she says carefully, and I squeeze my eyes shut to keep from crying.

"I was five when my parents started having me lock my door from the inside at night," I say. "He'd get angry and go after whatever he knew would make my parents upset, and that was me. We couldn't have pets. I couldn't have friends over."

"That's why you came here?" Delphine asks.

"There was a point where I realized that if they had to spend their time protecting me, they wouldn't have time to help him," I say. "It was better if I went away."

"So they got rid of you." She says it so bluntly, factually, but it's like a fist to my stomach.

"No. It was my idea," I insist. Atwood has always been mine—my refuge, my choice. "And it worked. Luke got better. He worked really, really fucking hard at it, and he learned how to control himself and follow rules and he got clean. And then a year ago, it all fell apart." It happened so fast. Luke met Dylan at a party and something about the older man *clicked* with him. He wanted to impress him, wanted Dylan to *like* him in a way he'd never wanted with anyone in his whole life.

He had worked so hard to live with the hell that was his own mind, to choose his own path. Then Dylan whispered in his ear, and in less than a month, everything was in ruins.

"Do you love your brother?" Delphine asks.

I don't answer. I don't know if I know the answer. "He can be really sweet sometimes. He's not an evil person. He's always been amazing at picking gifts out for people. And some days, good days, he would work so hard to make me laugh. And he can be really protective. He never lets anyone pick on me. He'd hurt me, but he never let anyone else touch me."

Until this summer.

And that's the worst part. Not the sudden pain in my arm or the hand pressing against the side of my face, pushing it into the carpet, but the days before, the long hours of Luke sitting placidly in his chair, chuckling in amusement when I slurred my words.

"I had a brother, you know," Delphine says. "A twin. He didn't develop properly. By the time I was born, they knew he had died."

“That’s horrible,” I say. “Your poor mother.”

“Sometimes I think that’s why she’s done all of this. She started out by losing one of us, and she’ll do anything to keep from losing the other,” Delphine says. “So I can’t die. She’d be all alone, and all of this would be for nothing.” I hear her shift, her head resting against the door. We are invisible to each other, yet almost touching.

“That’s not the only reason not to die,” I say, but she doesn’t answer.

“Tell me something nice,” Delphine says instead.

“Nice? Like, your hair is really pretty?” I ask, and she gives a little laugh.

“No. Something that makes you feel good. Something true that isn’t awful.”

I think for a minute. “This is silly. But where I grew up, there aren’t any fireflies. I used to see them in movies and read about them in books, but I guess I sort of thought they were a literary device? But then my first year here, the very last day before my best friend left for home, we were sitting in the woods talking to each other, and these little lights started popping up. I didn’t even know what they were at first. And it was like magic. The kind of magic I’d stopped believing in a long time ago. For a few minutes, there was something brand-new in the world, and it lit up the dark.”

Veronica, who never missed an opportunity to tease me, let me have my wonder. We held hands as the stars rose up from the forest floor, the universe turned upside down just for us.

“Is that what you meant?” I ask Delphine.

“That’s exactly what I meant,” she says, and I can hear her smile in the words. It sends a strange, quick feeling through me to know that I made her happy, even for a moment.

“What about you? What makes you happy?” I ask.

“It’s stupid,” she says.

“Mine is bugs with glowing butts. What could be stupider than that?” I ask.

“Flowers,” she says. “I miss flowers. We used to have this massive garden, and I would sit out by the flowers and watch the bees bounce around between them. The dahlias were my favorites.”

“That’s not stupid at all,” I tell her.

She lets out a soft hum of sound. “I think I’m going to go to bed now,” she says. Her voice is tender, raw. I feel bruised, and I marvel at how such small truths can be so hard to share.

We stand and look at each other through the glass. Her breath traces the faintest fog in front of her.

“You can tell me anything, you know,” she says. “You can tell me anything and I won’t tell a soul.”

“Weren’t you just saying that you lie all the time?” I ask her, almost teasingly. “Why should I believe you now?”

“Maybe you shouldn’t,” she says. I can’t look away from her. With the light shining from behind, her face is in shadow. Her hair has come loose from its braid, leaving red wisps around her cheeks. “Goodnight, Eden.”

Her steps carry her up the stairs with the quick, tense grace of a deer.

I look after her until the door shuts, cutting off the light. I don’t know what to make of Delphine Fournier. Maybe that’s inevitable—she’s bound to be a little strange. But I didn’t expect her to be so easy to talk to, and I didn’t expect the way she has of listening—like she’s intently focused on understanding every word you’re saying. On understanding *you*.

I didn’t expect that I would want someone to understand me that way.

I turn away from the door. There are no exterior windows off the hall, and without the light spilling down from Delphine’s rooms, it’s pitch-black. I drop against the wall for the light switch and flick it on.

Bare, wet footprints stretch between the front door and my room. I creep over, heart hammering in my chest. The prints aren’t just damp. Water has pooled in them and splattered around in drops and small puddles.

It was raining when I came in, and I hadn’t showered. Could I have tracked this water in?

I hold my foot up against one of the prints. My feet are at least a full size smaller. And there’s something strange about the right foot—it’s bent inward, and the inside of the ball of the foot hasn’t left a mark, like whoever it was had to put their weight on the edge of their foot.

I follow the prints to my room. Through the door I know I left locked.

All the way to the edge of my bed.

## 12

**I DON'T SLEEP** the rest of the night, listening for the rain. Around seven, my phone chimes with a text from Delphine.

*Come upstairs. I need to talk to you.*

I scale the steps with trepidation. I'm extra meticulous with the procedures. It's not like I was going to gamble with Delphine's health before, but now it takes on new importance. I dry beneath my fingernails and tuck every strand of hair up beneath the plastic cap before I walk upstairs.

Delphine is on the couch, reading. The title of the book is in French.

"Are you reading that for a class?" I ask.

"Just for myself," she says.

"Are you really French?" I blurt out, remembering Veronica's long-ago accusation.

Delphine's eyebrows raise slowly. Then she laughs, shaking her head. "No. But *Maman* has always been enamored of France," she says, overemphasizing the French word. "Her real name is Janet Murphy. She changed it when she started acting." She sets the book aside, closing it without marking her place.

There's a camera up in the corner I didn't notice before. It's white and blends in with the walls, but the black eye is pointed straight toward us. Delphine follows my gaze.

"In case I have an episode. They're monitored by an outside company," Delphine says. "They can't hear us, if that's what you're worried about."

"Can your mother watch you through there?" I ask.

"She says she doesn't, but I know she does from time to time. She'll keep track of the fact that you were here. She's anxious that she hasn't been able to meet you in person."

"When is she coming back?" I ask. I'm not exactly looking forward to the introduction.

"Tomorrow. That's why we need to talk," Delphine says. She eyes me. "Your arm is worse."

It's true. My arm is throbbing in time to my pulse, worse than it's been since it first happened. She approaches, stretching out a gentle hand, and lifts my arm to examine it, touching me only at the wrist and elbow.

"Were these here before?" she asks.

Four bruises stripe my arm. A fifth wraps around the other side to meet them. Like a hand, gripping tight.

Queasiness lurches through me. I pull my arm away. "No. They shouldn't—it healed. It was healing."

She grabbed me, hadn't she? The ghost grabbed my arm in my dream.

But her hand was small. This hand had wrapped easily around my forearm.

I shut my eyes. My tongue bumps against my teeth, and the taste of blood fills my mouth. The pain makes my thoughts sluggish, and through them comes the sharp-edged shadow of panic, rising toward me.

"Come with me," Delphine says. She touches my right wrist lightly before walking away. Numbly, I follow.

In the bathroom, she opens the medicine cabinet. There are two dozen prescription bottles, all of them with her name on them. Some of the dates look old, probably expired. She turns them to inspect the labels until she finds what she's looking for. She dumps out the pills and places them in my palm. I know exactly what they are without looking at the label.

I almost laugh. I almost throw up. *Open your mouth and stick out your tongue*, Dylan had instructed me before placing the pill in my mouth. *Now chew*. His fingertip tasted sour. "I don't want these."

"They'll help with the pain," she says. A question behind the words.

I close my fingers over the pills, feeling the shape of them in my hand.

"Take them just in case," she suggests. "Unless—you're not an addict or something, are you?"

I choke out a laugh. "No." I don't think so. If I was, I'd be craving them, wouldn't I? All I want is to fling them away. I make myself slip them into the pocket of my scrubs.

"Why do you have these?" I ask.

"Surgery last year. You know, it was the only time I've left campus in years. I didn't even stay the night. They had to get me back here right after. I guess not even a hospital is enough of a controlled environment."

And yet a refurbished house at a boarding school is. Why is Madelyn Fournier so set on her daughter getting an Atwood education?

“What’s it like?” I ask. “When you’re exposed to water, I mean. What happens? Seizures?” I remember her collapsing in the dining hall.

“Sometimes,” she says. She leans against the sink, chewing at her lip. “It’s like getting pushed against the back of my skull. Like something else is filling me up. And then I can’t breathe. It feels like I’m drowning,” she says, a distant look in her eye. “The smallest drop of water makes me drown. Isn’t that strange? And no one can explain it.”

She doesn’t sound self-pitying. She sounds angry. She looks away and wipes an errant tear from the corner of her eye.

“But filtered water is fine,” I say. It doesn’t make sense.

“There are a few people who are allergic to water. It’s called aquagenic urticaria,” Delphine says. “But it just gives you hives on your skin. You can drink water just fine. And it doesn’t matter if it’s filtered or not.”

She fell in the Narrow. And now she drowns on dry land. Oster knows something, and her mother, and Clarke. And Aubrey knew something, too.

“Did Aubrey ever say anything about . . .” I trail off. If I mention the Drowning Girl, will Delphine think I’m crazy?

“About what?” Delphine asks. When I don’t answer immediately, she clicks her fingernails idly against the white quartz counter. “Aubrey was my friend, but she also felt like she needed to protect me. There were things she didn’t tell me. Like that my mom was paying her extra to report on me.”

My eyes widen. Delphine doesn’t look bothered at the idea that her one friend in the world was spying on her.

“She needed the money. I didn’t mind. It’s not like there’s anything to tell, except for the AtChat stuff, so I never showed her that.”

“You showed me.”

Delphine pauses. For a moment I think she’s going to tell me that it’s because I’m different. For a moment, I long for her to. Then she clears her throat. “You’re going to lie to my mother,” Delphine says. “When she offers you the same deal, you’re going to take it, and then you’re going to lie to her.”

“You sound pretty confident about that,” I say.

“You don’t need extra money like Aubrey did,” Delphine says. She sounds like she’s laying out a logic problem. “But you *do* need the tuition, so you have to keep my mom happy.”

“Why wouldn’t I just spy on you for real?” I ask.

“Because if you do, I’ll know. My mother doesn’t lie as well as we do. I’ll know, and I’ll tell her I can’t stand having you here,” Delphine says. “She’ll make you move out, and you’ll have to leave the school.”

“You’re a bit ruthless, aren’t you?” I ask, trying to hide how much it stings.

“There are very few variables in my life. I like to know I have them under control. This works out for everyone.” Her expression is blank, and there’s something heartbreaking about that. Is this all she can hope for?

I know in this moment that if I agree to her deal, I will never have anything more. Only threats and secrets and a contract between us—not a friendship. Not trust.

I can’t stand the thought. So much is uncertain, but I know I want to be something more to Delphine—and if I’m going to be, I need to do something now to change things.

“You could just ask,” I say softly. I find myself taking a half step forward. There is not much space between us already in the tiny bathroom. She draws in a small startled breath.

“And you’d agree?” she asks. She is trying to sound strong, uncaring, but her voice quavers.

“I would. You keep my secrets and I keep yours,” I say. “You don’t need to threaten me.”

She looks at me with a perfectly still face, unsmiling mouth, wide eyes. She looks like a painting. Or perhaps she is more like a sketch I am making, roughing it in and then adding the details one by one as I start to understand her. The delicate arch of her brows, the sharp point of her chin. Those eyes so large in her face that a careless gaze would think them childlike, but they hold a weariness and a wariness beyond her years.

I’ve spent six years wondering about Delphine Fournier, the impossibility of her, and now I am inches from her, and she still feels unreal. As if I could reach out and touch her and she would disappear like a reflection on the surface of the water.

I promised not to lie to her. I didn’t promise to tell her anything. Yet what I know is like pressure building under my skin.

She deserves to know, doesn’t she? And if I keep it from her, I can tell myself that I’m not lying to her all I want—it won’t be true.

“I’ll keep your secrets,” I say again. “I always have.” Because it *is* her secret, not mine.

“What are you talking about?” she asks, head tilted curiously.

She needs to know. I need to know.

“I think I know why you’re sick,” I say. I hesitate.

She waits, eyes fixed on me, brow slightly furrowed.

“The night you first came to Atwood, Veronica and I went down to the Narrow. We jumped it. We didn’t realize that you’d followed us. You tried to jump, too. But you fell in.”

“That’s impossible. No one survives the Narrow,” Delphine says, confusion deepening.

“I know. You went under. We thought you were dead. But when we got back to get help, you were standing in the hall. You were soaked to the bone, but you were fine,” I say, dragging each word out in a dull, steady rhythm.

“That’s when all of this started,” she says, still staring at me, but now her eyes are wide.

“You don’t believe me,” I say. “You think I’m crazy.”

“No,” she says, and meets my eyes at last. “I don’t think you’re crazy. And you’re not lying. Which leaves only the possibility that you’re telling the truth.”

“That’s not all,” I whisper.

“Tell me,” she says.

And so I do.

## 13

**I TELL HER** about the footprints. The water pooling in the hall. The ghost. I tell her about Aubrey's diary and the water stains around the bed and the few undamaged words that remained. *The Drowning Girl. Don't let it in. Grace.*

"Grace," Delphine says, her body giving a jolt.

"Does that mean something to you?" I ask.

She frowns. "I feel like it should. Who is she?"

"I'm not even sure it's a name," I say. I pause. "Mr. Campos said there was a girl who went missing in the eighties. She might have drowned in the Narrow."

"Grace," Delphine says.

"Maybe," I allow. "You really believe me?"

She looks at me steadily. Those eyes could cut right through you. She'd see the secret heart of me even if I tried to hide it, I think. "I believe what you say you saw, but what actually happened?"

"You drowned. And you came back," I say slowly. "And in between . . ."

"In between, something changed. Something that left me like this," Delphine says.

"You don't remember anything about that night?" I ask.

She looks away, arms wrapped tightly around her middle. "Maybe. It's hard to know what's a dream and what's a memory."

"You drowned. And the Drowning Girl keeps coming here," I say.

She snorts. "Right. A ghost who wants to drag me back to the watery grave that was meant for me?"

"Or maybe that's not it at all," I say. We're standing so close to each other it's almost harder not to touch her. "Something saved you that night. Something lifted you out of the water. You couldn't have gotten free yourself."

"Are you saying a ghost saved my life, Eden?" Delphine asks softly. She looks up at me. I can see the golden flecks in her blue eyes.

“I don’t know what’s going on,” I say. I want to touch her arm, to reassure her, but I curl my fingers against my palm instead. “But I want to find out. I want to know what it is she wants.”

“And then what?” Delphine asks wearily.

“Maybe we find a way to stop this,” I say. “Maybe we find a way to get you out of here.”

“Maybe,” she echoes. She turns away, stepping toward the door. There she pauses, her hand on the frame. “Or maybe you’ve got it wrong. Maybe I did drown in the Narrow. Maybe I died, and I’m the one who’s a ghost.”

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On Saturday, it rains all day, and Delphine doesn’t summon me to her room. Veronica and Ruth both text me to meet up, but I give them excuses. I don’t want to risk venturing outside. I bury myself in schoolwork instead, opening the door only once, when a harried-looking staff member drops my long-lost luggage at my door. I leave my bags heaped inside, not able to summon up the energy to unpack them. My arm aches. It’s hard typing one-handed. Hard thinking at all.

If I don’t go out, the water can’t get in. I’ll be safe.

The throbbing of my arm makes my thoughts fray. The bruises are still there, purple and ugly.

As night falls, I give in at last. I’ve put the painkillers Delphine gave me in an empty ibuprofen bottle. I shake one out into my palm, then hold it up to the light. You’re supposed to take it so that it’s time-released, smothering your pain without getting you high, but of course the high was the point for Dylan. He acted like he was giving me a special present every time he offered me some. I shouldn’t have taken it, but I didn’t feel like I had a choice—and it helped. It left me euphoric and disconnected, drifting. It was like those days were a piece of paper I could fold in half and skip from edge to edge. And that was what I needed. After he found me in the kitchen, Dylan knew that he was screwed. Well, Luke was screwed. Whatever he threatened me with, all I had to do was make one phone call. Luke would go to jail, and Dylan would lose a steady paycheck. He needed leverage.

“Here’s what we’re going to do,” he told me. And together, we walked out to the pool house.

Luke was crashed out on the couch, playing some first-person shooter badly. He barely looked up when we came in. “What’s she doing here?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Dylan said.

The whole place looked like a TV set: Interior, Druggie Loser’s Living Room, Day. It would have been funny if I wasn’t terrified. “Have a drink. Settle your nerves,” Dylan suggested, but it wasn’t a suggestion. He made me a screwdriver, and then another. I looked over at Luke, some naive little part of me still hoping he’d act like my big brother and save me, but he seemed amused by the whole thing. Then Dylan gave me something—not one of these pills, something else, I didn’t know what, and I was drifting.

That’s when he started taking pictures. Photos of me, glassy-eyed, a bottle of vodka in my hand. Pills spilled over the table. Accepting the sloppily rolled joint Luke held out. Any one of those photos would get me kicked out of Atwood and tank my ability to get into college.

He finally let me stagger back to the house after dark. I puked for what felt like an hour and passed out fully dressed on my bed. In the morning, I took a forty-minute shower and I thought it was over, but just as I finished getting dressed, I looked up and there he was in the doorway. “Hey, Princess,” he said.

And so that’s what we did. Every day until the day before my parents got home, I went out to the pool house with Dylan and Luke.

That was my summer. Weeks spent trying to make myself empty. To do nothing but survive. All I had to do was get to the end, get back to Atwood, and I would be safe and I could forget it ever happened.

But I couldn’t keep my mouth shut.

“Hey, Princess,” Dylan said, and I’m in Abigail House, but his grin is a pale slash in the darkness of my room, and it isn’t over at all. Maybe it never will be.

I put the pill on my tongue and wash it down with a swig of flat distilled water. I swallow it whole. I won’t let the tide take me under. I want clarity, not oblivion. And for that, I need the pain to recede.

My phone chimes. It’s a message from Delphine.

I believe you, it says. Now what?

I consider. We find the Drowning Girl, I write.

We find Grace, she replies.

And with that, the ghost has a name.

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I wait for sleep, and I wait for *her*.

She doesn't come. Only dreams of that bright room and the dark, destroyed world that lies outside it. No matter how far I walk, the room is always right there behind me when I finally give up and turn around.

I wake to a knock on the door. I comb my hair with my fingers as I stumble blearily toward it. My head is foggy. Cotton candy and stuffing pulled out of a teddy bear. I yank the door open and find myself looking at a stranger whose face I know intimately. I've seen it larger than life on the theater screen and shrunk down to nothing on my phone. Madelyn Fournier.

Madelyn Fournier is a woman of strong, striking angles: a broad jaw, a wide mouth, a nose that's a touch larger than you'd expect and makes her stand out.

I've never been the kind to get tongue-tied or starstruck. I'm not even a fan—I've seen a few of her movies and think she's obviously a talented actress, but she mostly stars in the kind of dramas that win Oscars and end up on "worst movies to bring a date to" lists.

In person, even before she speaks, she's electric: immensely tall and dressed to elegant perfection in a silk shell and black pencil skirt, diamond studs winking at her ears. It isn't that she's beautiful—though she is—but that she seems to fill up every atom of space around her. Like not even air wants to get in her way.

"Eden, isn't it?" she says, and the sound of my name on her lips makes me shrivel in place. I realize I'm standing there dumbstruck in front of a movie star, my hair a rat's nest and dried drool at the corner of my mouth.

"I completely forgot you were coming," I say, mortified. Madelyn Fournier hadn't been terribly intimidating in the abstract, but that was when I'd only ever encountered her with the pause button near at hand. Her eyes flick around the apartment behind me, taking in the small signs of disarray.

"I suppose it is rather cruel of me to burst in on a high schooler at seven a.m. on a Sunday," she acknowledges. I search for anger in her voice, but all I hear is the faint curl of amusement, perhaps even genuine apology. "I'm very sorry—I just got in, and with the jet lag and all, I didn't quite think through the time difference. I'll let you get cleaned up, and then why don't you pop over to my side of the house?"

I agree—or I think I do, I honestly can't tell if I've managed a coherent sentence before she waves a goodbye and shuts my door for me, leaving me gaping.

So that's Madelyn Fournier. The woman who holds my future in the palm of her hand.

"Shit," I say eloquently. If she's been on a plane, does that mean she didn't see the footage of me and her daughter? Oh, God, we were out of camera view when Delphine gave me the drugs, weren't we?

The drugs that are still leaving slug trails through my brain.

I haven't unpacked. I start to yank at the zipper on one of my bags, panicky, and then make myself stop. She said I could come over whenever I'm ready, and surely she didn't want me smelling of—yuck. Sweat, mostly. She probably smelled me from across the doorway.

At least that's something to worry about that isn't ghosts.

I shower quickly, then get dressed.

It's Sunday, which means I have the added pressure of deciding what to wear. Going around in your uniform on the weekend is a quick way to lose all social credibility. I decide on a black turtleneck and ankle-length tan skirt—what Veronica calls my "ambiguously anachronistic librarian" look. I settle her pentacle around my neck, a flash of silver against the black, but after a moment's consideration flip it around so only the plain back shows. I don't know what Madelyn Fournier would think of it.

I steel myself and walk across the hall, making myself hold my arm at something vaguely resembling a natural angle. The door has been left open a crack. I knock twice, tentatively, and Madelyn Fournier's voice calls out for me to come in.

I enter. Unsurprisingly, this side of the house is far better furnished than mine. I recognize the couch from a high-end catalog my mom has been sighing over. It's bright red, with clean mid-century modern angles that are shared by most of the other furniture.

"Coffee, Eden?" Madelyn Fournier calls to me. I can't help but think of her with her full name. She's in the kitchen—bigger than mine and sporting quartz countertops that gleam white with gray marbling shot through them. "Or I can whip up an espresso for you."

"Coffee would be lovely, if it's not too much trouble," I say in my best impress-the-adults voice.

“It’s already made. I go through about a gallon a day,” she says in a confessional tone. She pours me a cup and sets it on the counter. I step close enough to curl one hand around it. She leans over, propping her elbows on the counter. I can see the pores on her nose. It doesn’t seem like Madelyn Fournier should have pores on her nose. “So. Tell me about yourself, Eden.”

My mind, of course, goes completely blank.

“I’m a senior,” I say haltingly. “I’ve been attending Atwood since sixth grade.”

“Ah, a lifer,” she says. She sounds enthralled. “Do you like it here?”

“Atwood? Yes, of course,” I say.

“It’s a hard thing, being away from your family for most of the year.”

“It’s definitely hard,” I lie. “But you get used to it. And it’s such a good school academically; plus, most of the private schools near us were religious, so they wouldn’t have worked for us.”

There’s no question of why I didn’t go to public school. For most Atwood families, it would be unthinkable.

“What do your parents do?” she asks me.

“My mother works for Denham and Brook, and my father works for Haley Imports, but I couldn’t tell you what they actually *do*. It’s all spreadsheets and mergers and meetings as far as I’m concerned,” I say with a false little laugh that’s reliable for charming people with.

“And they’re still working?”

There it is. I look at her earlobe so I don’t have to look her in the eye as I think. There’s no plausible lie I can come up with. Only the embarrassing, miserable truth. “You want to know why I need the tuition, right?”

“I don’t mean to pry, but there are students whose families are not nearly as well off who might benefit from the scholarship,” she says. “I want to make sure you actually need it.”

Meaning: She wants to make sure that I’m actually stuck here. That I have enough motivation not to just cut and run at the first sign of trouble—or the first sight of a dead girl at the foot of my bed.

“My parents are absolutely terrible with money,” I say. “They find ways to spend everything they make and then go into debt to buy more. They make enough that it isn’t usually a problem, but I guess something came up, and this time there wasn’t enough left over for tuition. So they just didn’t pay. I don’t know, I guess they thought it would work itself out somehow if

they ignored it. They have a lot going on.” I try to keep the bitterness out of my voice, try to keep it light, almost like it’s funny. But I have to look away.

“I imagine that if they sit down to find the money, they could,” Madelyn Fournier says. There’s no judgment in her voice.

“But I would have to ask,” I say.

“There’s quite a bit you would do to avoid having to ask your parents for help, isn’t there?” she says quietly.

“It would all be my fault somehow,” I say. “I know I’m wildly privileged, and it’s not like we’re actually broke, it’s just bad decision-making. But . . .” I sound whiny, pathetic. But she reaches out and puts a hand on my wrist.

“You don’t need to worry that I’m going to kick you out because your parents make too much,” she says. She straightens up. “The money was going to go to Aubrey this year. No one is going to be deprived because you’re here. So put that out of your mind. And it’s no trouble for me at all, of course.”

There’s rich and then there’s rich, and she’s the sort of rich for whom more than a combined hundred grand a year in tuition is hardly noticeable.

Besides, she wants me to be grateful. I see it the moment before she says it. The tightening of her shoulders and the not-quite-casual way she lifts her mug to her lips, watching me over the rim. “Eden, there’s something a little bit awkward I’ve got to ask you,” she says.

“What is it?” Eyes wide, guileless, meeting hers without faltering. As if I don’t already know.

“I’m away quite often, as I’m sure you know. And when I’m here, there are parts of my daughter’s life I’m not privy to. I would like you to keep an eye on her for me and let me know how she’s doing. I’m not asking you to spy on her”—she says this quickly, obviously not believing it herself—“just to keep me updated and answer a few questions. Delphine doesn’t like what a mother hen I am, so it would need to be just between the two of us. Oh, and I should mention—I always supplied Aubrey with a bit of a stipend. You’re welcome to the same.”

I could tell her I don’t need the money, but she’ll feel more secure in my loyalty if I take it, so I say, “That would be amazing. I don’t exactly want to have to call home for an allowance.”

“Wonderful,” she says. “Well! I’m sure you have plenty to do other than talk to an old lady like me. Don’t let me keep you from your weekend

plans.”

I’ve been dismissed. I thank her for the coffee—she insists that I take it with me—and I flee back across the hall, feeling like I’ve just passed a pop quiz. And maybe I have. She likes me. For now. She thinks she has leverage. And as this summer has driven home, with the right leverage, you can get someone to do just about anything for you.

**WE KNOW WHAT** we have to do, but it's harder to know where to begin. Cursory searches for *Grace* and *Atwood* turn up Margaret Atwood stories, not drowned girls, and I can't find any records of disappearances from the school. Then Monday classes begin and the scramble of staying on top of my work takes over.

The bruises on my arm fade. The dreams don't come again. The week is dry and cool, hardly a cloud in the sky. At the end of every day, I go back to Abigail House, scrupulously following procedures. I do my schoolwork and then at some point every evening, I get a message from Delphine, and I head upstairs. Madelyn often leaves her door open; I see her watching approvingly as I head up.

In view of the cameras, Delphine and I act the part of friends. We watch movies together on her laptop, and I notice she loves any movie with complex social situations, watching them with an intense look of focus, like she's studying. She has this way of tucking her lower lip between her teeth and furrowing her brow, and when she laughs it's a quick, startling sound. It's hard to make Delphine Fournier laugh, I learn. I haven't managed it so far.

I want to.

There's no camera in the bedroom or the bathroom. She's negotiated this much with her mother. I thought that it would be the scrutiny of the cameras in the other rooms that I noticed, feeling their gaze glaring down at me, but instead it's when we're sprawled on her bed together that I can feel the *lack* of them, like a tension in the air, a pressure. We lie on our stomachs side by side doing fruitless research on her laptop, six inches between us, and there is no one to see what we do. I am exquisitely and painfully aware of the distance between her hand and mine, of the strands of copper hair that have fallen over her face.

At the end of the week, I have memorized the map of the freckles on Delphine's shoulders, but I have not discovered anything about our ghost. And I cannot ignore my friends' texts anymore—they're threatening to

storm Abigail House. I stave them off with a promise of attending movie night.

It isn't that I don't want to see them. It's that I can't tell them what's happening, and the thought of adding yet another lie to the many I already tell makes me ill.

I know the boys are in the Westmore rooms before I get there, as the door is propped open to the exact eighteen-inch regulation, intended to keep us from stripping off our clothes at the first sign of an eligible mate.

Veronica and Remi are as entwined as usual, with her perched on his lap in the armchair, and he has that dopey expression he gets on his face whenever she's around, like he can't believe how lucky he is. Meanwhile, she looks like that old saying—the cat that got the cream. Diego and Ruth are at the table together, Zoya folded up on the couch.

Everyone looks up when I enter, but no one says anything.

*I don't belong here anymore*, I think, then tell myself that's ridiculous.

I clear my throat. "Is this the sad singles couch?" I ask Zoya. As if I haven't been avoiding them for the last week.

"I'm not sad about being single. You're the sad one," she informs me, but pats the seat cushion beside her in invitation.

I sink down onto the cushions. "What are we watching?" I ask.

*"Fury Road. Girl-power time,"* Veronica declares.

"I think that's our cue to leave," Remi says. He pats Veronica's hip, and she stands to let him escape as Diego rises from his seat.

"You're not staying?" I ask. The two of them pause, and a stricken look flits over Remi's face.

"We decided it's girls' night," Veronica says. She covers well, but Zoya and Ruth look guilty. What is this, an intervention? "See you two tomorrow for the Vespers run? Remi, we good to use the Land Rover?"

Vespers is next week, I remember. It's the welcome-back party we throw every year. We always go into town to pick up supplies.

"Sure thing," Remi says in his warm rumble. He'd order up a horse and carriage if she asked. I don't say anything as Remi and Diego make their farewells and filter out.

"Right. So, movie," Ruth says. She comes over to the couch, dropping to the floor in front of it, her usual spot. Veronica reaches for the remote.

"I was thinking of asking you to do my hair," Zoya says casually, not quite looking at me. It's a common movie-night activity. "I'm in the mood

for a change. But if your arm hurts too much . . .”

I blanch. I thought I was covering it pretty well. “It’s fine,” I say tightly. Veronica has turned on the TV but is now just looking at me. “I fell and bashed it on the curb at the airport. It’s feeling better.”

“It kind of seems like it’s gotten worse,” Ruth says. “I’ve seen you around campus. You’re always holding it like you’re protecting it. If it’s broken—”

“It’s not,” I say.

“And you’re kind of terrible at taking care of yourself sometimes,” Veronica says. “You should get it checked out.”

“Fine. I’ll go to the clinic tomorrow. Can we just watch the movie?” I snap, my cheeks flushed and my pulse speeding up. They can’t know. They won’t understand. *They’ll pity you. Poor little rich girl*, a whisper in my mind says.

“It’s just—” Zoya starts.

Veronica sighs. “Eden, look. You’ve been acting kind of weird. This thing with Abigail House and avoiding us—”

“I haven’t been avoiding you,” I say. “I just don’t live here anymore.”

“There’s no reason you can’t hang out here, at least until curfew,” Ruth points out. “And I still don’t get why you’d volunteer for Abigail House in the first place. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were trying to get away from us.” She says it like she isn’t sure it’s a joke.

“Eden?” Veronica says.

“What?” I look up sharply. “Maybe I don’t want to spend every single second of every single day with my friends. Maybe I just want some time to myself. It’s not a big deal.” I regret the words as soon as they’re out of my mouth.

Zoya scoots closer to the arm of the couch. “Hey, if you need introvert time, I get it. If I didn’t spend a few nights every week with noise-canceling headphones, ASMR, and not another living soul in sight, I would legitimately murder you all. But if there’s something wrong, we’re here for you.”

The others nod in chorus. And they believe it. But there’s that poisonous voice whispering that they’re wrong. If I tell them all the things I’ve lied about for so many years, they’ll feel betrayed. I’ve pretended to be someone different the whole time I’ve known them.

“There’s nothing wrong,” I say. “I’m just stressed and tired and don’t like being interrogated.”

“Come on, Eden. That’s obviously not true,” Veronica says.

“Can we please just watch the movie?” I plead.

“Fine,” Veronica says. She turns back to the TV, her jaw tight as she starts it up. I fidget as we watch, unable to pay attention, too fixated on the little glances my friends shoot my way. My sour mood spoils the fun, and by the time the movie is over, I’m desperate to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere of the room. I can tell they want to talk again, but I plead exhaustion and flee as soon as the credits roll.

The whole week has been dry, but now clouds skim across the moon. A single drop lands on my cheek.

“Miss White.” Oster’s voice brings me around. He’s on the path, his jacket on, his briefcase in his hand. Over his arm, he’s hooked an umbrella. “Taking another evening stroll?”

“It’s not past curfew,” I say.

“You’re not in any trouble, Eden,” he says. The rain is picking up. He extends a hand thoughtfully, catching a few drops on his palm. “If you’re heading back to Abigail House, I can walk with you. I need to speak to Madelyn.”

I’m not sure I would want to take a stroll with the dean of Atwood under normal circumstances, much less these ones, but as he opens the umbrella and extends it in invitation, I step under its shelter. I don’t want to be out here alone in the dark with the rain coming down.

The umbrella is large, but I still need to walk uncomfortably close to Oster to stay under its protection. Our sleeves brush against each other as we make our way down the walk.

“How are you enjoying your new accommodations?” he asks. His voice is not just old but old-fashioned, with a gravity to it that makes me think of 1940s professors in tweed jackets.

“They’re good,” I say.

“And Delphine? Are you getting along?”

*She’s serious and sincere. She has three freckles on her shoulder that make a perfect triangle.* “She’s nice.”

“And you haven’t had any trouble?” he asks.

“What kind of trouble would I have?” I look over at him. His focus is on the path ahead. The rain patters against the umbrella, steady now.

“Perhaps I’m being overly paranoid after what happened to Aubrey. It’s a terrible thing when something happens to a student in your care. Thankfully, it’s rare. We’ve lost two students in my time as dean. One in a car accident off campus and one to illness. Even knowing there was little I could do to prevent either one, they have haunted me.”

“What about when you were a teacher?” I ask. He was here. He knew her. Mr. Campos said so. “There was a girl who went missing, wasn’t there? Grace?” I watch his face as I say the name. I’m only guessing that Grace is the Drowning Girl, but his face drains of blood, and he halts on the path.

“Where did you hear that name?” he asks. I didn’t stop as quickly as he did, so I’m in the rain now, the drops striking my shoulders and hair.

“I don’t remember,” I lie. “But I heard that there was a girl named Grace and she disappeared.”

He’s silent a long moment, and a dark expression passes over his face. “Her name was Grace Carpenter,” he says. “She had . . . troubles. When she vanished, it was assumed she had run away, until her scarf was found near the river. They never found proof, but yes, it’s assumed that she drowned. A great tragedy.”

A shiver runs down my spine. Grace. Her name is Grace, and she was real.

Is real.

“Do you know the story of the Drowning Girl?” I ask Oster.

His face grows solemn. “I’ve heard the story. But if you are suggesting that it has some connection to Grace, I would remind you that you are talking about a real girl. A girl I knew. A girl who lived and suffered and died.”

I’m taken aback by the anger in his voice. “I’m sorry,” I say.

“If you are looking for entertainment, Miss White, look elsewhere. Grace’s story is not entertaining. It is difficult and tragic, and she deserves better than to be turned into fodder for ghost stories.”

We walk the rest of the way in stony silence. Oster waits outside until I have finished the routine of showering and changing; I’m in my rooms before I hear him enter and knock on Madelyn Fournier’s door.

I stand at my own door, listening to the faint murmur of voices, but I can’t make out a word. What are they talking about, I wonder?

I think of the anger in his voice. In his eyes. Was it really because he didn’t want Grace’s memory tainted with ghost stories?

Or does Geoffrey Oster know more than he is letting on?

**IN THE DREAM,** I'm standing at the edge of the Narrow, and Delphine is on the other side. She's young again, dressed in pajamas with slippers on her feet.

*Don't jump,* I try to tell her, but she crouches and leaps. She sails across the water. She is going to make it.

A hand emerges from the water and snatches her ankle, dragging her down. I scream and reach for her—

But it isn't me screaming. I'm awake in my bed, and the scream is coming from the hallway. It comes again, sharp and piercing. I bolt out of bed and run into the hall. The scream is coming from the other side of the door—from Delphine's rooms. Delphine stands on the other side. She's sobbing, her eyes wide, pulling at the door handle.

"Delphine?" I rush toward her, reaching for the handle. "What's wrong?"

"Don't." The voice is low and urgent. Madelyn Fournier, at her door. She reaches out as if to stop me. "Don't open the door. You can't let her out."

"Please. Please, I have to go," Delphine cries.

Madelyn snatches my hand, drawing me back away from the door. "She's dreaming. There's nothing to do but wait," she says. Her voice is calm, but she grips my hand tight, and there are tears glinting in her eyes.

"I have to go. I have to go to her," Delphine pleads. Then suddenly she drops back a step. Her hands go slack at her sides. She lets out a wail, grabbing her head in both hands, and sinks down into a crouch. "No, no, no. Not back there. Not again. I can't—I can't—"

She falls silent. Madelyn and I creep closer to the windowed door. Delphine is curled on her side on the ground, her eyes shut and her breathing even once more. Madelyn swiftly puts in the code and opens the door, bending down beside her.

"Delphine. Sweetheart. Wake up," she says, reaching out but not quite touching her. "Delphine."

I stand, numb and confused, as Delphine stirs.

"Maman?" she mumbles sleepily.

“You were sleepwalking again, dearest. You need to go back to bed now,” Madelyn says.

Delphine sits up, rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hands. She blinks at her mother, then at me, frowning. “I’m sorry. Did I wake you up?”

“It’s fine. You were just dreaming,” Madelyn says, like she’s talking to a small child. “Now, go on.”

Delphine drifts upstairs, hazy with sleep, glancing behind her only one more time. Madelyn waits until her footsteps creak the bedroom floorboards, then steps neatly into the hall and shuts the door again. She stands a moment, head bowed, hand on the door handle, before turning to me.

“I take it this hasn’t happened before while you’ve been here,” she says. “Mrs. Clarke should have briefed you.”

“She told me I wasn’t supposed to open the door at night,” I say.

“If she gets outside, she will die,” Madelyn says plainly. She stares straight ahead at the door beyond which Delphine vanished. *She’s like her daughter*, I think. When they want to tell you the truth, they look anywhere but at you. “You cannot let her out. No matter what. A single drop of water could destroy her.”

“How?” I ask. “How can it do that? That’s not medical, that’s—it’s—”

“What else would it be?” she asks, voice flat. She looks at me, her gaze unflinching, and I am utterly certain that she does not for a moment believe that Delphine’s malady is one that can be explained by science. “This is a lot to deal with for anyone. I wouldn’t blame you if you didn’t want to stay on.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” I say.

She gives me a long, considering look. “Don’t let her out,” she says finally. “And don’t let the water in.”

She walks back to her rooms and shuts the door behind her.

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By morning, Delphine doesn’t remember what happened. “You were trying to get out,” I say. “And then it’s like you realized what you were doing and panicked. You said you had to get to her.”

“Grace?” Delphine asks.

“It seemed like it,” I say.

“She’s trying to get in. I’m trying to get out,” she muses. She frowns. She sits on her bed with a pillow clutched in her lap. She’s only finger-combed her hair, and a few strands stick out wildly. I have to resist the urge to brush them back into place. “It’s like I became connected to her that night. Somehow, I’m bound to her. We’re drawn to each other.”

“Her name was Grace Carpenter. Oster told me about her—she was his student,” I tell her.

She looks at me sharply. “She’s real.”

I nod. “And if we know her full name, maybe we can find out more about her. Mr. Campos mentioned there were newspapers at the library. We could look there.”

“Let me grab my things,” she says wryly, and I wince.

“I can go look,” I correct myself.

There’s a knock on the bedroom door. I instinctively step back, putting more distance between me and Delphine before the door opens and Madelyn enters.

“Hi, Eden. I need to chat with Delphine a moment,” she says, an unsubtle signal for me to take off.

“Right,” I say. “I’ll talk to you later?”

“Let me know how it goes,” Delphine says.

Madelyn gives us a curious look but doesn’t ask as I slink out the door. I’ve barely reached the stairs when I hear their voices pick up again. They don’t sound happy.

Ten minutes later, I’m heading out the door. I cut across campus toward the library, and I’m so lost in my own thoughts that at first I don’t realize that someone is calling my name.

“Eden. Eden!” I whip around. Veronica is jogging toward me, a scowl on her face. “I texted you like eight times,” she says.

“I didn’t see,” I say. I hadn’t even turned my phone on yet today.

“We’re heading out. Are you coming or not?” she asks.

I blink at her for a moment before I remember what she’s talking about. Vespers shopping. The shopping trip is its own tradition. It all seems so pointless right now.

“I’m busy,” I say. “Research.”

“Research for what?” she asks, incredulous.

“It’s a personal project,” I say defensively.

Her frown deepens. “You are being so sketchy, Eden. Did I do something to piss you off? I know I wasn’t in touch as much as usual this summer, but with all the travel and Remi being around—”

I make a frustrated noise. “It’s not you,” I insist.

“Then what is it? It’s senior year. We’re supposed to be having fun. But even when you’re around, you’re like a little black hole,” she complains, throwing her hands up.

“Sorry to be such a drag,” I say bitterly.

Veronica puts a hand on her hip. “I’m not *complaining*; I’m trying to figure out what’s wrong with you!”

“Wrong with me?”

“You know what I mean. I don’t know what’s going on with you, that’s all,” she says in a huff.

“Maybe you would if you ever asked,” I snap. But she never does. None of them have. They’ve never pressed, never expressed interest. My summers have always been three sentences and a shrug, and I’m suddenly furious that they’ve never noticed, never cared. They’re always so eager to let me turn the conversation back to them and their problems and their fun little anecdotes about their perfect families.

She glowers. “I *am* asking,” she says. Our voices are loud enough that a few people glance over curiously, but I don’t care.

“Yeah, you’re asking now. Because it’s a problem for *you* all of a sudden,” I say. I don’t know if it’s true. I can’t tell anymore. I’m just angry.

She turns red, eyes sparking. Then she steels herself. She flicks her hair back from her face and archly she says, “Okay. You’re going through something and you’re mad at me and you’re what, punishing me with this Abigail House thing—”

“I’m not punishing you by living at Abigail House, I’m living at Abigail House because otherwise I would get kicked out of school,” I say, my voice too loud. Someone on the quad swivels around to look at us, and I drop my voice as Veronica gapes at me. “I need the tuition, okay? So leave me alone about it.”

“That’s what’s going on? You can’t afford school? Eden, I could have paid for you,” Veronica says. “Problem solved.”

I stare at her. And then I turn and walk away.

“Eden!” she calls, but I ignore her—and she doesn’t follow.

Anger scorches away the tears that might otherwise threaten. Veronica has never wanted for anything. My family has money, but hers is *rich*. Multiple homes on multiple continents, luxury-boat-with-a-full-time-staff rich. In Veronica's world, every problem has a price tag and money is no object. My tuition being paid doesn't fix everything. Not even close.

Veronica and I have always been there for each other. Nine months out of the year.

I spend a few weeks with her family here and there, but for the most part, they prefer to have her to themselves when she's at home. Which means I'm on my own. I've always accepted that. I've never resented her. And it has always been a good thing that she can be a little clueless about other people's lives. Fewer questions, fewer lies.

But now I can't tell her what happened this summer because that would mean telling her everything else. Telling her how I've misled her and hidden the truth and lied. It would mean having to explain the whole sordid thing, and I can't.

I step into the library blinking tears from my eyes and squaring my shoulders. Mr. Campos is there, and I stride up to him without hesitation.

"Miss White! More ghosts today?" he says.

"Yes, actually. Well, sort of," I say. My voice is a wreck. I clear my throat, shoving aside the tangle of emotions inside me. "You mentioned newspaper archives. Do you think I could look at them? I need the local papers from the eighties. I'm not sure exactly what year."

Mr. Campos presses a hand to his heart and looks up toward the ceiling. "Hold on. I'm having a moment."

"Uh?" I say.

"A student wants to look at the newspaper archives—and not for a class assignment. My tiny librarian heart has grown three sizes this day," Mr. Campos says, and a reluctant smile sneaks across my face. He stands, grabbing a huge ring of keys from his drawer. "Right this way, my young scholar."

He leads the way to a door I've never been through before. He unlocks it and ushers me into a room that's filled with utilitarian metal shelving filled with cardboard boxes.

"These are the *Patterson Post* and the *Atwood Call* archives," Mr. Campos says. "We have copies of every issue back to 1924. The

eighties should be . . . here we go, this row.” He waves a hand to indicate the right section. There are a lot of boxes. I have my work cut out for me.

“Thank you,” I tell him. “Is it okay if I stay in here a while?”

“No food or drink and no papier-mâché,” he says. “Otherwise, have at it.” He bows with a wave of his hand and retreats.

I walk over to the boxes. I decide to look at the *Atwood Call* first, since it only comes out once a week, so it’ll be faster to get through and pinpoint the right year. I start with 1980, opening up the box with a puff of dust and extracting a stack of papers.

I read about dances and school plays and new teachers, spicy editorials about politics, and reports on Atwood’s sports teams that confirm that they’ve always been terrible.

Then I find it suddenly. I open up a box from 1984, and there it is, the headline big and bold and startlingly out of place on the *Call*’s normally dull pages.

### **Atwood Student Still Missing: Feared Drowned**

The paper was dated October 12, 1984.

The search for fourth-year student Grace Carpenter continues, now two weeks after she was reported missing from the Abigail House women’s dormitory. She was last seen by her roommate, Cheryl Pennington, who reported that Grace was in her bed by lights-out. Miss Pennington did not notice her leaving but discovered her bed empty in the morning.

Atwood’s dean, Alan Lawrence, says, “We pray that God deliver Grace safely home into the arms of her family.” Chief of Police George Fairfax states that it appears that Grace left her dormitory voluntarily. When asked if it is possible that Miss Carpenter drowned in the Narrow, Chief Fairfax said, “If she did, we may never know.”

A prayer vigil will be held in Atwood School’s St. Mark Chapel on Saturday at 5 p.m.

Grace lived in Abigail House. Maybe that was why she kept returning. Trying to get home.

That's all there is. The next week contains an update—Grace still not found. Then she mentions stop. I step over to the shelves where the *Patterson Post* boxes are and find the one that matches. This article is longer. I sit on the floor as I read through it.

Grace Carpenter was from Connecticut, I learn. Her father was a banker and her mother was the youngest daughter of a wealthy businessman. She was the middle child of three. The night of the disappearance, her roommate saw her going to bed but slept soundly and didn't notice that she'd left until the next morning. This wasn't a cause for alarm, and so most of the day went by before a search began in earnest. She hadn't left by the main road—there was a security guard stationed at the gated entrance—but there were service roads she might have taken. Or she might have headed into town for some reason. Perhaps to meet someone. It's a little over an hour's walk on foot if you cut through the woods and over the Narrow.

You could walk the extra half mile to the bridge, of course. Or you could make one easy jump and be on the other side.

The article continues on the next page. I turn it, and there she is, staring at me: Grace Carpenter. It's a formal photograph. It's printed in black and white and fairly faded, but her gaze immediately arrests me. She has a fair complexion and dark brown hair, swoopy and curled where it falls around her shoulders. I think of it wet and lank, dripping water, but it's hard to hold the image of the Drowning Girl in my mind while looking at the living one. She has an elegant oval face. She's pretty in a way that sneaks up on you, a beauty that blooms softly as you look at her hooded eyes and the sly smile at the corner of her mouth, like she's keeping a secret and dying to tell you. I have the fanciful thought that we would have gotten along, Grace Carpenter and I.

I'm so absorbed in the photograph that I don't hear the door open or the footsteps approaching behind me. I only realize that Veronica is there when she speaks. "Eden."

I twist around with a gasp. She rocks back on her heels, hands held up in a placating gesture.

"What are you doing here? I thought you were going into town," I say, voice rough and adrenaline spiking.

"I ditched," she says. She folds herself into a sitting position on the ground next to me, elbows on her knees. Her bleached-blond hair flips over her eyes, and she blows a puff of air at it. A row of silver hoops marches up

the cartilage of her left ear. I have a sudden, vivid memory of holding her hand while she stifled a shriek each time the needle punched through. “I’m sorry.”

“Cool,” I say, looking down at the paper in my hands. “Thanks.”

“Eden. Come on. I’m really sorry. That was dismissive and bitchy of me. You’re right. I haven’t asked what’s going on with you. You’ve always been so private, though, you can’t totally blame me. You don’t like people asking questions.”

I want to protest. But she’s right. What came first—Veronica not asking me about my life or me dodging the questions every time? I can’t remember.

“I’m asking now,” Veronica says softly. “What’s going on, Eden? It’s not just the money.”

“It’s not just the money,” I confirm. I’m staring at the words on the page. *Fear* *drowned*.

“Then what?”

I know what the honest answer would be. It would be the pool house and the pills, Dylan and Luke. But when I look up, I say, “Do you believe in ghosts?”

She shrugs. “Sure.”

“Not just in theory, not just a maybe. Do you actually believe in them?” I press. I reach up, touch the pentacle she gave me. I laughed it off, but I’ve worn it ever since.

She bites her lip. “I think that ghosts are our way of perceiving spiritual energy,” she says. “Like spells are a way of shaping energy and intention, you know?”

“What about what happened to Delphine? That night at the Narrow?”

She looks uncomfortable. “I don’t know what happened to Delphine. What does that have to do with ghosts?”

“Nothing,” I say, shaking my head and looking away.

“Eden. What’s going on?” she presses.

I can’t look at her. “The Drowning Girl. I think she’s real. And for some reason she’s coming after Delphine Fournier.”

Silence. Then, a slow intake of breath. “Because of what happened. With the Narrow.”

“We think so.”

“We. You and Delphine.”

“She’s really nice,” I say, though of course that isn’t the word to describe Delphine at all. I look away.

Veronica puts a hand on my knee. “You like her,” she says, like she suddenly understands what’s going on.

“I want to help her,” I say, which isn’t a denial, not exactly.

“And you think this girl is the ghost? Grace Carpenter,” Veronica says, looking at the newspapers. Her voice is carefully neutral. She doesn’t believe me, I realize. She’s indulging me. She takes the paper from me and reads through it with a line between her brows. “What do you know about her?”

“Just what’s in there. I couldn’t find anything online,” I say.

“You could ask Geoffrey,” Veronica says. “He was a teacher back then, you know.”

“I know,” I say darkly. “I already talked to him, sort of. He’s the one that gave me her full name. But he wouldn’t tell me more than that.”

“You’ve been researching this for a while?” she asks.

“Not long,” I hedge.

“I guess I shouldn’t be that surprised,” she says, jostling me with her shoulder. “You’re the sneaky one, after all.”

“The what?”

“The sneaky one. I’m the hot one, Zoya’s the smart one, Ruth’s the strong one, and you’re the sneaky one. Your basic literary archetypes.”

I can’t tell if I should find it funny; I’m too wrung out to feel much of anything. She’s here, she’s trying, but that almost makes it worse. I don’t want her to have to try so hard. I just want things to be easy.

“We could help, you know. I love a good scavenger hunt. I’ve never done ghost research before,” she says, waggling her eyebrows. She doesn’t get it. She thinks it’s a fun lark.

“You should go. Do the Vespers run,” I say.

She chews her lip. “Are we okay?” she asks, searching my face.

I smile. It stretches the new skin on my lip. “We’re okay,” I assure her. I want it to be true; is that enough to make it something other than a lie?

“We’re hanging out tonight. Just the girls. Please come.”

“Okay,” I say. *Please let things be okay*, we both are saying.

“I love you, Eden,” she says. She leaves without waiting for me to respond.

I put the newspapers away and close the boxes. I have what I came for. A name, a date, a story. But it doesn't tell me what I need to know.

*What happened to you, Grace?*

*And what do you want from us?*

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—

When I get back to Abigail House, I towel off thoroughly before changing into my customary loungewear. Madelyn's door is closed, and it looks like the light is off inside. I didn't see her car out front, so I assume she's gone out.

My arm is throbbing. I fish out one of the five remaining pills and down it quickly, trying not to think about it too much. I need it, so I'm taking it. Simple as that. In another week, even a hairline fracture should be healed enough that I won't need the assistance anymore, and I can stop.

I hate the feeling of it sliding down my throat all the same, the memory of those days surfacing.

You back? Delphine texts, lighting up my phone. I pick it up, dashing off a response.

Yeah. Didn't find much, though, but it's a place to start.

Can you come up?

The answer is of course, but I send a more restrained response. I go through the decontamination procedures yet again, dress in the maroon scrubs, and trudge up the steps. Delphine is waiting at the top of the stairs, wearing one of her too-young dresses with the Peter Pan collar and shiny black Mary Jane shoes. Her hair is long and loose, perfectly smooth. She looks as put-together as always, but there is something off—the way she moves is jerky and uncertain, and there is red around her eyes like she's been crying.

"What's wrong?" I ask her.

"It's nothing," she says. "My mom and I had a fight. Nothing new."

"What were you fighting about?" I ask, worry creasing my brow.

She makes a sharp, frustrated gesture with one hand. "The usual. Everything and nothing. I want to be looking at colleges to apply to next

year, and she won't even talk about it."

"I thought you were a senior," I say. "Aren't you applying this year?"

"I missed too much time when I was sick. I'm a year behind you," she says. Her lips twist mirthlessly. "I'll get a whole new hired friend next year. I wonder who will be desperate enough to take the job."

"What about a real friend?" I ask. "You're in classes. You must talk to people. What about when you do group projects?"

"I use AtChat for projects," Delphine acknowledges. "But I don't know how to make friends. Or hold a normal conversation."

"You do fine with me," I tell her. She gives me a skeptical look, and I chuckle. "Okay, you don't have the *most* polished social skills in the world."

She walks over to the window, staring, but she isn't actually looking outside. She's looking at her reflection. "My mother thinks she can lock me in here like I'm in a time capsule, and I'll stay perfectly preserved," she says, almost a whisper.

"She wants to keep you safe," I say.

"She doesn't even know who I am," she says fiercely, and turns to me. "Look at me, Eden. I look like I'm twelve. I'm seventeen. But my mother buys all my clothes. I've never been allowed to cut my hair because she likes it long. I'm tired of it. I'm tired of being the weird girl locked up in her room, and now I don't even have Aubrey anymore." Her eyes are feverish. She stalks past me to the kitchen. "I'm tired of being stuck in here. I'm tired of wearing what she says to wear and doing what she says to do. I'm tired of never being able to leave these rooms or talk to people."

I follow behind her. In the kitchen, she looks around wildly, then wrenches open a drawer and takes out a pair of scissors. She wraps her hair around one fist and raises the scissors.

"Delphine, stop," I say, alarmed.

She looks at me, her teeth bared. "I want it gone," she says, and her voice breaks. She squeezes her eyes shut. Her preternatural calm is shattered.

*She's so alone.* So utterly alone. "Let me do it," I say.

She opens her eyes.

"Let me do it for you," I repeat.

"My mother won't be happy."

I glance up at the camera in the corner. I have to hope that Madelyn Fournier hasn't chosen this moment to look in on us. "She'll be happier

than if you hack it all off and leave it looking like you used hedge clippers,” I point out. “Let me help you, Delphine.”

I reach out, palm flat. She hesitates a moment more, then sets the scissors in my palm. I take them, then touch the ends of her silky red hair with my other hand. It’s beautiful—coppery red, perfectly straight.

“Do you think it’s ridiculous? Throwing a fit and cutting off my hair?” she asks. Her voice is equal parts challenge and vulnerability.

“Is it even boarding school if you don’t rebel and cut off all your hair at least once?” I ask her, a touch playfully. Then, more serious, I say, “Hair is important. The way you look is important. I understand wanting to look on the outside the way you feel on the inside. Or the way you *want* to feel.” I still have that length of hair between my fingers. I let it drop slowly.

“Okay. Let’s do it,” she says.

I take her hand and lead her to the bedroom. Her room is as anachronistic as the rest of her clothes, with its four-poster bed and thick rug. A mirrored vanity sits at one end, and I guide Delphine to sit in the stool in front of it. I stand behind her and set a towel over her shoulders, letting her hair fan out across it.

The mirror frames our reflections. Delphine with her elfin features and coppery hair, parted neatly in the middle. The perfection of her face is almost unsettling, her build so delicate you can see at a glance that she’s fragile, that she ought to be handled with care. Behind her, I look almost brutish with my hair scraped back and contained in its protective cap, my face broad and plain.

She’s beautiful—but anyone can see that. It takes another look to see that she’s more than that. To see not the vivid blue of her eyes but the sharpness behind them. Not her soft lips but the way they tighten when she’s uncertain of something.

“What do you want?” I ask her, meeting her eyes in the mirror.

“I don’t know,” she says, a helplessness in her confession. “Not this. Do whatever you want.”

“I can’t do what I want,” I say. “It has to be what you want.”

“But I don’t know what I want.”

I haven’t ever touched her. Haven’t been allowed to touch her. But I can’t avoid it now. I brush my fingertips as lightly as I can along her hair, let them hover near her shoulder. “Like this?” I ask. “We could cut off a few inches.”

“No. Shorter than that,” she says.

“See?” I say. “You know something.” I reach forward and slide my fingers into her hair at her temples, the backs of my fingers bumping against her scalp. She jumps at the touch, but I only run my hands down, sliding through her hair until I reach her jaw. I use my hands to hide the lower length of her hair. “What about that?”

“I like that,” she says.

My knuckles are just touching the soft skin of her neck. I let my hands run the rest of the way through her hair, the strands whispering between my fingers, and I shiver.

I want to run my fingers through it again. Instead I say, “I can manage that.” She watches my every movement in the reflection.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” she asks.

Do I? But that isn’t what she means. “I cut my friends’ hair all the time.”

“Then I guess I trust you,” Delphine says.

I pick up the scissors. “Are you sure about this? That’s a lot of hair to lose,” I say.

“I’m sure,” Delphine replies.

I gather her hair together behind her back. “Last chance,” I tell her.

She looks at me in the mirror, her head tilted ever so slightly. “Eden.”

Soft, chiding. Almost affectionate. I laugh a little. “Okay, but don’t hate me when it’s done.”

“I could never hate you,” she says.

And I slice through all her hair in one smooth motion.

The now-shoulder-length strands fall away, the rest left gripped in my left hand. She sucks in a little gasp. I hold the long tail of coppery hair out over her shoulder to show her. It’s a foot long—and gone.

“No going back now,” I tell her.

“Good,” she says firmly.

I go slowly after that, trimming, checking the length, trimming again. Again and again I touch her—tilting her head, bumping my fingers against her jaw, parting the strands, my fingernails nicking her scalp. Her breath is quick and her eyes stay fixed on me, on every movement. When the cold metal of the scissors touches the back of her neck, she gives a little shiver, but she never looks away.

“What do you think?” I ask.

I haven't done much. It's a simple short bob, slightly higher in the back, framing her face. It turns her features from delicate porcelain to precise marble.

Her expression is perfectly still, and my stomach twists with nerves. Did I screw it up?

Her hand reaches out and closes around mine. She doesn't meet my eyes, but keeps her gaze fixed on her own reflection, and her voice cracks when she speaks. "Thank you," she says.

She doesn't let go of my hand.

"Let's get you cleaned up," I say. I take the towel away. With one end of it, I clean the little stray hairs from the back of her neck and shoulders. Her hair is scattered across the floor around us in clumps and drifts.

She turns in her chair toward me and fixes me with those sharp eyes. "How do I look?" she asks.

My mouth feels dry. "You look beautiful."

"You're just saying that to be nice," she says immediately, shaking her head. She looks down at herself—that ridiculous little-girl dress. "I hate these clothes," she says. She stands abruptly. "Help me get this off." She turns her back to me, gesturing toward the zipper. I hesitate.

"Eden, can you get the back?" she asks, looking over her shoulder, and I force myself to step forward.

I unhook the tiny wire clasp, unzipping the back of her dress. A pale triangle of skin appears. I unzip the dress past the white band of her bra and step back, dropping my hands quickly.

She lets the sleeves of the dress fall down over her arms, shrugging out of it. Her torso is long, a constellation of moles along her back. She steps out of the dress and turns to me. I can't help staring at her—her ribs, her flat stomach, the flare of her hips. The curve of her small breasts.

She sees me looking, but she doesn't turn away or cover up. She walks toward me instead. "Eden? Is everything okay?"

I feel my cheeks go hot. My stupid blush. "I didn't expect you to . . ."

"You must change in front of your roommates all the time," she says.

"That's different," I say.

"Why is it different?" she asks.

I can't answer; I shake my head instead. She makes a little sound, a *hm* with no particular meaning. She reaches out, adjusting the neckline of my

scrubs, her eyes tracking the movement of her own hands. Her fingernails trail against my skin. I catch my breath.

“I wish I got to see you the way you usually look. Not in these scrubs with that stupid cap,” she says.

“But those are the rules,” I remind her. My pulse is speeding up.

Her hand drops; she catches mine lightly by the fingers, already moving as she does and pulling me, trailing along behind her, toward her heavy oak wardrobe.

“Help me find something to wear,” she says, and I fix my gaze on her shoulder, wondering how I can be entranced by the simple shape of her shoulder blades, the hollow of her throat.

She’s grabbing things from the wardrobe now, tossing them behind her. Skirts and dresses and blouses. “These are all made for a little girl,” she says, scowling at a frilly white blouse.

“Here,” I say. I reach past her. “Let me.” I pick out three pieces quickly and hold them out to her.

I turn away while she dresses. Somehow it feels even more intimate to watch her get dressed.

“Well?” That one syllable holds so much: a plea, a demand, a challenge. I turn and take her in.

The little girl dress is gone. She wears a white button-up shirt, sleeves rolled to the elbows, and the top two buttons undone, and over it, a black three-button vest. Completing the look is a pair of tailored pants in a tan plaid pattern. I can see why her mother bought every piece for the doll she thought she was dressing, but together with the new hair, with her chin tilted up and fire in her eyes—

“You look amazing,” I say.

“Amazing is a good start,” she replies playfully.

“You look hot,” I blurt out, and then feel my cheeks get warm again, but she laughs.

I made her laugh.

There is such wild happiness on her face that I want to grab hold of her, grab hold of that happiness. I want to kiss her and taste the smile on her lips.

She steps toward me. She puts her hand over my sternum, as if to feel my heartbeat.

“It’s perfect,” she says.

“It is. You are,” I say.

“You’re just saying that to be nice,” she says again, but this time it has the faintest edge of a challenge to it.

“I promised not to lie, remember?” I ask her, almost a whisper.

I think for a moment that she is going to lean toward me—

But she only smiles and turns away.

**WHEN MADELYN FOURNIER** calls me into her room that evening, I walk across the hall with the feeling of going to an execution.

I haven't done anything wrong, I remind myself.

And that absolutely won't matter if Madelyn decides she wants to kick me out.

"Come in," she says at my knock. She's sitting on the couch, her legs crossed and a cup of coffee balanced on one knee. Her hair is up in a casual bun and she wears little makeup, but it doesn't matter—she was born for the screen, and she'd look glamorous in a cow pasture wearing flannel.

"You wanted to talk?" I ask politely.

"Have a seat, Eden." She gestures toward the big red chairs that sit at off angles to the couch. I have to sit crookedly to face her, and fold my hands tightly in my lap. She sets her cup of tea on the small table beside her, mouth pursed. "You've been spending a lot of time with Delphine."

"Isn't that my job?" I ask. It's the wrong note to hit.

"Delphine's circumstances would be difficult for anyone. And she's a very sensitive girl to begin with," Madelyn Fournier continues, as if she hasn't heard me. "Sometimes she acts out. It's important at those times not to let her do anything drastic she will later regret."

"Ms. Fournier—"

"Madelyn, please," she interrupts.

I straighten my shoulders. "Madelyn. Delphine asked me to cut her hair. I was only doing what she asked."

"It's not your place to decide that sort of thing," she says.

Anger simmers in my chest. I struggle to keep my voice steady. "I don't think it's my place. But it is hers," I say. "It's her hair."

"Delphine has no experience of the world. She doesn't know what she wants," Madelyn says.

"Have you ever asked her?" I ask, startled by my own vehemence.

Madelyn is surprised as well—I see the spark of fury in her eyes and brace myself, expecting to be thrown out immediately—but she sighs. She

bends forward, covering her face with both hands, and her shoulders sag.

“I’m sorry, Eden. You’re right. You only did what she asked.” She rubs a hand over her mouth, looking off toward the corner of the room. “You can’t imagine how helpless I feel. You’re supposed to make a good life for your children. You’re supposed to protect them, and you’re supposed to help them grow up and go out into the world. But the world is deadly to her. And she’s so . . . so *diminished*. I can’t help her. I can’t free her. All I can do is keep her safe.”

She’s right—I can’t imagine what she’s been through. The decisions she’s had to make. But Delphine? I can imagine what it’s like for Delphine.

To be alone. To be trapped. For it to feel like time has stilled, all of existence frozen in one wretched moment with no hope of it ever changing. I found my escape. Delphine hasn’t. “Aren’t there any treatments?” I ask, leaning forward in my seat.

“To treat something, you have to understand it,” she says, gesturing helplessly. “No one can offer up an explanation. Most of the doctors who have examined her have insisted that the effect is psychosomatic. That it’s all in her head. But then how is it that even when she’s under anesthesia, her heart starts to fail if we take her away from here?”

A sharp shock goes through me. She seems to realize what she said, and her head whips toward me, her jaw tensed.

“She can’t leave,” I say. The surgery she had—she wondered why they couldn’t keep her at the hospital, even protected. They rushed her back here. “That’s why you kept her enrolled. That’s why you renovated Abigail House instead of taking her home.”

“She stops breathing. Her heart stops beating. Even a few hours away, and she starts to die,” Madelyn says. Her shoulders bow inward, making her seem uncharacteristically small. “No one believes me. Not the doctors. Not my parents or my friends. I know what people say. Some of them think I’m making it up. Some of them think I’m doing it to her.” Her voice cracks at the words. She sounds defeated as she continues. “I would do anything to protect her. But nothing I do seems to matter.”

“She told me about her brother. Her twin,” I say.

Madelyn’s breath catches. She gives me a piercing look.

“I can’t imagine how hard that was. Losing one of your babies. How scary it has to be thinking that it might happen again.”

“Yes,” she says haltingly. “Yes, the fear of losing a child is a terrible thing.” She looks like she wants to say something more, but she only looks away, touching a knuckle lightly to her lips.

I want to ask her about the Drowning Girl and about Aubrey and the Narrow and all the rest, but I hear the fragility in her voice. If I push, she’ll realize she shouldn’t be talking to me at all. “You’ve done everything you can,” I say instead. “You’ve kept her safe this long.”

“At what cost?” she asks. Then she shakes her head a little, as if to clear it. “I’m sorry for giving you a hard time about the hair. It’s between me and Delphine to talk about—we shouldn’t be dragging you into our mother-daughter quarrels. Just, maybe next time she asks you to pierce her belly button or something, tell me first?” She picks up her coffee and sips it, her cheerful armor sliding back into place.

“Of course,” I say. An easy promise to make, and an easier one to break. “I’m sorry, I’m supposed to be meeting my friends.”

“Oh, go on! Don’t let me keep you,” she says. Too loud and too bright. She’s regretting telling me as much as she did.

Everyone is keeping secrets.

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There is something wrong with the light outside. A thin crust of gray clouds covers the sky, and the light has an odd silver haze to it that makes everyone seem like they’re moving too suddenly, unevenly.

All I want to do is curl up by myself, but I promised Veronica I would meet everyone at Westmore. She apologized. She’s trying. I should try, too.

Normally, I’m the quietest member of the group during hangouts. Even Zoya opens up when she’s around the three of us, but I prefer to listen. Veronica has always teases that I’m like a puppet-master villain in one of Zoya’s books, gathering up secrets until I usurp the throne unexpectedly in the finale.

The silence helps me keep my secrets, but more than that, I’ve always *liked* listening to my friends talk about their lives. Different problems than my own. Different joys.

Tonight, despite my best efforts, I can barely focus on their words, and that hideous, corrosive resentment eats away at me. They can just be here in this room; I’m here, but I’m also in the pool house, Dylan’s arm over my

shoulder, and no matter how hard I focus on *now*, I look over my shoulder and there it is in perfect detail.

And tonight, they aren't content to let me stay quiet. It's infuriatingly obvious that Veronica talked to them, and all three are intent on drawing me out with questions they've clearly prepared and divvied up ahead of time. By the time I finally escape, I've been bombarded with tiny inquiries about my day and my opinions and my plans for the week.

They're trying to be good friends, I tell myself. So am I. We're all sucking at it.

"Want an escort?" Ruth asks when I get up to go. Technically, it's already a few minutes past senior curfew, but as long as I'm heading in the direction I'm supposed to be, I know no one will give me trouble over it.

"To protect me from all those Atwood muggers?" I ask.

"Or damp ghosts," Ruth suggests laughingly.

I stare at her. Then at Veronica, who blanches. Ruth's face falls. "You told them?" I ask. I hadn't told her to keep it to herself, but I'd assumed she understood how personal it was.

"Eden—" she says.

"What? I mean, I realize you're spooked, but it's not like ghosts are real," Ruth says. "It's just a fun story, right?" She looks between us.

Zoya shrinks against the couch cushions, eyes on her lap.

"Let us walk you back," Veronica says.

I shake my head angrily. "I'll take my chances."

No one follows me as I stomp out of Westmore. The campus is blessedly quiet this time of night. Dark and empty. Sunset gets earlier quickly this far north, and twilight has given way thoroughly to true night. The old-fashioned streetlamps dotted around campus are enough to see where you're going, but it's a far cry from the constant illumination of the city.

I pass another senior hustling to his dorm as I leave Westmore, but as I get closer to Abigail House, it's like the rest of the campus ceases to exist. As if I'm the only living soul outside. I pick up the pace, regretting my decision to stay out after dark.

The rain is no more than a single drop. A cold point of impact against the back of my hand. And then another, catching me right at the curve between my shoulder and my neck.

I've walked through rain and darkness countless times before, and nothing has happened to me. As long as I towel off thoroughly inside,

everything will be fine.

A footstep scrapes behind me, trampled leaves crackling underfoot.

Just my imagination.

I don't look back. If I look back, it might be real. I walk briskly, refusing to run. The rain keeps up, so light I wouldn't notice it under normal circumstances.

The footsteps continue. One steady step. One that scrapes along the ground.

Then another sound. Liquid. Gurgling. *Guh, guh, guh.*

I walk faster. It doesn't matter. The steps are always right behind me.

I need to get in. Get dry. *Don't let it in.*

If I keep the water out, I'll be safe. She can't follow.

I'm at the door. My hands are shaking. I can't remember the code. The footsteps are coming up behind me and so is the drip of water, too steady to be the sporadic rain.

Behind me. Right behind me. I punch in the code, the light blinks green, I turn the handle. And I stop.

If I go in, I will be safe.

And I might never answer the questions that have been haunting me. That frightens me far more than any ghost.

It is silent. No more footsteps. No more choking.

I have to know. I have to see.

I turn slowly, my heart beating so fast I think my sternum will crack.

The Drowning Girl stands before me, just out of arm's reach. Her hair hangs dark and wet and ragged around her shoulders. Her skin is mottled with bruises. I have imagined her all this time in a white dress, plucked out of a dozen horror movies, but she's wearing jeans and a blue tank top, one strap torn, the bra beneath black and lacy. Water flows over her lips. A blood vessel in the white of one eye has burst, leaving a splotch of crimson floating beside her iris, and behind her, blood flows into the air as if into water, dissipating in the dark.

In the darkness of my room, I couldn't see her face. But now, as my body floods with terror, I see the sharp jaw, the wide mouth, the dark intensity of her eyes.

This is not Grace Carpenter.

"Guh—guh—" she says, each syllable coughing up filthy water from her lungs. One battered hand reaches for me, the fingers crooked and broken. I

should be terrified—and I am—but there is no threat in that reaching hand, only a desperate plea, and I hold my ground.

She staggers toward me a step. Everything in me screams to run, but I hold still. Her broken fingers brush against my cheek, leaving cold trails of water across my skin. There's a sudden pop at the back of my head, like a firecracker going off, and a burst of pain at my lip. As I cry out, she draws in a gurgling, gasping breath. She blinks, and the milky lacerations across her sclera clear, her pupils suddenly focusing.

"Grace," she chokes out. And then she seems to lose her balance and fall against me—

And I catch her. Hold her up. Her skin is cold but solid beneath my hands. Her bones move oddly. Broken. But she has substance— a strange substance that seems half a dream.

Her hand flattens against my chest. Over my swift-beating heart. She looks up at me. Her breath still gurgles in her throat, but when she speaks, I understand the words. "Grace? Where have you been?" she asks.

I look at her in baffled horror. "I'm not Grace. I'm not her," I say, but she doesn't seem to understand. Her hand steals up behind my neck, and her eyes search mine frantically.

"You weren't there. I couldn't find you," she babbles.

"I'm not Grace," I say desperately. "My name is Eden White."

"Not Grace," she says, and then she wails. She falls back, clutching at her hair, and her whole outline shudders—images superimposed over each other. Drowning, screaming, staring at me with empty eyes.

"Where is Grace?" she yells, lunging toward me. I fall back against the door with a shriek of my own, but there's nowhere to run. She's right in front of me, and the rush of water roars around us. "You can't keep her away from me. I won't let you."

Her hand closes around my arm. Pain shoots through it, sudden and brutal, and at last I scream.

"I don't know where she is! I didn't do anything!" I cry out, the agony like a knife through my arm. "I'm not who you think I am. Please. I'm just a girl—I'm just Eden—please—" Nonsense tumbles from my mouth, pleas and prayers, and I brace myself for her fury.

But she only lets out a sob. Her grip releases, and her hand, shaking, fluttery, goes to my cheek. She shakes her head rapidly. "I'm sorry. It's so hard to think—it's so hard down here in the dark—in the deep—the dark

crushes you down and it doesn't want to let you go. I've been down there so long and I can't—I can't—" She moans, her eyes rolling back. Then she snaps back to focus on me. "Please. I need to find her. Tell me you'll help me, please."

"I'll help you," I whisper.

She lets out a cry of relief. Her outline wavers.

"Wait," I say. "What's your name? Who are you?"

For an instant, her eyes meet mine, her outline steadying. "Maeve. My name is Maeve," she says.

And then she is gone.

I stand alone in the dark, and there is no sign that she was ever there except for the cold water trickling down my face.

**I STAGGER INSIDE** shaking. Peel off my clothes. Turn on the shower full blast. I let the water sluice over me—clean, filtered, distilled. Stripped of anything that might hurt me.

My skin is stippled with bruises. The marks of fingers on my arm, bruises on my knees, on my shoulder. Familiar shapes long faded, now returned like stains on my skin. My fingertips prod at my spine and find the tender spot that has now healed twice over.

It was Maeve. Somehow her presence brought the bruises back. Made my arm light up with fire. But I don't think she meant to hurt me. Her touch was desperate, panicked even, but not angry.

Who is she? Her name wasn't mentioned in any of the articles.

*The Drowning Girl went to meet her lover.* Her family didn't approve for some reason, take your pick. He was poor, he was the wrong race, he came from the wrong family.

He wasn't a *he* at all, maybe.

They went to meet that night. Maeve and Grace. Then what? Maeve drowned. And Grace? Where is she?

I pull on my clothes with shaking hands and hurry to my room. I don't see Madelyn Fournier's bright red car in the lot, and there are no cameras downstairs. I'm not being watched here, at least.

Fear and wonder and confusion jangle through me. That was real. *She* was real, and she was a ghost, and all of this is real.

Impossible and real.

My mouth is full of the taste of dirt and river water. I grab a cup and fill it at the sink, swishing the water around. I spit, rinse, spit again—and something clatters into the sink.

My tooth. Ripped up by the root.

I stand there staring at it. My cheek stings. I touch my fingertips to it—there will be a bright red mark there, I remember. A hand pressing down. But that will fade. My lip is sore but not split. My arm is easy to hide.

I pick my tooth up from the sink. My tongue probes at the sore, bloody gap where it was.

I throw it in the trash.

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I dream that night of the Narrow.

I stand at the edge beneath a cloud-covered sky. My throat feels raw, as if I've been shouting—or sobbing. A branch snaps behind me. I turn. A figure stands in the shadow of the trees, indistinct.

“You can't keep her from me,” I say. “I love her, and she loves me.”

The dream slews sideways, time crumpling, and I'm under the water, dragged down, battered against the cruel rocks as I try to call out her name

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*Grace, Grace, Grace.*

But I'm alone.

I sit up, panting. It's morning. I'm in my bed, warm and dry. No current to drag me down. No ghost watching me from the corner. All at once, everything that happened last night feels like a dream as well, and I find myself trying to believe that I've somehow dreamed my encounter with Maeve, then kept dreaming, and the world is still arranged the way I believed it was.

But my tongue finds the gap in my teeth, still sore, still tasting coppery. No. It wasn't a dream.

Delphine is talking to her mother upstairs; I can hear their voices faintly. I dress slowly, tame my tangled hair into order, and wait. Eventually, Madelyn Fournier's footsteps come down the stairs. A few minutes after that, she emerges from her room and head out of the house. Only then do I make my way upstairs.

Delphine steps out of her room with her new sharp bob and, to my surprise, a slash of bright red lipstick, with expertly applied eyeliner to go with it. Her uniform shirt is unbuttoned enough that I can see the black edge of her bra. She looks—

“Amazing,” I say.

She gives me an amused look. “You've been reduced to adjectives by the sight of me?” she asks.

“You look amazing,” I amend.

She shrugs one shoulder. “Thanks to my mom. I’ve never really put on makeup before, so I asked if she would show me. Less than a day after screaming at me for cutting my hair. I don’t know what you said to her, but thank you.”

“I didn’t really say anything. I think she realized what she was doing all on her own,” I reply.

“She thinks that if I stay the same, I’ll stay safe. But the only people who never change are the dead ones,” Delphine says.

Something prickles at me. “That sounds familiar.”

“It should. It’s one of your lines,” Delphine says. “From *Grave Belles*?”

Now I remember: Lenore’s father, the gravekeeper, says something like that to her in the opening pages, before Lenore hears the ringing bell that changes everything.

“What happens, anyway? After Lenore finds Isabelle?” Delphine asks. “It was a really interesting story. I was sorry you stopped uploading it.”

“I could show you,” I say, almost eagerly.

“Then you did keep working on it?”

“Yeah. There’s a lot, actually. Belle’s brother goes on trial, and she starts living in the family house again, secretly, and he thinks he’s being haunted —” I stop, the subject suddenly a bit too close to home. But Delphine looks intrigued.

“I’d love to read it. If I could.”

“Of course,” I say. Of course—as if it’s no big deal. As if I have ever let anyone see it before. It’s always belonged to me and me alone. Not as ambitious or polished as Zoya’s writing, not as technically proficient as Veronica’s artwork, but *mine*. But I want Delphine to see it. To know that part of me.

“Thank you,” she says. I can tell from those two words that she understands what it means to me, and what it means that I agreed.

Then I remember why I rushed up here. My throat gets tight. “Something happened,” I say.

Her eyes flick to the side. She doesn’t turn her head, but I know she’s thinking of the cameras. “Come to my room,” she suggests.

It is never any less intimate, stepping into her private space. The bed is made neatly. A modest collection of makeup has been added to the vanity, along with a bag from the expensive boutique two towns over. Madelyn must have made a trip to assuage her parental guilt with gifts.

Delphine sits on the edge of the bed, but I stay standing. I have too much energy burning through me, and I pace as I tell her what happened. She listens with rapt attention, and when I reach the end, I search her face for any sign that she doesn't believe me—but there's none.

"Then the story is true, in a way. The Drowning Girl went to meet her lover, and the Narrow claimed her instead. We were wrong about who the ghost was, though. And it doesn't answer the question of what happened to Grace," Delphine says, sounding far away. She fiddles with the delicate pearl pendant around her neck. When she lets it go, it rests right at the cleft between her breasts. I realize where I'm looking and glance away quickly, a touch of heat in my cheeks.

"She wants to find Grace, that's all," I say. "She isn't malicious."

"But why is she coming here? And what does it have to do with me?" Delphine asks.

"Maybe it doesn't," I say. "Grace lived in Abigail House. Maybe that's why Maeve is coming here."

"But that doesn't explain what's happening to me. It can't be a coincidence," Delphine says. She reaches for me. She catches my hand and pulls me wordlessly down to sit beside her. She doesn't relinquish my hand but strokes her thumb across the back of it. Her head leans toward mine, her hair hanging forward to obscure half her face. From this position, I can see quite a bit of what her half-buttoned shirt reveals, and my memory supplies the rest. I picture her again, undressing—picture what might have happened if I put my hands on those hips, if I kissed that perfect neck.

I laugh, a low sound that scratches the back of my throat. Delphine's brow furrows with confusion. "What's so funny?" she asks.

"Not funny. Not really," I say. "It's just—with everything happening, ghosts and missing girls and all the rest, all I can think about right now is kissing you."

I promised, after all, to tell the truth.

She straightens up, her hand pulling free of mine. Her lips part in silent surprise. A lurch of panic goes through me. Why did I say that? She doesn't feel the same—I made her uncomfortable—I ruined whatever there was between us—

"You want to kiss me?" she asks. Her voice is small. Delicate. I pull back, giving her space.

“I’m sorry. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.” Guilt and embarrassment are acidic in my veins. She doesn’t need this—the one person she gets to spend time with checking her out. There are few more awkward things than realizing a friend has the hots for you and it isn’t reciprocated. How much worse is it when it’s your *only* friend?

“It doesn’t make me uncomfortable,” she says. My relief is sluggish compared to my panic. “It’s just . . . unexpected. Why?”

“Why?” I echo, and almost laugh again, but I think it wouldn’t be exactly welcome. “You’re smart and different and intense—intense in a good way, I mean. And you’re beautiful, Del. Especially with that hair. You never looked like you before, and now you do.”

“And that’s a good thing? Looking like me?” she asks. Anyone else would have sounded like they were fishing for a compliment, but her look is one of careful focus. Trying to make sense of something she doesn’t understand.

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“I’m pretty strange, if you hadn’t noticed,” she says.

“You’re . . . unexpected,” I say, searching for the right word. “It’s like . . . everyone learns the rhythm of things. Like learning how to walk. Once you learn how to do it you don’t have to think about it anymore. So you can walk without paying attention. And it’s the same way with talking to people. Most people go through the motions for most of the day. But you do everything deliberately. You think about it. It makes me feel like I know you, the real you. Even when you’re lying.”

“I don’t lie to you,” she says. It feels like a kind of confession itself.

“You never promised to tell me the truth.”

Her look is still intent, still one of deep focus and attention. *She doesn’t let a single moment slide by lightly. She lives every one of them.* “I mean, I never decided not to lie to you. It just happened. I wanted you to know who I was. More than anything, that’s what I wanted. And so every time I thought about lying, I didn’t, because then you’d know some other version of me. A fake version.”

“There’s nothing but fake versions of me,” I say. I look away. “I lie to everyone.”

“Except me,” she says.

“Except you,” I acknowledge.

“Then this is our truth,” she says. She reaches up, trails her fingertips along my jaw. Like everything she does, it’s slow, deliberate. So that there’s no chance at all to imagine it’s anything but intentional. That it means anything other than what it does. “I think I would like that.”

“Like what?” I ask. Not because I don’t know, but because I need to be sure.

“You, kissing me,” she replies.

I would. I would kiss her right now and run my hand through her hair and be surprised at how short it is. I would taste her lips and know that I am getting that bright red lipstick on mine and not care. I would breathe in the soft scent of her and feel her hands on my neck, my waist, my cheek—

But the door at the bottom of the stairs opens.

“My mother,” she says with a grimace. “We were going to spend the morning together after she got breakfast.” Her hand escapes mine and she stands, smoothing her uniform skirt, not looking at me.

I sit there with my heart beating fast and my mouth dry and wish I hadn’t wasted those extra ten seconds. “I should probably get to class anyway,” I say. Clear my throat. Stand. “I’ll see you later, Delphine.”

“Del,” she says. “You called me Del earlier. I like it. I think I’d like it if you called me that.”

“Del,” I repeat.

She darts toward me. Her kiss catches the corner of my mouth—not a proper kiss, just a farewell between friends, but it’s enough. For now, it’s enough.

“I’ll see you soon,” she says. It sounds like a promise.

“See you soon, Del.”

**IT SHOULD FEEL** strange to go back to normal life after what happened—the ghost and the almost-kiss, which between the two of them take up just about every available brain cell. But it turns out to feel more familiar than anything. I make the right expressions and say the right words and don't tell anyone about the memories that consume me.

There doesn't turn out to be much chance to see Delphine—Del. Not alone, at least. Her mother is always with her, or I'm in class. Or looking for Grace.

I sit each night on the steps out front, waiting well past dark. But it doesn't rain, and the nights stay cool, clear, and quiet. I'm not sure whether to be relieved or grateful that Maeve does not reappear.

As for Grace, she felt more real when I thought she was a ghost. It's strange that someone could leave so little evidence behind when they're gone. She lived before the internet, before social media and camera phones. There is no digital fingerprint to follow, and I find her family only in obituaries. Lives ended early—disease, accident, suicide. It's as if her family was cursed. Once, I glimpse Grace herself. It's a photograph from her aunt's obituary, in which the older woman sits with a young girl on a bench, surrounded by a profusion of flowers. The caption reads *Marian and her niece, Grace*. Grace looks about nine years old and bashful. Strange to think that in less than a decade, both of them were dead.

My one bit of luck comes when I'm looking through archival photos from the country club where Grace's family were members—the club had conveniently uploaded its archives online. Grace's parents feature in a number of the photos. Her siblings appear in only a handful, but in one, a young man is sitting next to Grace's sister Elizabeth. He has one of those long, narrow faces that always make their owners look like mourners or jokesters, and he's definitely the latter. He has his hand resting ever so subtly on the back of Elizabeth's chair, and she's looking over at him with a smirk.

I know that smirk. And I know the puppy-dog look he's giving her, too. I'd bet anything he's her boyfriend.

His name is Jack Elliott. And two minutes later, I've found Grace's last living relative. Elizabeth Elliott is still alive, now in her fifties and living in San Francisco, where she works as a graphic designer. Jack went into sales and wrote two thrillers in the nineties, though nothing since.

Elizabeth Elliott has a website. And it lists an email.

Sitting in my bed with my laptop balanced on my knees, I type out a hasty message, my hands shaking.

Hi—

This is probably going to sound very strange, but I am a student at the Atwood School, where I believe your sister Grace attended many years ago. I have been trying to find more information about her and about her disappearance. I understand that it is probably a difficult subject, and that you probably don't want to talk about it, but if you are willing, I would love to speak with you. I'm just trying to get some insight into what she was like and what might have happened to her.

Thank you,  
Eden White

I start to put my computer away, but then an email pops into my inbox. A reply to the email I sent.

Hello, Eden,

That is, as you said, a difficult subject. Can I ask why you are interested in Grace?

Liz

Shit. I don't know what to tell her that won't sound completely bonkers.

Thanks for getting back to me so quickly. I heard a bit about Grace's story and I guess it spoke to me. I wanted to know more about her, but I've been hitting a lot of dead ends.

I hesitate. Then add,

Did you know a girl named Maeve? I think she and Grace knew each other.

I sit there staring at my inbox. Two minutes crawl by. Then three. Then five. And then: a reply.

Call me old-fashioned, but I prefer to talk on the phone. If it's not too late where you are, I can give you a call.

It's ten o'clock here. Seven on the West Coast. I send back my number and an assurance that it isn't at all too late, and a moment later my phone rings.

"Um, hello?" I say, answering. My voice is shaky.

"Hello, this is Liz Elliott. Is this Eden?"

"Yes. It is. Thank you so much for calling," I say, suffusing as much genuine gratitude into the words as possible. It's weird—when you lie too much, you sort of forget how to sound genuine. But she doesn't seem put off.

“You asked about Maeve Fairchild. Can I ask how you came across that name?” Her voice is steady and gentle.

“I think I read it somewhere,” I say vaguely. “And I’ve heard—well, there are some rumors that Grace was seeing someone, and I wondered . . .”

Liz chuckles. “A name and a rumor and you put it together, when it took over a year for anyone else to catch on,” she says.

“Then she was really with Maeve?” I ask, breathless.

“Yes, though I didn’t know it at the time. I was too young for Atwood, and my parents thought I was too young to know about Grace’s ‘problem,’ as they put it. I didn’t find out the extent of things until after the fact.”

I sit back against the headboard. Once again, here is objective proof confirming what I’ve experienced. Evidence that this isn’t all in my mind.

“Eden, I have only been able to talk about Grace in the last few years. I used to be very ashamed of what had happened, even before I really understood what it was. I was ashamed of her, and then when I realized how wrong that was, I became ashamed of my parents. And of myself. I have tried to tell Grace’s story more honestly in recent years, but I need to know . . . I need to be sure . . .”

“You want to be sure that I’m worthy,” I say.

She laughs self-consciously. “That sounds so dramatic.”

I think of the photo of Grace. The secret in her smile, her steady gaze. “No, I think you’re right. Grace’s story, it’s been hidden all this time, because of people who didn’t understand her. Who couldn’t accept and love who she was. Now all that’s left is her story, her memory. You need to make sure that it’s protected. Because she wasn’t.”

There’s a short, sharp breath on the other end of the line. “Are you sure you’re in high school, Eden?”

“Unfortunately, yes,” I say. That breaks the moment just enough to keep it from becoming painful. “I feel this connection to Grace. And Maeve. I’m queer, and I’ve been lucky to have friends who are supportive. I don’t think my parents would care one way or another. It’s easy to forget how hard it was not long ago. How hard it still is for a lot of people. I look at Grace and I wish that she could be here now. Introduce her to my friends. Show her how far we’ve come.”

“That is a beautiful sentiment,” Liz says. “And one that I like to think Grace would appreciate. I’ll tell you what I remember and what I know, but I’d ask—if you’re going to publish it in any form, please talk to me first.”

“Oh! Of course. I wasn’t planning to,” I say. It hasn’t occurred to me.

“I know you kids are always doing podcasts or the Tik Toks,” she says, exaggerating the spaces between the words so I’m sure she’s making the mistake on purpose.

“I despise being perceived,” I admit. “This is just for me.” And Del.

“I understand that. But I think that’s all that Grace wanted, sometimes—to be seen. She was the perfect daughter. Did everything our parents asked of her. And because she never caused any problems, they never thought to look any deeper. Until she met Maeve.”

“Where did they meet?” I ask.

“Atwood, of course,” Liz replies. “Maeve—Maeve Fairchild—was a junior when Grace was a freshman. It was at the end of that year they started spending time together. Maeve was a bit older, and already wild—a troublemaker. Grace came home more excited and alive than I’d ever seen her. Their first kiss was on Grace’s birthday the next year. She was sixteen.”

Less than a year before she died. Before she *disappeared*, I remember, because there is no solid proof that Grace is dead.

“My parents found out. I’m not sure how—maybe someone at the school told them. Maybe Grace did. She could be like that. She was so sure of the goodness in people, sometimes she could be naive. She might have thought they would have no choice but to understand. But of course, they didn’t. They accused Maeve of corrupting her. And Maeve wasn’t a ‘good girl’ like Grace. She smoked and drank and sneaked out at night, and Grace wasn’t her first girlfriend. It wasn’t hard to convince the school to kick her out.”

“They expelled her?” I ask, more shocked than maybe I should be. “For being gay?”

“For corrupting the morals of younger students,” Liz says dryly. “Grace was *furious*. It was probably the worst thing they could have done. Maeve was eighteen by then. She moved into town and got a job waitressing, and Grace would sneak out to see her at night.”

Through the woods, I think. Over the Narrow. It’s the shortest way to get to town.

“I don’t know exactly what happened after that. I know that my parents became aware that they were still seeing each other. They spoke a lot with a teacher who was trying to intervene, to convince Grace to stop seeing Maeve. Things got quiet for a while. And then . . . then Grace was just gone. And so was Maeve.”

“The articles only ever talked about Grace. They hardly mentioned that Maeve even existed,” I say.

“My parents didn’t want rumors spreading. Maeve’s family had disowned her when the school expelled her, and no one was really looking for her. If my parents had their way, none of this would have been in the papers at all. You have to understand, it was a very different time—and our circles were obsessed with status and very conservative. I think my parents truly would have preferred a dead straight daughter to a living gay daughter.”

“What do you think happened?” I ask. I sit cross-legged on the bed, hunched forward as I press the phone to my ear.

She sighs. “Oh, from time to time I’ve fantasized about the two of them off together somewhere. Living under new names. Growing old around people who love them. But I think that after all this time without hearing from Grace, the only explanation that makes sense is that she died that night. She went to meet Maeve and drowned. And maybe Maeve tried to save her and fell in as well, or maybe she ran away when she realized what had happened. But either way, Grace is dead. I’m certain of it.”

Maeve didn’t run away. She’s still here. But if Grace died that same night, drowned in the river just like Maeve, why is Maeve still looking for her? “Thank you,” I say. “It helps. Knowing more of the story. And I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“You’d think a wound that old would be healed by now,” Liz says. She sounds exhausted. As if telling the tale had robbed her of all her energy.

“That’s not really the way it works, though, is it?”

“No, I suppose not. We’re all just bones haunted by our own memories, aren’t we?” Liz asks. “But you’re still young. Not so haunted yet.”

I don’t correct her. “Thank you again for talking to me.”

“Thank *you*. It was good, talking about her. I don’t think I’ve ever told the whole story like that. It was . . . I don’t know. Cleansing,” she said. “You take care, Eden. And be careful.”

“Careful?” I ask.

She hesitates. “I almost don’t want to mention this. It was a long time ago, and things have changed. People have changed. But the teacher who tried to break Grace and Maeve up, who was so dead set against their relationship—his name was Geoffrey Oster.”

My stomach drops. “He’s the dean now,” I say.

“I know. That’s why I wanted to mention it. I don’t know what you’re intending to do with what you learn, but I imagine it could be a very awkward subject to bring up, given how close to the situation he was. What happened wasn’t his fault, but he wasn’t blameless.”

“How is it not his fault? If he hadn’t broken them up, Grace wouldn’t have had to sneak out,” I say.

“He was part of it. But if you really want to blame someone, blame my parents. They’re the ones who were supposed to love her unconditionally,” Liz says, and now she sounds angry. “I wish I at least knew that wherever she is, she’s loved.”

I can tell that she is done, that grief is overcoming her willingness to talk.

“Thank you for everything,” I say.

“Take care, Eden,” she says.

I promise that I will; we say our goodbyes.

*What happened to you, Grace?*

They had wanted to be together forever. They had disappeared the same night. But somehow, Maeve was still here, alone and lost, and Grace—Grace was nowhere to be found.

## 19

***YOU'RE MINE, YOU*** know. Forever. No matter what.

In the dream, we're in the woods together, me and Maeve. Her fingertips trail up the inside of my forearm, sending shivers down my spine. My back against a tree trunk, she kisses my neck, my jaw. Her body is against mine, trapping me there as I sigh and moan at her touch.

*We're meant to be together. It's destiny.*

She kisses me, and my mouth fills with river water.

*Forever, forever, forever.*

I wake suddenly, and for a moment I don't realize why. Then I hear it—footsteps in the hall. I bolt upright. I was careful today. I didn't let a single drop of water in, I'm sure of it. It can't be Maeve.

The footsteps pass my door, and I realize they're going the wrong way. As I sit frozen in bed, I hear the door at the end of the hall open. Is Madelyn going outside for some reason?

I force myself out of bed and go to the hall. The lights are off. The door to the entry room is open.

So is the door at the bottom of the stairs.

I lose another few seconds processing the impossibility of what I'm seeing. Then I'm down the hall, screaming for Madelyn but not waiting for her to wake. I bolt through the empty changing room. The front door gapes open, and beyond it snakes the empty path. I run outside barefoot and look around wildly, searching for any sign of Del.

Something coppery glints among the trees. Del, moving quickly away. She's already crossed the lawn—dry, thankfully, after days without rain—and is heading into the cover of the woods.

I do not have to wonder where she's going. I already know. I sprint after her, calling her name. As soon as the grass gives way to the dirt and roots and underbrush of the woods, I regret not stopping for shoes. Rocks dig into the arch of my foot; sticks stab at me. Somehow Del is still moving with smooth, swift steps away from me. The ground slopes down. In the dark, I

can't see where I'm going, tripping and sliding and careening off tree trunks.

"Del!" I call out.

She halts. I scramble down the incline to catch up with her and discover what's stopped her—the chain-link fence that divides the campus from the Narrow. Del stands dumbfounded in front of it, fingers laced through the wire.

"Del," I say, reaching for her shoulder.

"I have to go," she says hollowly. "I have to find her."

"Who?" I ask. "Grace?"

She turns her face toward me, but her eyes don't seem to see me. "I promised I would come find her," she says.

A flashlight bobs among the trees. "Delphine! Eden!" Madelyn calls.

I shield my eyes as the light sweeps over us, and Madelyn comes scrambling down the same way I did. She's at least shoved her feet into shoes, untied.

Beside me, Del gives a little sigh, and her knees go out from under her. I yelp in surprise and grab hold of her, grateful for how small she is. Madelyn dashes forward to help, and we hold her up as Del's head rolls, then snaps up, her eyes blinking.

"What . . . Where . . . ?" she starts, and then she gasps, eyes widening in fear.

"It's okay. It's okay," Madelyn soothes her. "We're going to get you back inside. The ground's dry, you're okay." She starts to guide the stricken Del up the hill. When I move to help, Madelyn moves protectively to block me and snaps, "I've got it. I think you've done enough, Eden."

Startled, I fall back, letting them make their way up the hill together. The adrenaline surge is collapsing. My feet hurt. I watch the flashlight vanishing up the hill and shiver, though it isn't cold.

Behind me, the Narrow whispers between its banks. I turn, standing right where Del stood, fingers laced through the chain link.

The sky is clear. There is enough of a moon to just make out the Narrow down below me, rushing softly between its banks. It's only a river, silver in the moonlight.

I can feel her here. Maeve. A presence in the air making the hair on the back of my neck stick up.

"Maeve?" I call softly.

There is no answer. But I almost think I can make something out down below—a pair of hands, gripping the edge of the rocks. Then they let go and slip beneath the surface of the water.

She's there. And Del was trying to get to her.

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I get back to Abigail House, and even though it was dry outside, I shower thoroughly and clean my feet, which are scraped up but not cut, thankfully.

When I step into the hall, Madelyn Fournier is there, staring at the still-open door to the upstairs with her arms crossed. She's wearing lounge clothes, not the silver pajamas she had on when she was running through the woods, but her face is still bare of makeup and her hair is unkempt. I've never seen her look so small or so human. She looks over her shoulder at me as I approach.

"There's something wrong with the locking mechanism," she says dully, gesturing at the door. "It won't latch properly."

I draw closer. The lock on the door has a small logo, the same as the exterior door. FellTech. The same company that makes AtChat. "Has that ever happened before?"

"The lock? Or Delphine getting outside?" Madelyn asks.

"Either."

"No." She's shaking, and she scrubs a threatening tear from the corner of her eye. "I'm sorry about speaking to you that way out there. I assumed you had been careless and left the door unlocked."

"I wouldn't," I say.

"I know. I'm sorry," she says again. And then she covers her face with her hand and begins to weep.

I don't know what to do—whether she needs comfort or if me offering it will only make things worse. But it lasts only for a moment, and then she looks up at the ceiling, blinking rapidly, and draws in a breath through her nose.

"Well. I'll get someone out in the morning to fix it," she says. "I'll stay up until Delphine wakes up."

"I can take a shift," I say immediately.

"That's kind of you, Eden, but I won't be able to relax unless I'm out here anyway. One of us might as well get some sleep," she says. "It's

Vespers tomorrow, isn't it? You don't want to be exhausted."

Right. Vespers. I'd managed to forget about it. I wish I could just stay home, but I can't *not* go—I signed up last year to be an escort for Little Vespers, the pre-party for the Lower School students.

But there is one silver lining. Vespers is held in the courtyard outside the old chapel. Right by the path down to the Narrow.

To Maeve.

I need to know what happened to Grace. I need to know why Delphine is drawn to Maeve. I'm sure Oster won't tell me. Madelyn doesn't know.

But maybe I can ask Maeve.

Simple as that.

**THE TECHNICIAN IS** already there repairing the door when I go up to see Del in the morning. She's sitting on the couch in the living room, her legs crossed. Her feet are raw and angry looking. She looks pale and doesn't say anything as I approach, carrying a stack of papers and a box tied with a ribbon.

"Hey," I say. She looks up, her eyes red—either from lack of sleep or crying, I can't tell. I sit on the couch beside her, the things I've brought balanced on my lap. "That was a lot, last night."

She runs a hand over her head. "My mom is totally freaked out. She almost didn't want to leave for New York, but she has a bunch of obligations for the new movie."

I make a noise like I know what she's talking about, but my knowledge of current cinema extends only to whatever the algorithm recommends to me.

"I was trying to get to the water, wasn't I?" she asks.

I nod.

She shudders. "Why would I do that?"

"You said you were looking for someone."

"Who? Maeve? Or Grace?" Del asks.

"I don't know. Your mom showed up at that point, and you woke up," I say. "It's like when you're asleep, she calls to you. And when it rains, she comes for you."

"She wants something from me," Del says. "But why? I'm no one."

"You fell in the Narrow and lived. You're not no one. You're special," I say.

She says nothing, staring at the floor.

I hesitate, then hold out the things I've brought. "These are for you."

She takes them with a look of surprise, examining each separately, the papers first. "*Grave Belles*," she says in a delighted voice.

"Everything I have so far. They're all scanned in, so don't worry too much, but try to be careful with them."

“I can read the scans, if you’re worried,” she says immediately, but I shake my head.

“I want you to have them,” I say. *They’re me. I want you to know me*, I want to say, but it sounds too cheesy.

“And this . . .” She lifts the box.

My cheeks flame. “Just a present,” I say.

She gives me a curious look, then unties the ribbon and lifts the lid of the box. Inside is a small, delicate arrangement of flowers. Dahlias, in red and orange.

“They’re freeze-dried,” I say. “So no water, and they won’t die. They should last a long time if you put them somewhere protected.”

“They’re lovely,” she says.

“You said the dahlias were your favorites,” I tell her. She looks at me quizzically, and my blush deepens. “The night I first saw Maeve, and we talked? I told you about the fireflies, and you told me about the garden you used to have.”

“Oh. Yes,” she says, but there is a little frown on her lips. “It almost feels like a dream.”

Sudden worry flashes through me. “You *do* like flowers, right? You weren’t lying?”

She breaks into a warm smile. “I love them. Eden, they’re beautiful. I love them so much, I want a million more.” She laughs.

*That’s twice.*

“I want to fill this whole place with them,” she says.

“We can,” I tell her. “And you’ll have real flowers soon.”

Her smile falters. She stands, leaving *Grave Belles* on the cushion, and carries the flowers to a bookshelf, settling them carefully where they will be on display.

“I’m going to try to talk to her tonight,” I say. “Maeve. During Vespers, I’ll go down to the Narrow.”

She looks at me sharply. “Is that safe?”

“She doesn’t want to hurt me,” I say.

“She hurt Aubrey.”

“We don’t know that,” I object, though of course it’s the most likely explanation. But Del didn’t see the sadness and desperation in Maeve’s face. The frantic relief at being heard.

“Be careful, Eden. It isn’t worth getting hurt,” Del says.

I shake my head. “It’s worth it. Because you are.”

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The forecast calls for rain tonight. Rain won’t stop Vespers, though. Nothing does.

Vespers is, technically, an illicit party, but everyone knows about it. Most of the staff were students once, after all. It exists in the same liminal space as the leap—tolerated, as long as no one does anything *too* out of bounds.

The first hour of Vespers is called Little Vespers. Atwood has its problems, but there’s one thing I’ve always appreciated about it: we take care of the babies. With other schools, especially older ones, you hear horrible things about hazing and the way that younger kids are treated, but that doesn’t happen at Atwood. Little Vespers is for the Lower School students, and we protect them fiercely.

This year, as seniors, we’re in charge of policing Little Vespers. Every Lower School student has an Upper School student assigned to them, and if your Little gets in trouble, you basically get shunned.

I show up early, but Veronica, Ruth, and Zoya are already there, supplies in hand. I spot them from a distance and stiffen. We haven’t really talked since I walked out on them. Since Maeve. Zoya raises a hand to wave. If I ignore them now, it’ll be admitting we’re fighting, so I walk over toward them. Since seeing Maeve, my arm has been pretty bad, so I keep it casually in my hoodie pocket as I approach.

“Think we’re going to get rained out?” I ask. There’s already a light drizzle. I’m not worried Maeve is going to show up now, though. She wouldn’t come when other people could see her.

“It’s not supposed to get really bad until two a.m.,” Ruth says, shifting her weight uncomfortably. Veronica doesn’t say anything.

Nearby, a gaggle of Littles is standing around Ricky Tomlinson and Carmen Brennan as they try to get the bonfire going. Remi is herding another group in. “You stick close and we’ll make sure no one eats you,” he assures them.

“We should go collect our Littles,” Ruth says. Relieved at the suggestion of a mission to spare us from further conversation, we all hop to it.

“Janelle?” I call. A blond head pops out from among the crowd. “You’re with me tonight, okay? Try not to sneak off where I can’t find you, and if

you've got any questions or problems, you can come get me."

She gives a quick nod and sidles over to me. "Is there going to be drinking?" she whispers, big-eyed.

Veronica overhears and smirks in amusement.

I put a hand on Janelle's shoulder in what I hope is a friendly gesture. "Don't worry about it. There's absolutely no alcohol at Little Vespers."

"Hear that, Toombs?" Veronica says, giving Remi a meaningful look, and he spreads his hands innocently.

"I would never," he says.

"Nothing worse than a bunch of drunk Littles puking in the bushes," Ruth says.

"No, we much prefer drunk Uppers puking in the bushes," Veronica adds, and Remi guffaws.

Janelle doesn't look too comforted.

"Seriously, Little Vespers is super friendly and tame. Anyone who wants to party hard doesn't even show up until later," I tell her.

"Yeah, the hazing doesn't start until you're a freshman," another Upper offers.

"And if anyone does bother you, tell me and I'll sort it out," Remi says, cracking his knuckles. They don't know what a gentle giant he is; they all go wide-eyed as he flexes.

"We've got your backs," Veronica says with a friendly smile, and a half dozen Littles fall instantly in love. She catches my eye. I wonder if she's remembering our first Little Vespers like I am. Tiny and terrified in the presence of the giant seniors who herded us around.

Trying to forget why there was one fewer of us than when the year had started.

Little Vespers gets rolling. I have to admit, for all of its tameness, it's my favorite illicit Atwood tradition. It's designed to give them all a taste of what these forbidden parties are like without letting anyone get hurt. There are silly spontaneous contests and a "drinking game" with Sprite that's spent a few minutes in the general vicinity of a bottle of vodka and a lot of horsing around.

The music starts up. The hills around us bounce it around until it's like we're in an amphitheater. The wet logs still won't light, so we send someone for lighter fluid. Ruth goes mama bear on a sophomore who's bullying a Little, and we hustle everywhere, herding stragglers back in,

policing cups—making sure no enterprising eighth graders have sneaked anything in.

It's always about halfway through that the kids suddenly get into it. It's like this moment where it *clicks*—we aren't just outsiders at this party, we're part of it. Part of this. *Us* and *them* turning into just *us*, and we put our arms around them and say *welcome*.

That's why we volunteer every year. Because we experienced that moment—me and Ruth and Veronica—our first year. All of us, for our own reasons, terrified that we would find ourselves the outsiders in this strange country.

Then someone smiled.

Someone handed you a cup of Sprite and swore that it was moonshine, then laughed when your nose filled with bubbles, and you laughed with them.

Someone pushed you, whooping, onto the dance floor.

You joined hands with two girls you barely knew and spun in a circle as the music pulsed, and you shrieked with joy and knew that you were, always and forever, sisters.

That is Little Vespers.

Then, just as suddenly as it begins, it's over. One hour and that's it—it's us and them again, except that all the Littles are their own *Us*, and that means they'll make it. They have each other, like we did, and they know we'll look out for them when they need it. But not for the rest of the night.

*"If you are not an Upper School student, you must vacate the premises before the commencement of debauchery,"* Remi announces, using his cupped hands as a bullhorn.

Those of us assigned to Littles escort them back to the Lower School dorm. We herd them in with theatric shushing and frantic motions, though their house parents will all be waiting up to do a headcount.

Veronica, Ruth, Zoya, and I arrive back at the chapel at the same time. We stand in a loose knot, silent and awkward.

It's Vespers. It's supposed to be the time when we're unbreakable. It's not supposed to be like this.

There's a lump in my throat. I swallow against it. "Hey," I manage.

"We don't have to," Veronica says, and I know what she means at once. We don't have to talk about it. We don't have to apologize, analyze, agonize. "It's Vespers. Let's have fun together."

She takes out a small flask. She takes a swallow and passes it to Ruth. It comes to me next, and I drink without asking what it is. Whiskey, it turns out—the stuff Remi likes. It's not bad, a little smoky and buttery smooth. Remi has firm rules about drinking. Cheap beer is okay. Cheap whiskey is not. And this stuff tastes like money. I take an extra swig before passing it along. I need it tonight.

“Whoa, careful there,” Veronica says. “Or are you forgetting what a lightweight you are?”

I cough into my fist. “Just getting in the Vespers spirit,” I say weakly.

Veronica flashes her teeth and sticks out her hand. “Come on, losers.”

I take her hand, the warmth of the alcohol spreading through my chest. As we walk back toward the bonfire—now flickering with anemic light—I look out farther, toward the trees. Toward the path down to the Narrow.

“Dance with me, Eden,” Veronica says as the music kicks in. She draws me toward the flat area where people are already dancing and puts her arms on my shoulders. We dance—me, awkward, both because of my arm and because I'm a terrible dancer at the best of times; Veronica, graceful as always—and maybe it's the magic of Vespers or just the magic of Veronica, but everything that's happened seems to drop away. It doesn't matter. At least for a few minutes. Then the song ends, and reality creeps back toward us—but then Remi is handing me his flask, and Ruth is dragging me over to hear a joke Zoya told her, and then it's the four of us, and it's perfect.

We're whole again, as long as you don't look too close. As long as you don't notice the cracks.

I usually never drink at Vespers, but I find myself stealing a few sips here and there, keeping up the mild buzz that holds the illusion together. And helps me forget the other part of the night. What's waiting for me at the bottom of the path.

It's past eleven when Veronica staggers off, loudly declaring that she has to pee. Zoya is off getting a refill—nonalcoholic—and leaves me and Ruth alone by the fire for a moment. She holds a red Solo cup. Despite the cool night air, her hair sticks to her skin with sweat from the heat of the bonfire.

“Soooooo,” she says, not bothering to pretend it isn't awkward. It's kind of a relief.

“So,” I say. “How's it going? How's Diego?”

“Oh. He's great. We broke up,” she says mildly.

I look at her in surprise. “When?” I ask.

“Monday,” she says, shrugging.

“Are you okay? What happened?” I ask. I’m not used to being this out of the loop.

“I’m fine. Nothing happened. Things had run their course,” she says. “He’s cool, but there just isn’t that spark.” She seems to realize as the words come out of her mouth that it’s exactly what she told me when she broke up with me sophomore year. She cringes. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I assure her. “Ancient history, all that.” I’ve ended up with Veronica’s flask somehow. I take a tiny sip. I’m going to need to go down to the Narrow soon; I want to stay relatively clear-headed.

“I can’t believe I said that to you. ‘You’re cool, but there’s no spark.’ Those words *actually* came out of my mouth,” Ruth says. “I was a total jerk.”

“You weren’t. I get it—we were better as friends,” I tell her, though the memory is still tender. I’d thought things were going great, and then she just dropped me and disappeared.

“That wasn’t entirely true,” she says, eyes on her cup.

I give her a quizzical look. “What do you mean?”

She shifts almost nervously. “When we broke up, I said it just wasn’t working, but it was actually because my parents freaked out. I figured I was bi, so why not just date guys so I don’t rock the boat? Except that meant hurting you and hurting myself because you were the one I really wanted to be with, and why was I making decisions based on my parents’ bigotry anyway? And then they went to therapy and joined a queer-friendly church and literally will *not* stop sending me rainbow Pride swag.”

“Oh,” I say eloquently. I’ve been hung up on Ruth and pretending not to be for years.

She bites her lip. “I know things have been kind of fucked between us all, but . . . I miss you, Eden. We all do.”

“I miss you, too,” I say, my voice hoarse. I look away, blinking back tears. Why can’t things just be easy? Why can’t *sorry* fix everything? It still hurts.

“I know you haven’t really dated anyone since then,” Ruth says leadingly.

“No. I mean yes. I mean . . . I’m sort of seeing someone,” I tell her, stammering and blushing. I hate how easily I blush.

“Seriously? Wait, who?” she asks. Her eyes widen. “Delphine.”

“Nothing’s happened, exactly,” I say.

“Wow. I have really terrible timing, huh? Well, that’s great. I’m happy for you,” Ruth says with forced cheer. Silence falls between us, excruciatingly strained. She looks down at her drink. “I need a refill.” She wanders off, and suddenly I’m alone in front of the fire.

Why would Ruth tell me that? Why would she do it *now*? I shut my eyes, feeling the heat of the fire against my face. I feel like I can’t stop screwing up.

I open my eyes and look for the others. Ruth has joined Zoya and Veronica in the line for drinks, talking to them. Zoya glances briefly over my way, and I get a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, knowing they’re talking about me. But then Zoya looks away, and for a moment I’m unobserved.

I slip away. I stick Veronica’s flask in my jacket pocket and take out my phone, using the flashlight to light the path. Soon the sounds of revelry die down behind me, replaced by the steady tramping of my feet. The rain is still a soft mist pattering down on the leaves. As the light of the bonfire vanishes behind me, I wait to hear that choking sound, to feel her cold hand on my arm, but there’s nothing.

In the dark, the shores of the Narrow are hard to discern, the water as black as the stone. I stay well back from the slippery moss and the uncertain edge.

“Maeve?” I whisper, the rain hissing down around me. “Are you here?”

Something pale catches my eye to the left. I turn, heart in my throat, knowing what I will see. And there she is. Standing on one of the outcrops of stone, near the very edge. Her dark hair hangs bedraggled around her shoulders, her clothes soaked through, clinging to her body.

“Maeve,” I call. It’s soft, but she turns toward me. I take a step in her direction. She watches me, water trickling from her lips. “Maeve. I want to help you. But I need to know what happened.”

“Grace,” she says. The word is garbled. Her body shakes, a convulsion so abrupt it blurs her outline.

“I know. I want to help you find her. But I have to understand. What happened that night?” I ask, drawing closer.

She turns away from me. Looks back toward the water. And then it’s like watching a video played in reverse. She judders backward step by step, then wheels around to face the trees. Her hair is damp now, not sodden, her leg

straight. She wears shoes, practical-looking things—she must have lost them in the river.

“Where is she?”

She’s looking at the trees. It’s like in my dream. Someone is there, but I can’t see them. Maeve is angry. Her voice is a snarl, her hands clenching into fists at her sides.

“You can’t keep her from me.”

Her image tears like tissue paper, reforming into the Drowning Girl again.

“I know this part,” I say. “You argued with someone.”

A flicker, and she’s standing at the edge of the river again, her back to me. She stands—and then she’s falling, a sudden, violent explosion of motion as if shoved by a great force. She pitches forward into the river, her arms outstretched in a futile attempt to arrest her fall.

I gasp, lunging forward on instinct, but she vanishes before she hits the water. Gone.

She didn’t just fall, I realize with horror. The way she jerked forward like that—she was pushed.

Someone was here. Someone killed her.

*Guh, guh.*

The choking is behind me. Water drips, too steadily and too strongly for the light mist of rain. I turn, swallowing hard.

Maeve’s crimson-stained eye stares into mine, her other eye concealed behind her lank, wet hair. Her broken fingers reach for me.

I brace myself, knowing the pain will come. And it does—skittering across my ribs, lancing through my arm. But as she touches me, her breath comes easier. Her eye clears.

“Do you remember who I am?” I ask.

“Eden,” she half sings. She presses her forehead to mine. Her skin is so cold. “I thought I dreamed you.”

“I’m real,” I promise her. She sounds so sorrowful. So lost.

She brushes a thumb across my lower lip. The skin breaks with a sharp slash of pain, and the taste of blood reaches my tongue.

“You’re hurting me,” I tell her, pain warping my voice.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to. I can’t help it,” she says, shaking her head.

“I know. I know, but I—I—”

Her hand brushes through my hair. Fingernails against my scalp, and there's a *pop* under the skin. A blaze like an emergency flare in my vision.

*You've got a filthy mouth, Princess.*

Fist against my teeth. Skull cracking against the floor. The next seconds—those were erased. Lost in the gap between when my head hit the ground and when I became aware of the weight on top of me, the crusty carpet against the side of my face.

“Eden!”

I jerk back, away from Maeve, but she's already gone. My foot skids out from under me on a patch of mud, and I go down on my ass, the impact jarring all my reawakened injuries. I don't have the breath to shout or scream, only managing a moaning wheeze. The flask falls from my pocket. The loose cap pops off, spilling Remi's expensive liquor onto the ground.

Veronica strides down the path behind me. Zoya and Ruth are with her, lagging behind. I shove myself to my feet, fumbling to grab the flask. Nausea rolls in my gut, my head spinning. I remember this part. Feeling like the ground was pitching under my feet.

“Eden, are you okay?” Veronica demands.

“I'm fine,” I grind out. “Just—”

Then, quite abruptly, I'm not fine. Luckily, none of my not-fine gets on anyone's shoes as I bend over, vomiting into the mud.

“Fuck!” Veronica yells, jumping back.

“Shit, are you drunk?” Ruth asks.

“Not drunk,” I mutter, but my words are slurring. When I finally get up, I'm confused, disoriented. Luke walked me back to my room, put me in my bed.

*You're not going to tell anyone, are you?*

Veronica snatches the flask from my hand. She turns it upside down. A few drops shake out, and Veronica makes a disgusted face. “She's wasted,” she says.

“No, I'm not,” I insist, and shake my head—but that only makes my head hurt and the world spin.

“Eden doesn't get drunk,” Zoya says doubtfully.

“Well, she obviously is now,” Veronica snaps. “We've got to get her out of here.”

Get out of here. Yes. I need to get out of here before someone sees my lip or realizes why I'm stumbling around. I googled all my symptoms. Mild

concussion. I recovered pretty quickly. I'll recover again.

*You've got a filthy mouth, Princess.*

What had I even said to him? I can't remember. I never remembered. Just the punch. Fist to the mouth. Falling. Drowning—

No, that wasn't me. That was Maeve.

"Since when do you drink?" Ruth asks.

I turn in a tight circle. They're all around me. Hemming me in. My heart starts to pound. I need to get away. I move toward the gap between Zoya and Ruth, but Ruth steps in my way.

Panic jolts through me. "Let me go," I say. I need to go. I'm trapped and I need to get away, and the fear of it is like a bright sun blotting out my vision. It's all I can see.

"Eden, you're drunk, you can't go off on your own," Veronica says.

"Just let me go," I say again, and turn, and step toward the empty space that's opened up between Veronica and Ruth. But Veronica steps in front of me, reaching for my shoulders—

*Where do you think you're going, Princess?*

The past blots out the present. Panic drowns out every other thought. It isn't Veronica in front of me. It's Dylan. Grabbing me by the shoulders, pushing me back toward the couch.

*Stick around.*

And I didn't fight him. I didn't struggle, I walked back to the couch and let him put his arm around me and all I wanted to do was scream and hit him and run, to get away, so I *do*. I shove him hard in the chest, as hard as I can, a shriek in my throat, and he topples back—

But it isn't Dylan, it's Veronica, sprawled out on the forest floor as I stagger and sob.

I press my hand over my mouth, stifling a moan. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I say.

Ruth and Zoya only gape at me as I back away, hands up, pleading, placating. Veronica gestures sharply to them. "Come on, let's get her home."

The world is spinning around me. I can't breathe properly, only in hiccuping gulps. But Veronica reaches out gently, tentatively, two fingertips against my shoulder.

"You're okay. We're going to get you to bed, okay, Eden?" she says, tender and calm.

I shut my eyes. They sting with tears. “I’m sorry. I’m—”

“I’m fine,” Veronica says, worry—not anger—in her eyes. “I’m not hurt, and I’m not mad.”

“We’ve got you,” Ruth adds, and Zoya murmurs agreement.

I surrender to their care. Stumblingly, I follow them up the trail as Veronica murmurs encouraging, meaningless things. I can’t stop crying and apologizing. I’m barely aware of when we get to Abigail House.

“Maybe we should take her to Westmore,” Zoya suggests.

“If she gets caught in Westmore, they’re definitely going to have to cite her for being drunk, too,” Veronica counters. “What’s the code, Eden?”

I manage it on the third try, my fingers fumbling with the buttons. I can’t think. Can’t keep track of when I am. I keep sliding, toppling back down to that pit where Dylan is waiting.

*Stick around.*

“Okay. Here we go. Let’s get you into bed,” Veronica says encouragingly.

“Have to—the rain,” I say, gesturing at the showers.

“I think we can skip it for tonight.”

I shake my head violently and immediately feel dizzy. “Don’t let it in. If you let it in, she gets in too.” I grip her arm. She needs to understand. I can’t see Maeve again, not tonight. I don’t know if I’ll survive it.

“Okay. Everybody shower, I guess,” Veronica says.

She helps me strip down, then gets undressed herself. She has to step into the shower with me to help me wash my hair, and my face goes bright red. “I used to be in love with you,” I tell her as she kneads shampoo through my hair. When her fingers touch my scalp, they set off pulses of pain.

“I know,” Veronica says lightly. “You fall in love with all your friends. It’s kind of a beautiful thing about you.”

I make a noise of protest, but she’s right. How could I not be in love with them a little? They’re all so incredible.

“It’s tragic that I’m so completely straight. We’d be an amazing couple,” she says.

“You’re an amazing couple,” I mutter, and give a snort-laugh. “That didn’t make sense.”

“That’s because you are epically out-of-your-mind drunk for some ungodly reason. You’re supposed to be the sensible one.”

“I thought I was the sneaky one.”

“You can be both,” she tells me, and then she’s shutting off the water and wrapping me up in a towel.

I whimper as my head throbs, and she moves more gently as she helps me into sweats. The three of them herd me down the hall and into my room.

“This is actually pretty nice,” Ruth notes.

“Is the Fournier girl up there?” Zoya half whispers.

“Where the hell else would she be? She can’t leave,” Ruth says at full volume, and Zoya hushes her.

Veronica ignores them. She walks me straight to bed and makes me lie down while I am still slurring my apologies. The room spins insistently around me. Their voices murmur in the living space, and then Veronica appears again with a glass of water. “Sit up.”

I obey. She pushes the water into my hand and then looks over toward the door.

“Did you find any ibuprofen?”

“Not exactly.” Ruth comes in and hands Veronica something. I squint. It’s the ibuprofen bottle. The one I stored the pills in.

Crap.

“What are these?” Veronica asks. She has a pill in her palm.

“Nothing,” I say, shaking my head, but Ruth is holding out her phone with a matching image on it. Trust her to know how to quickly look up a pill by its appearance. Stupid brilliant premed friends.

“Why do you have these?” Veronica asks.

I don’t answer.

“Did you take one of these? And then get drunk?”

“I didn’t take one,” I say. Or did I? I have a sudden memory of downing a pill before I left, but that was yesterday, right? “How many are there?”

“Two,” Ruth says.

That’s not right. I had six. I’ve taken three. Right? “I can’t remember.”

“Fuck, Eden,” Veronica says. “What were you thinking? Why do you even *have* these?”

A wild laugh bubbles up in the back of my throat. I hold it in, and it turns into a horrible kind of whine.

“She’s completely out of it,” Ruth says, equal parts disgusted and concerned.

“Should we call someone? Get her to the nurse?” Zoya asks, peering around from behind.

“She’ll get in trouble,” Veronica says.

“I’m fine,” I say. No one seems to hear me. Or maybe they’re not listening. I’m not drunk. I’m concussed—because of Maeve, because somehow her touch brings my injuries back. And I’m maybe a little tipsy. Suddenly it seems hilarious, but I have the sense to stifle my giggle. I’m not even trying to lie this time. But nobody believes me, so it doesn’t matter anyway. I could tell everybody the truth, I think wildly. I could tell them and they wouldn’t even care.

*I’m going to tell them.*

That was what I said. After I called Dylan whatever horrible thing I could think of, and he laughed at me. All I needed to do was shut up for one more day, but when he laughed, when he said, *You have a filthy mouth, Princess*, I’d threatened to tell.

And that’s when he hit me.

Not Dylan. Luke.

Dylan was the one standing, laughing, the same way he laughed a moment ago, but now it was in shock rather than amusement.

Luke was the one with his hand on my face.

His knee in my back.

It wasn’t his fault. It was Dylan’s. He’d been working so hard. Doing so well. Dylan was the one who ruined it.

He apologized after. Over and over. Begged me not to tell.

“We can’t just leave her here. It’s not safe,” Ruth says.

“No, it’s fine,” I tell her, lying down. “As long as you keep the water out, she can’t get in and I’ll get better and it’ll be fine.”

“What is she talking about?” Zoya asks.

“I have no idea,” Veronica says. “Look. I’ll stay with her. I’ll stay on the couch and make sure she doesn’t throw up or anything, and I’ll be back in Westmore before morning.”

“Maybe we should all stay,” Zoya says.

“We could take shifts,” Ruth suggests.

“I’m not drunk,” I tell them, shutting my eyes. That makes the spinning worse. My stomach lurches, and I open my eyes again, fixing my gaze on the wall to try to steady myself.

*You can’t tell anyone about this*, my mother said when I told her.

“You don’t know if you took a serious opioid before getting drunk. Which you should know is a major no-no,” Ruth says.

Of course I know. I spent several summer nights up late googling interactions and side effects and horror stories, convinced my heart was going to stop.

*You're fine. Right? You'll be fine. We just need to handle this ourselves.*

I didn't take a pill tonight, and I haven't had more than a few sips to drink, but they aren't going to leave me alone. "Wait. Check my pocket," I say. I remember stashing one in case I needed it.

They exchange looks. With a sigh, Ruth heads back out into the hall. When she comes back, she has the pill.

"Looks like we're safe," she says. "Now we just have to worry about alcohol poisoning."

"She's a lightweight. She probably didn't have enough to worry about," Veronica says. She doesn't know how much my tolerance improved over the summer. "I've got this. You can go."

"Okay, but I'm taking the pills," Ruth says. "And we're talking when she's sober."

"Make sure you don't get caught with them," Veronica advises.

Ruth gives a curt nod, and she and Zoya head out.

"I'm sorry," I say again, staring at the wall.

"Stop apologizing and drink more water," Veronica says. She sits beside me on the bed and puts her hand on my hip. She sighs. "I don't know what's going on with you these days, Eden."

I don't answer. After a while, she stands up and goes out to the living room, and I hear her getting blankets out of the linen closet. I lie there, staring at the wall, trying not to be sick.

I can't tell her. I can't tell anyone.

Not about the summer.

Not about the ghost.

They won't believe me. They *don't* believe me.

I'm on my own.

## 21

**I DREAM THAT** I'm drowning. Tumbling through the water, my limbs twisting, my back bending at impossible angles. But time is running backward. My bones knit themselves together as I rush back through the wicked current. As I erupt from the cold water and land on the dry shore, I pause a moment, suspended in time, the moonlight playing over the softly creasing water of the Narrow.

Then a blow against my back sends me toppling forward once more, and I hit the cold water with a gasp—

And I wake in the darkness of my room. My eyes are open, but I can't move.

I know what's happening before I hear the slow, steady dripping. Before I see the pale figure at the very edge of my vision.

She draws closer. I whimper, unable to even part my lips. Veronica is here. She's only a few feet away, but I can't call to her.

The Drowning Girl is at the edge of my bed, leaning over me. I can't make out her face, only the ragged curtain of her hair, wet and dark. Cold water drips against my cheeks, but I can't even blink it away.

*Guh, guh, guh,* she chokes.

"Maeve," I try to say. No sound comes out.

She shudders. Her fingers crackle as they twist back into place. "Eden," she says. She slides one knee onto the bed, half kneeling. She bends over me, her hair curtaining down around us both. "I have to reach her, Eden. They're trying to keep us apart, but I won't let them. You have to help me."

*I'm trying.*

"I know. I know," she croons. She cups my face with her hand. A bright star blooms behind my eye, but my wounds are already fresh. There's nothing worse she can do to me.

"You look so much like her," she whispers.

I'm not afraid. All the fear has rushed out of me. In its place comes a flood of longing, a fierce thing that sings with the beating of my heart but isn't mine, doesn't belong to me.

It's hers. But it's the strongest thing inside of me. Stronger than fear or sense.

"You're kind, like she was," she whispers. Every part of me wants to cry out to her, to answer that wild longing. Her fingertips trail down my cheek. "I loved her with everything I was. They tried to keep us apart, but I wouldn't let them. We're supposed to be forever. We're infinite. You and me, Grace."

I can't answer or move or scream or tell her I'm not Grace—I'm as frozen as ever.

I can feel her breath, warm against my lips. Her fingertips against my chin. Her lips, soft as they press against mine. And my heart sings with joy. *Her joy.*

Cold water trickles between my lips. I choke, swallow it down. But she's still kissing me, and the water is still coming, filling my mouth, flowing up over my face. I'm drowning in her.

Pain bursts in my leg, my ribs, my spine. Blood blooms in the water in my mouth—

"Eden!"

Veronica is screaming my name. Shaking my shoulders. I choke, cough. Water gurgles from my mouth. Veronica flips me onto my side, and I cough again, gagging as the water spills out. I gasp down a breath. Another coughing fit seizes me, but this time I'm gasping in air in between. Veronica sits back, raking her hair away from her face and letting out a moan of relief.

I shove myself upright, looking around wildly. "What . . . ?" My head pounds.

"She was here," Veronica says. "Oh my God, Eden, she was *here*. I saw her standing over you and then she kissed you and you started choking and I tried to get her off you, but when I touched her, she vanished, and you were drowning, and I didn't know what to do, so I just started screaming your name, and . . ." She looks over her shoulder and calls out, "She's okay!"

Del. I stagger to my feet and past Veronica, into the hall. The door at the bottom of the stairs is closed, but I can see Del through the window, standing right on the other side. She presses one hand against the glass when she sees me, letting out a cry of relief.

"She knew," Veronica says. "She was yelling for me."

Del's eyes are wide, her pupils dilated until you can barely see the ring of her irises around them. "I saw her in the hall. She was coming toward me, but then she turned into your room."

"You saw her," I say raggedly. Relief floods through me. Not because I have doubted for even a moment that Maeve is real, but because this means that Veronica knows it, too.

Now she will have to believe me.

"Eden," Del says. Her voice is clear, sharp-edged, despite the door between us. "Your face."

I touch my fingers to my cheek. It's tender. My lip bloodied. My arm is in agony once again. The vicious pain was a comfort for a few minutes, proof that I was alive enough to feel it, but now it's too intense to bear.

"She hurt you bad," Veronica breathes. She spreads her hand near my face. I flinch away from it, but she's only measuring her hand against the marks on my cheek.

"She didn't do this to me," I say. I look down the hall. The inner door to the dressing room is cracked open. The cuff of my jeans has wedged it open, keeping it from latching shut. Ruth must have dropped them when she went to check for the pill in my pocket. The rain-soaked cuff is surrounded by a small slick of water, and bare wet footprints track down the hall toward my rooms.

That's all it took. A few drops, carelessly allowed through the door.

"You need to get to a hospital," Del says.

"I was fine the first time," I protest. "I just need to rest."

"The first time? The first time what?" Veronica asks.

"Her brother's friend attacked her," Del says. Betrayal blurs into guilt in my mind. I didn't lie to her, but I hid the truth. She thinks it was Dylan. And wasn't it? He was the one who whispered in Luke's ear, who shattered all the progress he made. It wasn't Luke's fault, what happened. Not really. "He broke her arm, and I'm pretty sure gave her a concussion, based on how out of it she is, and when the ghost touches her, the injuries all come back."

Veronica turns a wounded look on me. "Why didn't you tell us? Wait—your arm is *broken*? Why the hell didn't you go to a doctor?"

"I can't tell," I say. I can't look her in the face. "It would be bad for Luke."

“*Fuck* Luke,” Veronica says with a snarl. “We’re going to the hospital. And the police.”

“It won’t matter. I can’t say that Dylan did this. It’ll look like it just happened. There’s no way he could have caused these injuries. Even if I tell now, no one will believe me.”

“Whatever,” Veronica says. “You need to get that arm in a cast, and you need an MRI or whatever to make sure your head injury isn’t going to kill you in your sleep.”

“It didn’t—”

“Before. I know. But who the fuck knows what’s happening when your bones crack all over again?” Veronica asks. “We’ll say it was rainy and you fell. I tried to catch you by the arm and that’s why it’s bruised.”

“Your hand is way too small,” I say.

“Like they’re going to notice. Come on. I’m driving you to the hospital.”

“It’s still raining,” Del points out, and both of us fall silent.

“In the morning,” Veronica says at last. “We’ll go in the morning. And then I’m going to kill that ghost. I don’t care if she’s already dead.”

“No,” I say. I reach out, take Veronica’s hand. “She didn’t mean to do this to me, V. She’s looking for the girl she loves, that’s all. She didn’t just fall in the river. She was pushed—someone murdered her, and now she’s lost. We have to help her. Please.” I’m crying, hot tears trailing down my cheeks, banishing the cold of the river water.

Veronica puts her arms around me. “Hush. Okay. I’m sorry, Eden. We’ll help her. I promise we’ll help her. But first we have to help you.”

I nod against her shoulder, and she strokes my hair, whispering comfort into my ear. Behind her, Del presses a hand against the glass, as if she wishes she could reach through. Wishes she could touch me. But there’s river water on my skin. On my lips. One touch from me would kill her, and so she stands in silence, three feet and an infinity between us.

**MORNING COMES, AND** Veronica holds me to my promise to go to the hospital. She gets keys to the Land Rover from Remi and drives me herself, uncharacteristically silent. Her jaw is set, her eyes fixed on the road ahead.

The pain is not as bad as the guilt. She knows now that I've been lying to her. Keeping secrets. Maybe once, telling the truth would have been better than keeping up the lie, but after this long, confession isn't a balm anymore but a blade driven straight to the heart.

"I wish you'd told me," she says when we're halfway there.

"I'm sorry."

"Why didn't you? I would have helped you," Veronica says.

"You would have wanted me to turn him in," I say.

"Of course I would have," Veronica snaps. "This guy attacked you. He broke your fucking arm. He gave you a fucking concussion. He should be in fucking jail."

Guilt curdles in my gut. The longer I don't correct them, the more it becomes a lie. "It's not about him. Luke—"

"What does it have to do with Luke? He hurt you too?" Veronica demands.

"No," I say quickly, looking anywhere but at her, and this time it is a lie. "But he's on parole, and Dylan wasn't supposed to be there. He could go to prison."

"Parole for what?" Veronica asks.

I don't answer. Other people don't see Luke as a person. They can't put the bad things he's done in the context of the good. Maybe it still works out to him being rotten. But it's different from only defining him by his worst deeds. I don't mind if people hate him. I do, too. I also know he brought me soup when I had the flu and let me watch cartoons on his iPad. He protected me from a bully at school in fourth grade, taught me how to tie my shoes, spent an entire Saturday morning doing a thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle

with me. The good doesn't outweigh the bad, but it still exists. I need people to know it still exists.

"You should have told me. I could have helped," Veronica says.

"No, you couldn't," I say.

"Of course I could. My parents have all kinds of resources. They could —"

"This is why I didn't tell you. You think you can fix everything. You think that every problem is just a matter of how much money you have to throw at it," I say angrily.

"That's not true," Veronica protests. She shakes her head. "I thought you trusted me. I thought we told each other everything. When did that change?"

"It didn't," I say.

Veronica snorts. "You're keeping secrets from me. That means something's changed."

"No, it doesn't," I say, and watch the moment she realizes what I mean. Nothing has changed—because I've been keeping secrets from her all along.

She lets out an angry hiss. "I thought we were friends."

"We are. You're my best friend."

"How can you say that when apparently you've been keeping secrets from me the whole time? What have you been hiding? Has it been like this the whole time and you didn't tell me?"

"Not like this. Not this bad," I say, looking out the window. I swallow. I can't start crying. "I wanted to be the person you thought I was. Not your sad charity case of a friend."

She's silent. Then, "Are you safe at home?"

"I thought I was," I tell her. For certain definitions of the word. "This summer was different."

Veronica clenches her teeth and doesn't say anything more until we reach the hospital. She drops me off in front of the ER and circles around to find parking. By the time I'm through checking in and have found a place to sit, she's back. She takes the chair beside me, staring down at her phone. I know from the soft chimes in my pocket she's messaging the group chat, but I don't have the energy to check what she's saying.

"I'm just letting everyone know where we are," she says, still not looking at me.

“How much are you going to tell them?” I ask.

“I said you must have fallen last night. You can decide how much to tell them yourself.”

“Thank you.”

She grunts and puts her phone away, then sits back in the chair with her arms crossed. It’s a slow day in the ER, but there’s a wheezing kid and a guy with chest pain, so I guess we’ll probably be here a little while.

“I’m sorry,” she says suddenly.

I look at her without comprehension.

“I’m sorry that I wasn’t a good enough friend for you to feel like you could tell me what things were like.”

“It hasn’t always been like this,” I say.

“But it’s always been bad, hasn’t it?” she asks. “I should have noticed. You were the only one who never wanted the summer to start. You were always so glad when breaks were over and you could come back. And you never invited any of us to your place.”

“I couldn’t,” I say. “Luke doesn’t like having people around he doesn’t know. It makes him worse.”

“Violent?” she asks.

“No,” I say immediately, defensively. Then my shoulders slump. “Not most of the time. He has episodes, and sometimes things get scary, but he’s never hurt anyone too badly.” *Except me. Except this time.*

“What about your parents? Haven’t they done anything?” Veronica asks.

“They’ve done *everything*. Therapy, medication, tough love, unconditional love, hypnotic regression, essential oils, you name it.”

“What about for you? What have they done to make sure you’re okay?” Veronica asks.

“Atwood,” I say simply.

Veronica lets out a huff. “So he’s a monster, and you’re the one that gets sent away.”

“He’s not a monster. And what were they supposed to do? Give up on him?” I ask.

“Yeah. Maybe they should have. Before you got your arm broken,” Veronica says fiercely.

Sometimes I think the same thing. My parents had a choice to make. They didn’t choose me. I know it wasn’t their intent. They thought this was the way to keep both their children. Instead, they lost us both.

“I’m never going back there,” I say. I haven’t been able to bring myself to think it before. I don’t have to go back. I’m going to be eighteen before Christmas. They aren’t even paying my tuition anymore. They can’t make me.

“No, you aren’t. You’re coming home with me,” Veronica says. “You’re right. I can’t fix everything, but I can fix *that* much.” She reaches out and takes my hand, clasping it tight.

“You’re not angry with me?” I ask.

She bares her teeth in a feral smile. “Of course I’m angry with you. I’m furious. Sisters get mad at each other.”

I’m not going to cry, I remind myself.

I cling to her hand, and she doesn’t let go until they call my name.

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The nurse who checks me over asks gentle questions. The doctor sends Veronica out of the room and asks blunt ones. I figure they know I’m lying when I say that I fell, that the bruise on my back and the crack to my skull are from rocks, that the handprint on my arm is a result of Veronica trying to catch me as I fell. Both of them try to convince me to make a report, to have something on file if I decide to go to the police. I tell them I don’t need to. What I mean is that it wouldn’t make a difference.

Several hours later, I’m back in the passenger seat with a diagnosis of mild concussion and a splint on my fractured arm, as well as an appointment for a follow-up. Veronica takes care of updating Zoya and Ruth, then drives us straight back to Abigail House. By the time we get through the entry procedures, Del is at the bottom of the stairs, anxious and relieved to see us.

“It’s fine. No worse than the first time around,” I tell her. “And I got this stylish new accessory.” I indicate the splint. “Now, if it’s okay with the two of you, I’d really like a nap.”

“We need to talk first,” Veronica says, standing with her arms crossed.

“No offense, but I’m deeply tired of talking,” I say. “I can’t remember the last time I had a full night’s sleep.”

“Right. Because of the ghost that’s stalking you,” Veronica says.

“Maeve,” I say. “Her name is Maeve.”

“The Drowning Girl,” Veronica says, and there’s a challenge to the words. “She almost killed you last night. We have to figure out how to stop her or destroy her or whatever.”

“She’s not evil. She doesn’t need to be destroyed,” I object. None of this is Maeve’s fault. “She doesn’t *want* to hurt me—or anyone. She’s trying to find Grace. If we can help her, maybe she can move on, or whatever it is souls are supposed to do.”

“Why are you so obsessed with helping this girl who was dead before you were even born?” Veronica demands.

“Because she shouldn’t have died,” I say. “Because it might help Del.”

“You can’t always take on everyone else’s problems, Eden,” Veronica says. “Look at what this is doing to you.”

“It doesn’t matter. Not if I can help her,” I insist.

Veronica gives a strange, strangled sound. “Of course it matters. You matter.”

“That’s not what I meant,” I say, and my face goes hot. I can’t tell if I’m lying. All I know is that I can’t leave Maeve out there suffering like she is, not if I have any chance to save her. I couldn’t do anything this summer. Only surrender. Now I can *do* something, and I can’t turn away from it.

Del interrupts, her voice gentle. “How can we even help? We don’t know where Grace is. Everything you’ve tried to find out about what happened to her ends with that night. So if she isn’t with Maeve, where did she go?”

“I don’t know.” I shake my head, frustrated. Maeve’s memory and her ability to communicate are so fragmented, but I’m certain she knows more that could help us. If only she could find a way to help me. “I need to talk to Maeve again. If she can tell me what actually happened that night—”

“No,” Del says at the same time Veronica snaps, “No fucking way.”

“She’s not going to just go away,” I say. “Helping her is the only way to stop this. And it’s the right thing to do.” I look between them imploringly. They have to understand.

Del is the first to nod. “The whole world is trying to keep them apart and punish them for who they are. It tore them away from each other. And it happened to so many people so many times. We can’t fix the past, but maybe this one story can have a happy ending,” she says softly.

“They’re dead. How happy can it be?” Veronica asks, but she purses her lips, thinking. “Maybe we could find a way to talk to her without getting hurt.”

“How?” Del asks.

“We could try a séance,” she suggests. “I mean, most of what I know about this sort of thing is about, like, the metaphorical energy of the spirits as a source of strength and wisdom, not an actual manifestation of a dead girl with dead-girl powers. But we could give it a try.”

“What would we need?” I ask, my heart speeding up. It sounds too good to hope for, but I’ll try anything.

“Let me look into it,” Veronica says. “We’re probably going to have to cobble some things together and cross our fingers.”

“We’ve got to try,” I say immediately.

Veronica gives me a hard look. “First you’ve got to heal up. Because now you’ve got a doctor appointment, and if Maeve snaps your bones again, you’re going to have some awkward explanations.”

“She’s right,” Del says. “You’ve got to take care of yourself first, Eden.”

“We don’t have that kind of time.”

“We do if you’re careful. Don’t let the water in. Don’t stay out after dark. Right?” Veronica says.

“But—”

“Two weeks,” Del suggests. “Give yourself two weeks to heal and for Veronica to do the research. Maeve’s waited forty years. She can wait that long.”

I let out a sigh, surrendering. “Fine. Two weeks.”

**VERONICA STAYS SUNDAY** and Monday night with me, getting special permission for a school-night sleepover after explaining about my broken arm. It's not something I can exactly hide anyway, but I don't like the idea that the administration is officially aware that I got hurt. Having Veronica around reminds me of just how much I've missed her presence, her jokes, her easy affection. But she doesn't try to hide her discontent about our plan, and a cloud seems to hover around us constantly. When she goes back to Westmore on Wednesday, part of me is relieved.

The first thing I hear when I get back to Abigail House after classes is the sound of Del's footsteps. I haven't been upstairs since Maeve's visit. I felt too much like the river water was still clinging to my skin; I couldn't shake images of Del seizing on the floor, water trickling from the corners of her mouth. Now, with studious care, I go through the monotonous routine of decontamination.

By the time I get to the top of the stairs, the pacing has stopped—because Del is there, waiting for me.

“I—” I begin, but I don't get out anything more because her arms are around my neck, and her lips—cool and soft and insistent—are on mine, and even if she stopped kissing me, I couldn't speak because I have forgotten every word I've ever known.

I have imagined kissing her before, but no amount of imagination could supply these sensations. The way her fingernails scrape lightly at the nape of my neck. The soft hum she makes against my mouth. The way her body fits so perfectly against mine. The pain that sparks in my bruised lip and how much it doesn't matter, and the way our noses bump together when we pause for a breath, my brow against hers and a soft laugh, so inaudible it is only a shiver in the air, escaping her.

“I was so afraid that I would lose the chance to do that,” she whispers.

“That would be tragic,” I agree, and she laughs again, more audibly this time. I realize I've stopped keeping track of how often she laughs; it has become familiar enough that I don't have to keep score.

My pulse is racing. God, she's beautiful—those startling eyes, the sweep of her pale lashes, the perfection of her mouth. Every part of her is its own verse in a poem about beauty.

And next to her, I'm a lump. A lump in scrubs and a shower cap.

"It's not fair. You're stunning, and I look like a lunch lady," I complain.

She reaches up and plucks the cap from my head. "We can fix that," she tells me. She takes my good hand and draws me toward her room.

"Your clothes are not going to fit me," I remind her as I follow her in.

She turns and reaches past me, pushing the door shut with a quick, almost-flippant movement. "I wasn't planning on lending you clothes," she says. She draws close to me. Her fingertips play along the hem of my shirt. "You could take this off. If you like." She bites her lip, flushing with nervousness. I bump my fingers against hers.

"We don't have to go fast," I tell her. "We only just kissed."

"I want to see you," she says, wetting her lips with her tongue. "And—kiss you again. If that's all right."

In answer, I lift the hem of my shirt. She has to help me get it over the splint, and then it falls to the floor. She wears a soft camel-colored sweater, and when she leans in to kiss me again, it brushes against my bare skin, the sensation so delicious I'm not even very tempted to remove it.

We make our way to the bed. There's some negotiation and awkwardness, trying to find a position that doesn't hurt. We kiss hungrily at first, desperate for each other's touch. After a while, the kisses grow slower as we luxuriate in each other.

The sweater comes off eventually.

Straddling me on the bed, her bright red bra stark against her pale skin, she kisses me deeply as I rest my palm on her hip. Her skirt spills over me, and her fingers play with the strap of my embarrassingly plain and functional black bra.

"I think I like kissing," Del says with a little grin I would kiss away if I could reach her.

"I think I like kissing you," I say.

She tosses her hair back, straightening up.

I reach out as if to catch her but only trail my hand down her arm. "This is good, then?"

"It's very good," she assures me. Then, nervously, "What about for you?"

"It's perfect," I promise her.

“I know you’ve probably done a lot more before,” she says.

It’s my turn to laugh. “That’s right. I’m a real player.”

Her cheeks go pink. “You must have dated other people.”

I shake my head. “Ruth is the only girl—only person—I’ve dated, and we were fifteen. We didn’t get much past a few kisses. I’ve never . . .”

“I just assumed . . .”

“Have you . . . ?” Our voices overlap, and we break into another nervous laugh.

“When would I have had the chance?” she asks.

“I thought maybe you and Aubrey,” I say.

“Entirely platonic,” she tells me. She rolls to the side, dropping onto the bed beside me and wriggling up until she’s tucked under my good arm. “Is it okay if we don’t go any further?”

“Totally okay,” I assure her. My heart rate slows down, and now I sink into the bliss of just having her here, next to me. “I don’t know if I’m ready to do more, either. Even without a broken arm.”

“I hate him for what he did to you,” Del says.

“Please don’t say that,” I tell her, turning my face away.

“Why not? Don’t you hate him?”

“Dylan isn’t the one who broke my arm,” I say. I still can’t look at her. I stare at the ceiling instead.

“Luke.” She says the word tonelessly.

“I didn’t lie to you,” I say.

She is quiet; I imagine her playing over the things I’ve said, searching for the moment I misled her. “It would be okay if you did,” she says at last. “I wouldn’t blame you.”

“I would.” My eyes sting. I shut them. “It was my fault. If I’d just shut up, everything would have been fine. Dylan was leaving. But I was just so angry. And Luke was terrified about me telling. It was the worst thing I could have said. He snapped. He was horrified afterward. He took care of me. Got me to bed. He didn’t mean to do it. Dylan’s the one who wrecked things in the first place. Dylan’s the reason he was on drugs, that he got arrested at all.”

“And Luke’s the one that hurt you,” Del says.

“I can’t,” I whisper. I can’t start hating him, because if I do, I’ll never stop. And it won’t end with Luke. If I hate Luke, then how must I feel about the parents who have chosen him over me again and again? And if I hate

him, do I have to hate the brother who was so good at making me laugh, who helped me build a blanket fort that covered half the house and strung it with fairy lights?

“I think I understand,” Del says. Her fingertips trail up the inside of my forearm. “You don’t have to hate him, Eden. But you have to protect yourself. He can’t hurt you again. You have to do whatever you need to so that doesn’t happen again.”

“I know,” I say. “I know I can’t go back. But I can’t stay here forever, either.” As I say the words, I realize what they mean. I can’t stay forever, and she has to. I look at her with an apology in my eyes, but she only kisses my shoulder.

“Eden? Can you promise me something?”

“Of course,” I say. “Anything.”

“Remember me?” she says.

I stiffen, craning my neck to look at her.

She traces a fingertip along my clavicle, not meeting my eye. “You’re going to graduate and leave and move on, and I’ll still be here. I can’t ask you to stay with me, but if you could visit, sometimes, if you could call me . . .”

“Del,” I chide softly. “You’re not going to be stuck here forever. Whatever this is that’s happening to you, we’re going to fix it. And even if you did have to live here your whole life, I could never forget you. And I won’t leave you.”

She rolls onto her back and stares at the ceiling. “I have this horrible feeling like I know what’s going to happen. That we won’t be able to stay together. For so long, I’ve thought my only options were to be alone or to drown, and then here you are. You’re here, and for the first time, I can breathe. But it won’t last.”

There are tears running down her cheeks. I don’t know what to say. I can only hold her close as she shakes, crying silently. Her body is slender against mine, and cold, and I wish I could promise to hold on to her forever.

I wish I could tell her that she’s wrong and everything will be okay.

But I promised not to lie.

**THE SUMMONS COMES** the next day, pulling me out of third period. I walk to the administrative building with trepidation. All the message says is that Dean Oster wants to speak with me.

My mind races as I cross the campus, wondering what he knows—about Maeve, about what we were doing, about any of it. His secretary is at her desk outside his office; she ushers me inside immediately.

“Eden, good,” he says. He sits behind his desk, looking over something on his laptop. He shuts the lid as I enter and gestures behind me. “Close the door, will you?”

I obey robotically. My mouth is dry. We have no idea what Oster’s involvement in any of this is, but I couldn’t forget what Liz Elliott said: he tried to keep Maeve and Grace apart.

“Take a seat,” Oster says.

I sink into the chair in front of him. Each time I’ve sat here, it’s been right before my life changed. My nerves are electric.

Oster folds his hands. He looks grave, his white eyebrows drawing together. “Eden, I heard from your teachers today about your injury.”

Instinctively, I draw my splinted arm against my body. “I fell. During Vespers,” I say.

“Yes. I also heard some reports that you were drinking beforehand,” he says.

I wonder who’s telling tales. Not Ruth and Zoya, surely? At least I can be certain it isn’t Veronica. Not after what she saw. “Not drunk, just clumsy,” I assure him, but my voice is tense and unconvincing.

He leans back in his seat. “Your teachers also tell me that you are struggling with your work. You’re off to a rough start this year.”

“It’s only been a few weeks,” I say.

“And you’re already quite behind,” Oster says.

“Shouldn’t I be talking to my teachers about this?” I ask testily. “A few missed homework assignments isn’t exactly a dean-level crisis, is it?”

He taps a finger against the arm of his chair. “Normally, it wouldn’t be. But I have to confess, Eden, that I was concerned about the decision to send you to Abigail House. In some ways, it seemed ideal. Two birds, one stone, all of that—your tuition problem and Delphine’s need for a companion solved neatly. Now I’m not so sure. I am beginning to question the wisdom of removing you from the support of your friends.”

“I like Abigail House,” I say immediately, fighting the edge of panic. He can’t make me leave, can he? Without Abigail House, I’d have to leave the school altogether—he wouldn’t do *that*.

“I know you and Delphine have become quite close,” he says, and something about the tone of the words makes me tense up.

“Who told you that?” I ask. And then I realize—the cameras. We forgot about the cameras.

When Del kissed me, it was in the living room, not the safety of her bedroom. Madelyn was anxious to be away; of course she was checking on her often. She could have mistaken Saturday night’s drama for a sleepwalking episode, since she couldn’t see the downstairs hall, but the kiss—the kiss she must have seen.

I bristle. “Del and my relationship is none of your business.”

“True,” Oster says. “But your well-being is.”

“And it’s bad for my *well-being* if Del and I are dating?” I ask.

“That’s not what I’m saying. I have no problem with the two of you seeing one another,” he says, raising a hand.

“Right. Like you didn’t have a problem with Maeve and Grace Carpenter?” I ask.

His face pales. “Where did you hear about Maeve Fairchild?” he asks.

I straighten up in my seat. “I know that she and Grace were in love. I know that you tried to keep them apart.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Oster says. He sounds angry. He straightens up, and I find myself shrinking away from him.

“Then you didn’t break them up? You didn’t help Grace’s family forbid her from seeing Maeve?” I demand.

“I have no idea where you heard about Maeve, but she was a troubled girl. I was trying to protect Grace. As I’m trying to protect you now.”

“Protect Grace from being in love with a woman,” I say, voice dripping with scorn.

Oster's jaw tightens. "I am not going to discuss this any further with you, Eden. And it has no bearing on the situation at hand. I am not kicking you out of Abigail House, and I am not saying anything about your relationship with Delphine. But I *am* requiring that you speak to a counselor. You have an appointment with Ms. Maynard tomorrow afternoon. Be there, or we will need to revisit this conversation. We are done here. You can go."

His tone invites no disagreement. I stand, fuming, and stalk out the door. His secretary wordlessly hands me a Post-it with my appointment details on it, and I flee. In the sunlight outside, I scrub away the sheen of tears that's formed over my eyes.

Maeve couldn't show me who was there the night she was pushed into the Narrow.

But I'm starting to get a pretty good idea.

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"You're sure about this?" I ask as we walk across campus. I have my hand tucked in my jacket pocket while Veronica hooks her arm through mine, keeping me close. She's been like that all week. Anytime I'm not with Del, Veronica is either glued to my side or texting me to check that I've definitely, absolutely dried off completely, yes, between my toes, even.

The visit to Ms. Maynard was frustrating—for both of us, I'm sure. I made up simple answers about stress and homesickness and an accidental fall, and she talked to me about self-care and the "resources available to me." Unless those resources include a guide to séances, I don't think they'll do me much good.

At least it seems to have gotten Oster off my back for now. I still don't trust him, but he hasn't called me back into the office or pulled me out of Abigail House.

"It'll work better with all of us—four is an important number," Veronica says. "Four cardinal directions and all that. And we can't do it at Abigail House—that's putting Del in too much danger, like you pointed out—so we're going to have to use Westmore, which means we can't exactly hide it."

"They're going to think we're crazy."

"It's not like that will come as a complete surprise to them," she says sensibly.

Zoya and Ruth are alone in Westmore. Veronica managed to peel Remi away from her side by saying she needed to focus on her friends. Being sickeningly emotionally mature, he commended her for being a good friend and agreed to give her a bit more distance.

“Hey, klutz,” Ruth says when we come in from the hallway. “How’s the war wound?”

“Better,” I say. And it’s true. With a proper splint and not having people accidentally bump it five times a day, it’s healing a lot faster than the first couple times around. The doctor offered me a prescription for something a little stronger than Tylenol, but I turned it down. I don’t want to keep thinking of Dylan every time I take something for the pain.

“Ruth means to say, sorry we thought you were drunk when you were actually concussed,” Zoya says, slapping the back of Ruth’s head. Ruth ducks and rubs at the spot with exaggerated offense.

“You could have told us,” Ruth says.

“She did tell us she wasn’t drunk,” Zoya says. “Several times. And since she’s never gotten drunk or had more than a sip before, maybe we should have believed her.” She folds her arms. She’s wearing an open-knit shawl thing in deep emerald green that hangs off her in that slouchy, chic way of hers. “And your arm was already hurt. You poor thing.” She sounds genuinely sympathetic, but there’s a sharp barb of a question behind the words.

Veronica and I exchange a look. “I’m going to tell you everything,” I say. “But it’s going to take a while. We’d better sit down.”

Ruth and Zoya look at each other. Ruth takes a chair. Zoya folds herself onto the ground. Veronica sits with me and holds my hand as I speak. I start with the summer. Then I have to go earlier—to why I came to Atwood in the first place. All of Luke’s struggles. His rages. The things that were his fault and the things that weren’t. Because I need them to see him, actually *see* him, not just the worst things he’s done. It’s more than I’ve told even Veronica, but she doesn’t interrupt. She holds my hand, and I hold hers, and she keeps me afloat.

“I’m sorry,” I say when I’m done. I feel wrung out, numb. “I lied to you. I didn’t want you to feel sorry for me, so I lied this whole time.”

“Eden. Sweetie,” Zoya says softly.

“You have nothing to apologize for,” Ruth says. Her voice is rough and angry, and I flinch, but then I realize she’s not angry at me. She’s angry for

me. “I am going to pop these guys’ heads off their necks and play volleyball with them.”

“Seriously. Stop apologizing,” Veronica says, glaring at me. “I don’t care what you lied about. Bad shit happened to you, and you are not the one who should have to apologize for it. I officially forgive you, and if you tell me you’re sorry again, I’m going to be super annoyed because it means you don’t believe me.”

Veronica rakes back her hair and lets out a noise like this is the end of the conversation, and something inside me crumbles with relief. This is it. This is the big confession I was so afraid of. This is the pity I’ve been so dreading—Zoya looking like she wants to hug me, Ruth and Veronica exchanging a look that clearly means *We’ll plot the murders later. I already have ideas for where to hide the bodies.*

I’ve told myself all the reasons I have to keep the secret so many times. I convinced myself I would be the one to bear the consequences if the truth came out. Because that was how it was all my life. Things got worse with Luke, and I wasn’t allowed out of my room at night anymore. Our vacation got canceled, I couldn’t have friends over, I couldn’t live at home anymore.

I don’t want my parents giving up on Luke. But I wish, just once, I could be their priority.

“Okay,” Veronica is saying. “Now we have to tell you the rest.”

“There’s more? Please tell me Remi isn’t a serial killer or something,” Ruth says.

“Not that I know of,” Veronica quips. “This is actually a bit more out there. But you’re going to listen, okay? And not interrupt until we’re done. And we promise every part of this is true. We are not joking or pulling your leg. It’s deadly serious, and we need your help. Eden needs your help.”

“Okay,” Ruth says slowly. Zoya nods.

I shake myself. Take a deep breath. And tell them about the ghost.

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Predictably, they don’t believe us.

Thirty minutes later, we’ve come around to “I believe that you believe it’s real.” When we talked ahead of time, we agreed that’s probably as far as we would get without them actually seeing Maeve themselves, so this isn’t a surprise. Still, I think that Zoya is wavering. It’s one thing to dismiss

phantom footsteps or episodes of sleep paralysis, but we were both awake when we saw Maeve, and we saw her together. That's harder to dismiss.

Ruth is still trying. "Maybe it was a prank. Someone dressed up as a ghost," she offers.

"Maybe," I say, spreading my hands. I know there's no point in trying to convince her. She's just going to have to see it for herself. "Look, I don't expect you to totally change your view of the world just because we told you a wild story. But we need your help."

"We're going to do a séance, and we need four people," Veronica says.

"No. Nope. Nyet," Zoya says, making an X with her arms in front of her. "I have a Russian grandmother and a Black grandmother, and they would both kill me for even thinking about messing with spirits."

"I thought you didn't believe in ghosts," Veronica says.

"I don't. And I don't mess with them, either," Zoya says, as if this should be apparent.

"We can't do this without you," Veronica says.

I touch her arm. "It's okay." I turn to the others. "I can't ask you to do this if you don't want to, or if you think it's too dangerous. But I don't have a choice. Neither does Delphine. We don't get to choose not to mess with ghosts—she's already fixated on us. So you can find somewhere else to be, or you can help, but we're going to do it."

"Oh, I'm totally in," Ruth says. "Sounds like fun. And since nothing's actually going to happen, it's not actually dangerous, so . . ."

Zoya chews her lip. She touches the delicate gold cross that hangs around her neck. A gift from one of her grandmothers, but I don't know which. "I'll help," she says quietly.

And with that, we have a plan.

**WE DECIDE ON** Saturday for the séance, which means several days of class to get through. My grades are slipping. I know it, my teachers know it, Oster knows it. It's getting harder to dodge requests for meetings after class.

As soon as this is over, I tell myself, I'll focus.

There is one last thing to do before the séance. We need water from the Narrow. Veronica didn't want me to be the one to get it, but I convinced her it would be safe enough in daylight, and it's easiest for me to sneak away from Abigail House without being spotted. I'm standing up, a cheap plastic water bottle filled with river water in hand, when my phone rings.

I almost don't answer it. It takes me a moment to recognize the number. It's the same one that sent me those warning texts. Aubrey. I fumble to put the bottle down and answer before it goes to voicemail.

"Hello?"

For a moment there's silence, and I think I've missed the call after all. Then Aubrey's voice comes over the line. "Is this Eden White?"

"Yeah. Is this Aubrey?" I ask, my heart pounding. I don't really need to ask.

"Yes," Aubrey says. Another pause. "I got your number from Leah Stevens. I'm not sure I should be calling you."

"It's good to hear from you," I tell her. "We've all been worried about you. Delphine especially. She's been trying to get in touch."

"I know. I'm sorry I haven't talked to her. I haven't been in a good place," Aubrey says.

"Are you okay?" I ask her. "Are you recovering?"

"I'm healing," Aubrey says. "I don't know if I'll ever really be better, though. After what happened."

"It was the Drowning Girl, wasn't it?" I ask.

She lets out a sigh. "You've seen her."

"More than seen her," I say. In front of me, the Narrow makes its sly way between the rocks. I can't sense her here. She is deep below, I think. The night and the rain draw her out. Perhaps because it's like the night she died.

“I got careless,” Aubrey says. “I let the water in. I woke up and she was standing over me. She was trying to say something, but I couldn’t understand her. She got angry. She . . . I don’t even know how I got away. I got outside. That’s all I remember. They said someone found me.” There’s a ragged relief in her voice, one I recognize. She knows that I believe her.

“It isn’t her fault,” I say. “She can’t help it. She’s trying to communicate. To get help.”

“She almost killed me,” Aubrey says in a disbelieving tone.

“She’s lost,” I protest. “She’s trying to find someone. The girl she loved.”

“The Drowning Girl is dangerous,” Aubrey says flatly. “I heard you got hurt. That’s why I called. I thought you needed to be warned. If you’re smart, you’ll get out of Abigail House. You’ll get as far away from that place and Delphine as you can.”

“I thought Delphine was your friend,” I say.

Aubrey makes a strangled sound. “She is. But it isn’t safe. That *thing* is drawn to her for some reason. Madelyn knows more than she says. She knows it’s not safe and she let me stay there. It’s not just so Delphine has company. It’s because if the ghost gets in, she comes to that room first. It’s where she lived. That was her room. And if there’s someone in there . . .”

So that’s what I am. What Aubrey was. A distraction.

But why keep Del in Abigail House at all? If Maeve is drawn there, surely another building on campus is safer. Unless it *had* to be Abigail House.

“I have a way to talk to Maeve without getting hurt,” I say.

“Maeve?”

“That’s her name. Maeve Fairchild,” I say.

There’s a choked silence. “I thought it was Grace.”

“No. She’s looking for Grace,” I say.

To my surprise, Aubrey laughs. The sound is edged with tears. “I got it all wrong, then. All of that, and I didn’t even have the right girl. Listen to me, Eden. It’s not worth it. Don’t get yourself killed trying to save the dead.”

“I won’t,” I say. Because I’m not going to die. Maeve isn’t going to hurt me.

It takes me a few seconds to realize that the line has gone dead. Aubrey’s hung up.

“She’s wrong,” I tell the trees, the rocks, the river. The spirits below. “I know you don’t want to hurt me.”

The Narrow does not answer, and I turn away.

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“This is so silly,” Ruth says, standing off to the side of the Westmore living room while Zoya and Veronica work with a stake and a piece of string to chart a perfect circle of chalk.

“Just go with it,” Veronica says, hiding her irritation poorly.

“Fine,” Ruth says with a sigh. If this works, she won’t be able to keep denying it’s real.

*If this works.*

Veronica painstakingly draws a star within the circle, marking out a pentacle. Zoya sets a candle at each of the points of the star, and then the two of them step back.

“One more thing to do, and then we can get rolling,” Veronica says, her usual bravado masking the quaver in her voice.

The last time she saw Maeve, it was terrifying. I can’t blame her for being nervous. But I wish that I could soothe that fear away. I’m not afraid. I’m eager. I want to see her again, want to talk to her without the pain. If we can do that, Veronica will see that Maeve isn’t evil. She doesn’t have ill intent. She’s just trying to reach out.

“Eden?” Veronica prompts.

I jump. “Right. I got it,” I say. I pull the bottle of river water from my bag.

“Let’s see if we can get a slightly more dignified container,” Zoya suggests, and goes to the cupboard. She comes back with a ceramic serving bowl with a deep black glaze and sets it in the center of the pentacle.

“Much better,” Veronica agrees.

I don’t think the aesthetics of the thing really matter, but I step forward, carefully navigating past the chalk, and pour the water into the bowl.

Veronica instructs us to sit around the circle. Each of us has our own candle to hold, and Veronica waves a crystal around to cleanse the energy in the room. We have no way of knowing if Veronica’s piecemeal traditions will map to Maeve’s reality, but it’s the best we’ve got.

“Now what?” Ruth asks as we sit there, lights off and candles flickering.

“Now we call her,” Veronica says.

It all feels so awkward. Like we’re kids putting on a play or goofing around at a slumber party. Upstairs, someone is watching an action movie too loudly. A toilet flushes and the water rushes through the pipes.

I clear my throat. “We call to the spirit of Maeve Fairchild. Maeve, hear us.” That seems properly occult, but it doesn’t feel right. Ruth fidgets. Zoya glares fixedly at the bowl of water in the middle of the circle, as if she’s willing it not to do anything spooky.

I shut my eyes. “Maeve,” I say. As if I’m talking to her from across a quiet room. “It’s me. Eden. We think we can talk to you without you hurting me. We’d like to try. Do you hear me?”

“Eden,” Veronica whispers.

I open my eyes. At first I don’t understand why she’s spoken, and then I see it: the surface of the water rippling.

“There must be a draft in here,” Ruth says, but Zoya shushes her.

“Maeve. Can you hear me? Can you come to me?” I ask.

The water in the bowl rises higher, as if more is flowing up from below. Zoya gasps as the liquid overflows the container and spills onto the floor, seeping out in all directions.

“What the hell?” Ruth starts, but at Veronica’s sharp look, she shuts up.

“Maeve,” I say again. “You can hear me. I know you can. Come through.”

A sharp crack sounds as the bowl breaks neatly in two, the rest of the water spilling out. It flows over the floorboards, over the chalk lines of the star, a spreading puddle in the center of the circle.

A footprint appears, the water displaced. Then another. Another. Slow, uneven steps.

“Oh, fuck,” Ruth whispers, clutching her candle.

The footsteps pause. Slowly, they turn in place, the water sloshing around them.

She’s standing in the center of the circle, facing straight toward me.

“Eden,” comes a whisper.

All the candles go out.

**ZOYA SCREAMS AS** darkness engulfs us. “Don’t move!” Veronica shouts. “Don’t break the circle!”

My heart hammers in my chest. Veronica’s lighter rasps, and a thin flame appears in her hand. It barely illuminates anything.

It’s enough to see the figure crouched in front of me.

Zoya screams again—and this time Ruth does, too, throwing herself back away from the circle.

I don’t move. Maeve’s face is eighteen inches from mine. She’s crouching down with her elbows on her knees, hands dangling casually. Her head is cocked to the side, her hair plastered in dripping strands across her sallow cheeks. It’s then I realize that her leg isn’t twisted anymore. Neither are her fingers. Her eye is still scarlet, but clearer, and the water that runs from the corners of her mouth is only a slow, steady trickle.

She’s getting better, I think. She’s getting stronger.

“Eden,” she says. Her voice has a gurgle to it, but it’s clear enough to understand. “You’re hurt.” Her fingers stretch out—but they don’t go beyond the edge of the pooling water.

“You hurt her,” Veronica says.

Maeve’s face swings in her direction, but she seems disinterested. She looks back toward me as Zoya, muttering what might be a prayer, creeps over to Veronica to relight her candle.

“We thought we could talk to you safely this way,” I say. Even though it’s out, I clutch my candle tightly in my hand.

“You told me you would help me find her,” Maeve says, a hint of a question in the garbled words. “Did you change your mind?”

“No,” I say. “I’m going to help you. *We’re* going to help you. But we don’t know where Grace is, Maeve. You have to tell us what happened that night. Where she might have gone.”

“That night,” Maeve says. Her eyes grow unfocused. She draws in a strained breath, then coughs, filthy water gushing over her lips.

“Oh fuck oh fuck oh fuck,” Ruth is chanting. “This can’t be real. This *cannot* be real.”

“Maeve. The night you died. Where was Grace?” I ask, tuning Ruth out.

“Grace. She was—they wouldn’t let me see her,” Maeve says. Her fingers crawl up into her hair, digging painfully at her scalp. “Said I was bad. Said I was wicked. Said I made her do things, that she’d been good before she met me, and she was. She was so good, and she never stopped. So sweet, so serious. Such a solemn little thing, you know—didn’t know how to laugh properly until I taught her.”

With every word, her voice grows clearer. The bright star of blood in her eye recedes to a small point of scarlet.

“We said we were going to be together forever. But they tried to get rid of me. It didn’t work. We were going to run away together,” she says, her voice turned bright and hopeful. Slowly, across the circle, Ruth and Zoya steal back to their places. Zoya’s eyes are wide. Ruth’s jaw is clenched so hard, it flares.

“You came to the school. To the woods, to meet Grace,” I prompt.

“It was dark and she wasn’t there,” Maeve says. Her voice trembles. She gags on water. “Grace wasn’t there, she—it’s dark—the water—I can’t hold on, I—don’t let go, don’t let go, foreverforeverforever—” Her stream of words cuts off. She jerks backward, blood blooming in the air behind her as if through water. Her feet lift off the ground, her spine bending backward, her hands lifting as if drifting in a current. We’re losing her.

Before I can register what I’m doing, I’m on my feet. Veronica screams at me to stop, but I’ve already stepped across the line of chalk, my foot splashing into the puddle of cold water. I reach out, grab her arm. She isn’t moving, yet I can feel a force tearing her away from me, an unstoppable current.

“Maeve!” I yell. “Look at me!”

I pull hard.

The river relinquishes its hold. I stumble back as she falls toward me, and now I’m the one falling—but her hand turns, catches my arm, each of us holding the other tight.

There is no pain. Not this time. Our breaths are ragged, and they seem to fill the dark around us.

“Look,” Maeve whispers.

Another sound emerges—the rush and babble of water. We aren't in the room anymore, but wrapped in darkness pricked by the light of a swollen moon. Beside us glides the thin silver tongue of the Narrow—no, beside me and me alone, because Maeve is gone.

My body isn't my own. I wear a familiar blue blouse and jeans, and dark hair tumbles over my shoulders.

A branch cracks behind me. I turn. A shadowed figure approaches from among the trees. For a moment my heart leaps—*Grace*—but the figure is too tall and too broad. Anger burns away my fleeting happiness.

“You can't keep her from me,” I say. “I love her, and she loves me.”

“You shouldn't have come,” says a voice that I recognize immediately, despite being decades younger than when I last heard it. “Go home, Maeve.”

“She is my home,” I say, the words sandpaper in my throat. “At least let me see her. Let me talk to her.”

“I can't do that. You need to leave. If you don't, I will do whatever is necessary to make sure you're kept away from her.”

“You have no right,” I bite out.

The figure steps out from the trees, and the moonlight casts a pale wash of light over Geoffrey Oster's face. He's younger—much younger. But the hardness of his eyes and the stern line of his mouth haven't changed. “Don't test me, Maeve.”

Rage tears through me, my anger snapping free. “You heartless bastard!” I shout at him. “How can you do this to us? You'll never keep me away from her!” I scream, and all I want to do in that moment is leap on him, gouge his eyes with my nails, bite and claw and tear. I wheel away, turning my back on him, hands balled into fists.

And then—

There's a strange sensation, like hurtling through the dark. Then, strangely, a smile creeps over my face. The rain pelts down. My clothes are soaked through, clinging to my skin, and I shiver with cold, but all I can feel is inexplicable elation. I can't seem to see properly; everything is blurred from the rain in my eyes.

“I—” I begin to say.

Something shoves me hard in the back, and I pitch forward. Toward the silver ribbon of water. I twist as I fall, and my flailing hands grab hold of an arm I can't see, fingernails digging into flesh, but I keep falling.

I don't hit the water. I come to screaming instead, someone's arms wrapped tight around me, my head against someone's chest.

"Shh, shh," that person is saying, stroking my hair. "Hush. It's okay. Be quiet."

A hammering knock sounds. I grope about in my confusion, trying to understand what's happening. I'm not Maeve anymore. I'm back in Westmore and Veronica is holding me, Zoya crouched nearby.

"Shut her up," Ruth hisses, and then strides over to the door.

I clamp my mouth closed with a whimper. The chalk circle remains, three of the candles burning steadily and the water spilled inside the circle, but Maeve is gone. I ache all over, but I don't think my arm has rebroken, and there's none of the nausea or dizziness that comes with the head injury.

"Yeah, what?" Ruth says, yanking the door open a few inches. A muffled voice comes from the hall. "That's because we're murdering someone in here! You think you can murder someone without screaming? Jesus Christ, it's not even midnight, what are you complaining about?" Over her shoulder, she shouts, "Use an ice pick, finish her off! These people are trying to watch porn in peace! There, that should cover it. We good? Great."

She slams the door on whatever poor neighbor had the misfortune to come check on us and stalks back over.

"Are you back?" she asks.

"Back," I say weakly.

"Good." Ruth turns on the lights. It's only then I realize how soggy everyone is—Ruth's left sleeve is soaked, and Zoya's shirt is splattered with water. I'm completely drenched, and consequently so is Veronica, since she's holding me.

"What happened?" I ask, dazed.

"You grabbed Maeve," Veronica says. "She vanished and you sort of—your eyes rolled back in your head and you collapsed, and then there was water everywhere, and then suddenly you started screaming and woke up. It was only a few seconds."

"Oh," I say inadequately. I look around. "But everyone's okay?"

"Yeah, we're fine. Just traumatized for life," Ruth says, arms crossed. "Plus, I am extremely pissed that I now have to believe in the supernatural like some kind of fucking hippie-witch dipshit. No offense, Veronica."

"Fuck you, too; no offense taken," Veronica says, flashing a peace sign.

Zoya groans and collapses onto the couch, face buried in her hands.

“So I’m guessing that whatever you wanted to happen, that wasn’t it,” Ruth says. She sits down beside Zoya and grabs her hand, the two of them clinging to each other as if for dear life. I don’t blame them.

“Actually, I think it was progress,” I say. I drag my soaked hair back behind my shoulders, shivering with the fading adrenaline. Veronica makes a little noise and grabs a blanket, which she wraps around my shoulders. “I saw what happened that night. Part of it, at least—the part Maeve saw.”

“You saw her die?” Veronica asks, fascinated and horrified in equal measure.

“Not quite. Thankfully, I woke up before I hit the water,” I say. Those are not sensations I want to share. “It was all so real. Like it was *me*. She was waiting for Grace, but someone else showed up. Oster.”

“Dean Oster?” Zoya asks, brows knitted.

“He was a teacher back then. He tried to break them up. That night he was there. He threatened Maeve, but she told him she’d never give up, and then . . .” It felt so real, but the details of it are fading as quickly as a dream. “She didn’t fall. She was pushed. By Oster.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Veronica says. “He’s the dean. He’s friends with my parents.”

“And back then, he was desperately trying to keep a couple of queer girls from being together,” I snap. “You should have heard the things he was saying. He was treating Maeve like she had some kind of communicable disease. Like Grace caught the gay from her and if they got rid of Maeve, she’d be cured.”

“I buy Oster being a douche, but murder?” Ruth asks.

“It is hard to imagine,” Zoya says. I start to protest, but she raises a hand to stop me. “But it was a long time ago. We barely know him now. We don’t know what he was like or what he believed. Or what he might have done. You saw him kill her?”

“Yes,” I say. Then, “I mean, I didn’t see him, but that was because Maeve’s back was turned. He was the only one there.” It had to be him. Geoffrey Oster, the man supposedly in charge of our safety and well-being.

“That doesn’t answer the questions of what happened to Grace and where she is,” Zoya says.

“So we ask Oster,” I say. The others look at me with varying levels of surprise and discomfort, but I bare my teeth. “He’s been dodging all of my questions, but now I know he was *there* that night. He was the last one to

see Maeve alive. We confront him, and we make him tell us everything he knows. We make him tell us what he did.”

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I doubt if any of us get much sleep that night. I manage to convince everyone that we need to talk to Oster, but we disagree about how and when and who should do it. It isn't like he's some random person, or even a teacher. He's the dean. He could make trouble for any of us if he wanted.

I sleep in the bed that should have been mine, snatching a few fitful minutes of rest. I dream, but not of Maeve or the water, and when I wake, I can't tell if I'm relieved or disappointed.

All I told Del was that “it” worked and I'd talk to her soon. We didn't want to say anything more over the school networks. Now, with the sun up, I dress quickly, eager to get back and update her. I throw my things into my bag, grabbing my keys from the table in the living room. The half-crushed water bottle I used to carry the river water is still there, half an inch of silty water in the bottom. The last evidence of last night's activities. The chalk has been cleaned from the floor, the water sopped up, the broken bowl disposed of. But there it is: unglamorous proof of what we've done.

Of what we now know.

Only Zoya is awake. She emerges from her room as I get ready to go, looking puffy-eyed and tired.

“I need to update Del,” I tell her.

“You and her are really getting along, aren't you?” she asks.

I feel the heat crawling up my neck. “Yeah. Is that a problem?”

“No, of course not,” Zoya says. “But you don't make things easy on yourself, do you?”

“That might be an understatement.”

She laughs her soft, smoky laugh. “I've missed you, Eden,” she says, crossing her arms and leaning against the doorframe.

“I haven't gone anywhere.” I set my weight back on my heels, fingers wrapped tight around the strap of my messenger bag.

“Yes, you have. And I understand. I just wanted you to know that you're missed. I miss having someone who understands the need to be quiet. And I love Ruth and Veronica to death, but they are terrible listeners.”

“Sometimes . . .” I hesitate. But I tell myself I’m done lying to my friends. “Sometimes I feel like I don’t understand why I’m part of . . . of *us*. I’m not special. I don’t have some amazing talent or plan for my life. I’m just kind of . . . here.”

“We’re not a prize you win for being special enough. We’re your friends, and you’re ours,” Zoya says. “What, like we should drop you because you aren’t a math genius or a music prodigy? Do you really think that poorly of us?”

I shift uncomfortably, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear.

“I’m always kind of terrified you’re only hanging out with me because you feel sorry for me,” I admit. “I know it’s not true. Or I do when I’m thinking clearly, at least.”

“I think we all feel that way sometimes. Well. Maybe not Veronica.” She lets out a little sigh. “Eden, do you remember sophomore year, when you and Ruth broke up? You weren’t even talking, but I found you making her this big bouquet of paper flowers from used copies of her favorite books. I didn’t understand why you’d do that for someone you weren’t even speaking to. But you said something like, ‘Later, when we aren’t mad at each other anymore, we’re going to be friends again. I’m making this for my friend, even if she doesn’t show up for a while.’ ”

“I forgot about that,” I say. I wanted to do the project, and I knew Ruth would like it. It didn’t occur to me not to make it for her.

“You’re literally the first person we all go to when we need a shoulder to cry on, because you listen and you always understand because you pay attention. You knew I was feeling weird about my photos before I said a single thing, and you got Ruth to completely spill her guts after about thirty seconds. And I’m sure you’ve noticed, because you notice everything, she doesn’t really do ‘vulnerable.’ ”

I make an amused sound of agreement, looking down at the floor. Ruth is blunt, which some people mistake for being open, but she tends to lay things out as a way of *not* talking about the squishy feelings behind the facts.

Zoya rubs the side of her neck, looking at me with sad eyes. “You’re a really good friend, Eden, and that doesn’t change because you’re going through stuff, and you need to lean on other people for once, instead of being the one we all vent to.”

“Promise?” I ask, my voice weak.

“Yes, I promise we’re not going to ditch you because you’re having a hard year and you’re depressed and being haunted by a moist murder victim,” Zoya says, rolling her eyes.

I snort.

“We deserve better than you telling yourself a story where we’ve abandoned you. So do you.”

“Yeah,” I say. It’s all I can manage.

“Check back in soon,” she says. “And stay dry.”

“I’ll try,” I say.

She gives me a look.

“I will,” I amend, and she waves a hand to let me go.

All the way across campus, my mind wanders back through weeks and months and years, snagging briefly on moments—Veronica’s birthday last year when we filled her whole room with balloons so she couldn’t even find her bed; when Ruth won gold at the state championships and we screamed so loudly for her that I lost my voice for a week; the quiet nights when Zoya and I sat up together, painting each other’s toenails while she taught me how to thank her grandmother for the cookies in only slightly butchered Russian.

Maybe I don’t have their talent and poise and ambition, but Zoya’s right. They’ve never given me a single reason to think I’m not really their friend. They’ve never suggested I have to achieve some milestone to earn my place. I’ve been there for them, and they’ve been there for me—when I let them.

I don’t know how to make that be enough. I don’t know how to believe what I know to be true, when my mind keeps insisting that I am alone. That I *should* be alone.

Zoya said it so casually: *You’re depressed*. Is that the name for this feeling? This endless drowning deep?

As I approach Abigail House, I slow. Madelyn Fournier’s car is parked outside. Madelyn herself is standing in front of the house, face creased with something like worry.

She is talking to Dean Oster.

She looks up and spots me. Her face goes still for a moment, and then she says something to Oster and turns away, stepping briskly up the stairs and into Abigail House.

Oster looks my way. I approach with leaden steps. He is forty years older now, but there's no mistaking that he's the same man who stood by the Narrow and told Maeve that she and Grace couldn't be together.

Those wrinkled, liver-spotted hands were strong and youthful when they shoved her hard in the back. Did he really think he was protecting Grace? Does he realize now what a monster he was?

I set my jaw as I approach. "Dean Oster," I say, perfectly polite. "Excuse me."

"Miss White," Oster says. "We need to talk."

I'm well out of reach and it's the middle of the day, but I still feel a kick of fear being this close to him. *It was him it was him it was him*, my thudding heart seems to say.

"What's going on?" I ask.

"Ms. Fournier and I have been talking," Oster says. "We feel it's time you return to your original housing arrangement. You don't need to worry about the tuition; we've gotten things sorted out with your parents."

"You talked to my parents?"

"We were able to arrange a payment plan," Oster says.

"But why does that mean I have to leave?" I ask.

"It's what's best for everyone involved."

"The best for who, exactly? Delphine? Or you?" I ask. I feel knocked off balance, rage and fear swirling through me. "I know what happened to Maeve. I know what you did."

"I did nothing to Maeve Fairchild," Oster says. His face is shuttered. "I do not know what this obsession with Maeve is, Miss White, but it certainly has nothing to do with the present situation. Your things will be brought to Westmore. You should head back there now."

"You can't stop me from at least talking to Delphine," I say, and now my panic is growing.

"Of course you can talk to her. But right now, you need to go back to your friends," Oster says. He's still standing between me and the door.

"You can't," I say, and stop. I feel like I'm going to vomit. My hands curl into futile fists. "This is exactly what you did before. You're keeping me away from Delphine just like you kept Maeve away from Grace."

"This is nothing like that," Oster barks, and the anger in his voice makes me snap. "Maeve was a deeply troubled young woman."

“Like me, apparently,” I say. “Where is Grace Carpenter, Dean Oster? What happened to her?”

“Go back to Westmore,” he orders.

I dodge past him. Forty years on, he’s slower than he used to be. I’m at the door before he even turns around, putting in the code—but the light flashes red. I try again, with the same result.

He stands half turned, his shoulder to me, his head bowed. His hands are in his pockets. “This is for the best, Eden. Go back to your friends. You’re done with Abigail House.”

“*Why?*” I demand, turning on him. “Just tell me why.”

But he can’t. He won’t. He walks away without another word.

I sink down on the steps and wait. For what, I’m not sure. For Madelyn Fournier to come out and explain herself to me, or to tell me there’s been a mistake.

Finally I get up. With one last glance behind me, I walk back to Westmore.

**THE NIGHT IS** cold and crisp, no clouds to conceal the plentiful stars or the harsh crescent of the moon. I lie in bed and send another message.

What's going on? Please talk to me.

It's the latest in a long string of plaintive messages to Del that have gone unanswered. Did her mom take her phone?

Or could it be that Del is the one who wants me gone?

No. That's just my depressed, paranoid brain coming up with the worst explanation. "Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, *I'm going to go eat worms*"—level emotional sophistication. Good job, depression brain.

Having a word for the pattern my brain has fallen into—not just a *feeling*, but a sprawling web of thoughts and beliefs—doesn't fix things, but it feels like a start.

Miss you, I write simply, and make myself set the phone down.

It's entirely possible that Oster and Madelyn Fournier decided to kick me out because of me and Del. At least for Madelyn, I doubt it has anything to do with my gender. If she wants to break us up, it's because she's too protective of Del when it comes to *anyone*, male, female, or nonbinary.

It doesn't make it suck any less, though. And the other possible explanations are more worrying.

Like that Oster somehow knew we were onto him.

That he knows about the Drowning Girl, maybe.

Maeve must have lain in bed like this so many times. Knowing that Oster and others like him were doing everything they could to keep her away from Grace. Wanting to talk to her, to touch her.

I roll out of bed. The dorm is silent. It's past midnight, and even insomniac Zoya is fast asleep. I pad out of the bedroom and into the kitchen. I pull the trash can out from under the sink, not sure that I'll find what I need. But there it is.

The bottle of river water. I fish it out of the trash, glance around guiltily, and hurry back to my room, easing the door shut behind me.

“This is stupid,” I say, because it feels like someone should say it, and I’m the only one around. Then I unscrew the cap and tip a few drops of water over my upturned palm. It gathers in the creases. I sit on the edge of the bed, the liquid cold against my skin and my heartbeat swift.

“Maeve?” I call softly. “Can you hear me? Can you come?”

I feel the moment before she arrives. A shift in the air, a tension. And then there she is.

“Eden,” she says, a smile on her lips. Water drips from the cuffs of her pants and the tips of her hair, but the crimson star in her eye is gone and her limbs are straight and whole. She steps close to me and brushes the hair back from my face. I wait for the spark of pain that always follows her touch, but it’s hardly a whisper.

“You’re getting better,” I say.

“It’s easier to remember who I am,” she says. “To keep from hurting you. I’m sorry, Eden. I never mean to.”

“I know,” I say. Her palm cups my cheek. She feels so solid—cold but solid. She feels real. “I wasn’t sure you’d come.”

“When I’m in the water, it’s hard to hear,” Maeve says. She trails her fingertips along the shell of my ear as she speaks, sending a shiver down my spine. “It’s all darkness down there. And we’re alone, all of us.”

“There are others?” I ask.

“The Narrow drowns all it takes, and holds them fast,” she says. “Haven’t you heard that? We’re all down there. The damned and the drowned. It will never, ever let us go.”

“Except for you. You’re here,” I say.

“For her.” Her gaze grows distant. “I would do anything for Grace. We were made for each other, she and I. No one ever loved each other like we did. Maybe that’s how I can escape. For a little while, at least. But it always pulls me back.” Her voice is melancholy, but there’s a core of rage behind it.

“What you showed me from that night . . .”

“Don’t,” she says sharply. Her hand drops from my face. “Don’t talk about that. I don’t like to think about it. It makes me—it makes it—” She shudders, and blood oozes into the air behind her skull. She gasps, lunging forward. Her lips catch mine.

Now there is pain. A quick pulse of it at the base of my spine, and where she kisses me there's a burst that sends me rocking back, but she holds me, her hand tangled in my hair, and cradles my head against her chest.

"Shh. No, Eden, I'm sorry, shh. It's hard, holding on. I can't think about those things. You can't make me think about them, okay?"

I gasp, sagging against her. I almost made her lose herself. I almost made her die all over again. She's trying to be whole, trying to keep from hurting me.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I whisper, frantic to make her believe me so she won't leave.

She sinks down into a crouch in front of me, her hands on my knees. "It's okay. You didn't know," she says. "Just don't do it again."

"I won't. I promise," I tell her. She beams. I feel bruised from her kiss, but that smile is beautiful. And when she rises up and touches her lips softly to mine, I don't draw away. Not at first. I cannot deny the pull she has on me, the aching current of need. I can't tell if it is hers or mine. With her wounds knitted, life in her eyes and even faint color in her cheeks, she is beautiful, but Del's voice and face and touch are fresh in my mind. "What are you doing?" I whisper.

"Isn't it obvious?" Her fingertips trace a slow path along the inside of my knee.

"I'm not her. I'm not Grace," I say, and she makes a soft *ah*.

"I know. But I've been so alone, Eden. And you bring me back to life," she whispers.

Her presence makes the air electric. The energy before a storm. She's going to kiss me again. And that's like a storm, too, inevitable and powerful. "I'm with someone," I say.

"I don't want to be alone," she says. Her hand in my hair tightens. The pressure pulls back my head, bares my throat, and her lips and tongue and teeth are there, and I make a soft noise that she must take as agreement because then she's kissing me again, pushing me back onto the bed.

"Wait. Stop," I manage, and get a hand between us. It rests over her unbeating heart.

She looks down at me curiously. "What's wrong, Eden?" she asks. Cold water drips onto my chest, my neck, making me flinch.

"I told you. I'm with someone," I say. Am I? We haven't talked about what we are to each other. As if defining it might make this fragile thing

slip away.

“And you would rather be kissing her,” she says. She bends, nips my jaw. “You would rather be touching her.” Her cool palm slides up under my shirt, ghosting across my belly, and I suck in a startled breath. “Have you tasted her? Have you slept with her? Has she told you that she loves you, the way she told me?”

Alarmed, I try to rise, but she’s straddling my torso now, pinning me to the bed. Her eyes are wild with something I can’t name—grief and longing and rage and hunger.

“The way she told you? Delphine?” I ask.

“Grace,” she says. “You’re the girl who lives in her house. You’re the one that helps them keep her from me.”

I shake my head. “She’s not Grace. Her name is Delphine. Del.”

She bends. Presses her brow to mine, her hand wrapped around the back of my skull. The pressure is almost painful. Not quite. She hums in the back of her throat. “I’m remembering so much now. They took her name and who she was and they hid her away like a princess in a tower, but it won’t work. We’ll find our way back to each other. We always do.”

As the last words fade, so does she. I’m alone.

I shiver, cold water on my skin everywhere she touched me.

**MADELYN FOURNIER DOESN'T** answer the door at first. But I look up into the camera above me, my feet planted. “We need to talk about Grace and Delphine,” I say.

The silence lingers long enough that I doubt for a moment that Madelyn even knows I’m there. But at last the speaker in the doorbell turns on. “Come inside,” Madelyn says, and the lock pad gives a blat. I didn’t know she could access it remotely, but I’m not surprised. The tiny FellTech logo stamped on the metal is a clear reminder of how closely everything here is monitored and connected.

The routine of changing is second nature. My own clothes are gone, of course—delivered to Westmore as promised. It’s back to the school sweats. As it was the first day I met her, Madelyn’s door is left open a crack so that she won’t have to get up to answer. She sits on the couch, her long legs crossed and her gaze on some distant point to the side.

“Eden. Come in,” she says unnecessarily as I enter. She wears a sleeveless red silk blouse and black trousers, diamond earrings, eyeliner applied with engineered precision; I’m frizzy-haired and clad in maroon, but I straighten my spine and refuse to be intimidated. I take the seat across from her. “What do you know, Eden?” she says at once.

“I came here to ask you that,” I say.

She waves a hand. “I think we’re past the point where it’s useful to hide anything from you. I’m just trying to save time by not telling you what you already know.”

“I know about the Drowning Girl. I know that she comes here,” I say.

Madelyn flicks her thumbnail with her middle finger, making a distracting clicking noise that makes my skin crawl. “Yes. She does. She started coming for Delphine as soon as we brought her back to campus. Any rainy night.”

“The water hurts her because of the Narrow,” I say.

She dips her chin in confirmation. “The school is on a well-water system. The groundwater is contaminated with the water from the Narrow. And the

rain—I don't know if it's because some of it comes from the Narrow or if it's because it was raining the night that poor girl died, or something else entirely.”

“It was never about distilled water at all, then,” I say.

“Anything from off campus is fine,” Madelyn confirms. “And it seemed to be enough. I really thought we'd done enough to protect her, but then Aubrey . . .” She presses her fingertips to her lips, looking away. I lean forward.

“Aubrey started to see her.”

“I never would have knowingly put Aubrey in danger,” Madelyn says. “It's not as if she confided in me that she was seeing a ghost. I had to piece it together later. I wouldn't have let her stay if I knew.”

“But you let me move right in.”

Madelyn rakes a hand through the air, frustrated. “Aubrey was fine for years. I had no idea it would escalate so quickly with you. As soon as I realized what was happening, I was going to go to Oster and tell him it wasn't working out. I would pay your tuition, and you would be safe somewhere else. But he'd already made the arrangements.”

“Do you know who she is? The Drowning Girl?” I ask.

“I believe her name is Maeve Fairchild,” Madelyn says. She speaks readily, and her tone is one of relief to finally be able to tell someone.

“Does Oster know?” I ask.

“I don't know how much Geoffrey has worked out,” Madelyn says. “Or how much he believes. He's certainly happy enough to take my money, and he wouldn't want anything about Aubrey's accident to tarnish the reputation of the school, so he's smoothed things over. But I think he feels more comfortable existing in a state of deniability.”

“So he can pretend there's nothing supernatural happening while keeping his biggest donor happy,” I note.

“There are perks to wealth,” she acknowledges.

“Madelyn,” I say. My mouth is dry, my pulse racing. “What exactly is wrong with Del?” I already know. Or at least I think I do. But I need her to say it.

“Delphine told you the story of what happened to her twin,” Madelyn says. She wets her lips. “Delphine never had a twin. But Grace Carpenter did.”

The missing pieces fall into place, confirming what I had already guessed. The reason that Maeve is so inevitably drawn to Abigail House—to Del. She’s looking for Grace. She isn’t only chasing the past when she returns again and again to that house. Grace has been there all along.

“She’s not Delphine, is she? She’s Grace,” I say, barely above a whisper. Somehow, she’s Grace.

The girl I got to know.

The girl I fell for.

The girl I kissed.

I want to scream, or run, or weep. Instead I force myself to sit still and pretend that everything I understand about the world isn’t coming apart at the seams.

Madelyn shakes her head. “She is Delphine. And she is Grace. Like an amalgam of the two, combined into a single personality. Both of them and neither of them. She doesn’t know,” she adds quickly. “Sometimes she thinks Grace’s memories are dreams or daydreams. Sometimes she works them into her memories, finding places where they’ll fit, and I don’t contradict her—it’s important not to contradict her, because if you do . . .”

“She remembers that she’s dead,” I say, thinking of Maeve rearing back, her wounds reopening. “That’s why the water hurts her. It hurts *Grace*.”

“There are things that help. Keeping her here, in this house—it seems to have been a haven for her in life. She only grew settled enough to stop having fits when we brought her here,” Madelyn says. “It’s a delicate balance. Keeping things familiar, but not enough that she truly remembers. Encouraging the parts of her that are Delphine without alienating Grace. That balance is all that is keeping her alive. I don’t always know which parts are which. I don’t think I care anymore. She’s my daughter. Every part of her.”

She wipes tears from her eyes, not looking at me, and clears her throat before continuing.

“I’ve tried to find ways to extricate Grace without harming Delphine, but there aren’t rules for this kind of thing,” Madelyn says, her helplessness making her voice raw. “All I can do is keep her safe. I thought it was working, until . . .”

“Until Maeve found her,” I say. “Why now?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Madelyn says with false humor.

“She’s almost the same age as Grace when she died,” I say. “Maybe that’s why. Until now, she’s been different enough that Maeve couldn’t find her or recognize her.”

For the first time, it hits me that this means that Grace is truly dead. There is no secret happy ending, no family and future lived in secret. She died. She drowned, just like Maeve.

“She was in the water,” I say, staring at the wall behind Madelyn.

“What’s that?”

“Grace. She was in the water,” I say, pulling the threads together. “The night before Del first got sick, I saw her down by the Narrow. I sneaked out to do the leap, and she followed me. I saw her jump. She fell in. I thought she was dead. But when I ran to get help, she was back at the dorm. She was fine. I didn’t tell anyone. I didn’t think anyone would believe me.”

It wasn’t just that, though. It had been the shame and the fear and the guilt. Knowing she was down there because of us. Because we went, and because I pushed her away all day, was cold to a girl desperate for a friend.

“You . . .” Madelyn’s voice chokes off into silence. Fury flashes in her eyes for a moment, and I stiffen, ready for whatever she says to me. I deserve it. But instead her shoulders sag. “That explains it, then. That must be why—how—Grace found her.”

“She saved Delphine’s life,” I say. “But for whatever reason, she didn’t leave. Maybe she couldn’t. And now Maeve is looking for her.”

“She can’t have her,” Madelyn snaps.

“You need to tell Delphine,” I say.

“It could kill her. She can’t know,” Madelyn says, gripping the arm of the couch. “You cannot tell her, Eden. She can’t think about what happened. We just need to keep her safe and keep Maeve away from her.”

“She loves her.”

“There is a fine and fragile line between love and possession. Believe me. I’ve crashed through it often enough,” Madelyn says. “She may love Grace, but I love Delphine—and she can’t have Grace without taking my daughter. So I won’t let her.”

She looks at me, aching desperation in her eyes. We’re all just drowning. Pulled by a current we can’t see and can’t escape.

And I am no exception.

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I wander the campus in a haze. Delphine is Grace; Grace is Delphine. It wasn't one girl who emerged miraculously from those waters but two, and she doesn't know.

She can't know.

She has to know.

I can't keep this from her. But what if Madelyn is right and learning the truth kills her?

Maeve will never give up trying to reach Grace now that she's found her. And I wonder about Delphine. How long can a body survive with death inside it, a soul where it doesn't belong?

It doesn't matter what Del should or shouldn't know, though, if I can't reach her. The school is watching everything we do. I'm sure Del's messages aren't private. But maybe that's the solution as much as the problem. I pull out my phone.

Hope you're doing well. Just wanted to say hey. Veronica's talking to her friend Jane and will NOT shut up and I'm going a little crazy. Like, some of this stuff should definitely go in a private journal, not blasted full volume in a shared dorm, right?

Anyway. I miss you.

I send the messages, hoping that to anyone else they'll read like I'm trying to make small talk to get my ex to talk to me again. And hoping Del knows the real meaning.

I rush back to Westmore. Veronica is on the couch, making out with Remi. I yelp and shield my eyes. "Sorry!"

"WHAT DID WE SAY? NO PDA IN THE COMMON AREAS," Ruth hollers from her room.

"Sorry, Mom," Veronica calls back.

Remi chuckles, blushing, and gives me an embarrassed wave. "Hey, Eden. Good to see you," he says.

"You, too. Um, Veronica? I need to borrow your laptop," I say, bouncing on the balls of my feet.

"You have your own," Veronica says, a fine line between her brows.

“I’ll explain later, but I really need to use your AtChat account,” I say.

“Technically, that’s against school policy. It’s in the handbook,” Remi points out.

“So’s the bottle of scotch hidden behind your headboard,” Veronica shoots back. “Go ahead. Password is the same as always.”

“You need to start taking your cybersecurity more seriously,” Remi scolds her.

“Sweetheart, if you start talking to me about bits and bots and technobabble, I am never going to make out with you again,” she says with a throaty rasp to her voice, sliding into his lap once more.

I leave them to it, too anxious to be amused. I duck into Veronica’s room and log in. A minute later, I have her private journal on her AtChat account pulled up. I open a new entry and type.

I don’t know if you’re reading this, but it was the only thing I could think of. I need to see you. There are things I need to tell you.

The security system on Abigail House is FellTech. I thought you might have your mom’s log-in or be able to use Jane’s somehow and let me in.

I sit there, waiting, not sure if Del is reading or if she has a way to message me back. But then a message pops into Veronica’s inbox. It’s an admin alert—a canned response to reporting a technical issue. But when I open it, there’s a second message tucked below the first.

Mom’s going into town tomorrow around noon. I can get her phone and put in a new profile for the security system with the old code. I don’t think she’ll notice. She doesn’t really know how the app works.

I sit back, relief washing through me, and rub my hands over my face.

I need to see Del again. Not just because of what I need to tell her—after what happened with Maeve, I need Del’s touch. Her presence.

I delete the text of the private journal entry. Then I delete the admin message and log out. Hopefully, even if Oster thinks to check my profile, he won't go snooping around Veronica's.

Now there's nothing to do but wait.

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I have to skip class to get to Abigail House at the appointed hour. I'm finding it harder and harder to care about school. Grades and classes and college admissions seem unimportant next to Del and Grace and Maeve.

I approach the house slowly, scanning the drive for Madelyn's car. But there's no sign of her, and the house's isolation works in my favor, the screen of hedges and trees hiding me from casual observation.

I try not to look up at the camera as I step onto the porch. If Madelyn is watching, I'm screwed anyway, but I still try to look like I'm supposed to be here as I put in the code.

The light flashes red. My heart drops. Did Del not put in the new code? Maybe she couldn't get her mom's phone.

Or maybe I put the code in wrong, I scold myself, and try again.

The light flashes green. I dart inside. One obstacle down.

Even knowing Madelyn isn't there, I creep quietly from the foyer into the hall, like I have to sneak past her door. Del is already at the bottom of the stairs, watching me from the other side of the glass.

I cross the distance between us quickly, and she raises her hand to the glass. I rest mine on the other side, matching the spread of her fingers, and let out a laugh of agony and relief.

"Hey," she says, her voice shaky. "I didn't know if you were coming back."

"Of course I came," I say. She curls her fingers against the glass. "Can I come up?"

She nods. "I'll wait upstairs," she says, but she doesn't retreat at first. Her breath fogs against the glass. For two seconds, three, we stand there, separated only by the door, before she reluctantly draws away.

I rush my way through the procedures and practically gallop up the stairs. I want to kiss Del the moment I get to the top, but she catches my hand instead and pulls me into the bedroom—and then my lips are on hers, and

her back is against the door, her hands, urgent and greedy as they rove up my body, slide inside my shirt.

I break away before we can get too far and lean my forehead against hers instead. “Del,” I say. “God, Del.” Is that even the name I should be calling her?

“Shh. It’s all right,” she says, her fingertips on my jaw, her eyes searching mine.

“It isn’t,” I say. “None of it is.” I fall back away from her and sink onto the bed with a groan.

She settles next to me, taking my hand. Worry creases her face. “What’s wrong? What is it you needed to tell me?” she asks.

“I don’t know if I can. I don’t know if I should,” I say. If I tell her, it could be deadly.

But what’s the alternative? Let her live in ignorance, unable to make her own decisions, unable to protect herself or understand what’s happening? I shudder. I can’t make that decision for her. She has the right to determine her own future.

The only thing that keeping secrets has ever brought me is pain. It’s meant I had to carve parts of myself away. Pretend to be versions of me that don’t really exist.

Del needs to be able to make that choice.

“There’s something I found out,” I say. “But, Del, your mother thinks that even knowing this stuff could trigger your condition, maybe even kill you.”

She stares at me. I can’t begin to read the storm of emotions in her eyes. Fear and confusion and curiosity and—and trust. “It’s worth the risk,” she says.

“Are you sure?”

“I can’t keep living like this. The ghost at my door. I need to know what’s happening to me, or I’m going to lose it,” Del says, and offers a fragile, false smile.

It’s her choice, I remind myself. I don’t have a right to protect her from it. I take a deep breath. “I figured out what happened the night you fell in the Narrow. How you survived.”

“How?” Del asks, hunger in her voice.

“It was Grace. She saved you somehow. She helped you escape the water, but you helped her escape too.”

Del's hand tightens over mine. She looks at me with furious intensity, not yet comprehending. "Grace was in the water."

"She and Maeve were there together. Caught in the Narrow—together forever, right? But when you fell in and Grace saved you, she stayed with you. Maeve was left alone. That's why she started to show up. She was looking for Grace. And Grace was with you."

"With me," Del repeats.

"In you," I say, and wait, silent.

Slowly, Del looks away. She fixes her eyes on the opposite wall. "In me," she echoes. "As in . . ."

"Her ghost—or soul, or spirit, or whatever you want to call it—it's part of you," I say.

"I'm possessed," Del says flatly.

"I don't know if that's the right word for it," I say with a helpless shrug. "Your mother thinks it's more like you became the same person. You're Del. And you're Grace. One person, just more than that, too."

Del's hand slips from mine. She rises from the bed and walks slowly toward the vanity. The mirror reflects back her still, solemn face. "Sometimes I look at my reflection and I don't recognize it," she says. "I look at my mother and it takes me a moment to remember who she is. I knew I'd changed. I felt different. *Maman* said it was because I was sick. That being sick would change anyone. I was so impatient with my old friends when they tried to talk to me. They seemed like chattering little children. That's why I liked Aubrey so much. My mother said she was an old soul. Like me." She gives a hollow laugh. "Does that mean I'm sixty?"

"Grace died when she was sixteen. At this point, you're—Del is older than her," I say. I don't know how to talk about them separately. I don't know how much they *are* separate. She remembers her brother, the scent of her aunt's dahlias, as if they are her own memories. She's never noticed being two people, so maybe that means she isn't. She's one person who used to be two. "You're still breathing. That's good."

"I can feel it, though," Del says. She turns back toward me, her movements precise. "Like a trickle of water down the back of my throat. I can hear it. Like a sound that isn't yet a sound. The water rushing in."

Her breath comes fast with a little hitch at the end, a small wet sound at the back of her throat. I rise and cross to her, putting my hand over her sternum to feel the too-quick beating of her heart.

“You’re okay,” I tell her. “You’re safe. There’s no water here. You aren’t drowning.”

“But I did.”

“You did,” I acknowledge.

“Who am I, Eden? Delphine or Grace?” she asks.

“I don’t know. Both. Neither,” I say. “You’re Del. You’re the girl I love.” I haven’t said it before. Maybe it isn’t even true—not yet. But it will be. I know with all my soul that our love is a promised thing.

She looks at me, her lips parted. And in that moment, my heart cracks like brittle ice, and just like that, the promise tumbles into truth.

“I love you, Del,” I whisper.

“You promised never to lie to me,” she reminds me.

“I’m not lying. I love you,” I tell her. I press my lips to hers, and she lets out a soft sound of longing. “Del or Delphine or Grace, I love you,” I say, tears in my eyes.

She’s the one who kisses me this time, not gentle but hungry, half exultant and half desperate. But just as quickly as the kiss begins, she pulls away.

“Maeve,” she says. “I left her there. In the river.”

“Do you remember?” I ask.

She puts her hands to her head. “Tiny bits and pieces. I remember her. Her hands. I remember . . .” A blush creeps up her neck. She touches one finger to her lower lip. “We were supposed to be together forever.”

There’s a lump in my throat like a stone. Even death didn’t keep them apart. Who am I in the face of that? “Do you know what happened? How Grace drowned?” I ask.

Del shakes her head. “That’s down in the dark. In the water. I can’t go there,” she says, shivering. “I don’t think I can think about Grace too much. It’s—she—” She gives a shudder, and for a moment her breathing stops. *She* stops. Her body goes still, then limp, and I lunge forward in time to catch her.

She sags against me but quickly gets her feet under her again, coughing and spluttering on nothing as she straightens up. Her face is pale as a sheet of paper.

“Let’s not do that again,” I say, and she nods. “So thinking about Grace and about that night is a definite no-go. But you haven’t just drowned, so I think we’re doing okay.” My voice is shaky.

“Is that supposed to be my life, then? Trying desperately not to think too hard about who I used to be?” she asks. She sounds lost. “And what about Maeve?”

“Maybe we can make her understand,” I say. I think of her pressing me down onto the bed, the snarl of anger in her voice. She died for love of Grace. Died in panic and pain. Maybe she’s too damaged by that trauma to listen. To let go.

“I loved her,” Delphine says. It’s almost a question. She looks at me as if I can answer it. “I was the one who loved her so much, we died for each other. It was me, wasn’t it?”

“It was Grace. And you are Grace. Or part of you is,” I say. I hesitate. “What about now? Do you still love her?”

“I don’t know,” she says. She shuts her eyes. “Yes,” she whispers, and I know—she is remembering. The power of that love is flooding through her.

I ease back. “I wish there was some way you could be together again,” I say. It isn’t a lie. Not really. I do wish Grace and Maeve could be happy again, reunited.

And the idea of losing Del feels like its own death.

“I don’t want to die,” Del whispers. “I don’t want to go back there, Eden. It’s all darkness and cold and you’re dying with every breath.”

“What if . . .” I trail off. It’s too crazy an idea. It probably won’t work. But she looks at me with a bright shard of hope glinting in her eye, and I say it anyway. “What if you didn’t have to go back to the river to be with Maeve? What if she could escape the same way Grace did?”

She looks at me blankly. “How?”

“Grace and Maeve’s chance at life, their chance to be in love, was stolen from them,” I say. “But we could give it back if Maeve could do the same thing. Maeve could be part of me, the way Grace is part of you. Maybe if they—if we were together, it would be enough to keep them both alive. Give them back to each other.”

And then I could have Del. It wouldn’t be the same me—but does it matter? I won’t have to give her up.

Maybe being me doesn’t matter so much if I can have that.

“Could we even survive like that? With the river trying to pull us back every moment?” Del asks.

“I don’t know. But I’m willing to try.”

Del turns away. She walks to the bedside table. On it rests the pages of *Grave Belles* I gave her. She's nearly at the end of what I've written. Lenore's face in stark black-and-white fills the entire page as caption boxes seem to swarm around her, each with a fragment of her panicked thoughts as she realizes that Belle has been discovered by her brother and is in mortal danger. It's also the moment she realizes she's in love with Belle.

"What happens to Belle and Lenore?" Del asks softly. She looks up at me through her pale lashes. "Do they survive? Do they get to be together?"

"I don't know," I say. Sometimes I think it has to be a tragedy. Sometimes I can't bear any ending but one in which they're happy and in love.

"I would really like to find out," Del says. Her voice breaks. "Promise me you'll finish it."

"I promise." And they'll live. They'll be happy and they'll never die, and they'll get a forever that can never be taken away.

"Let's do it," Del says. Her voice is rough but confident.

"When?" I ask, my heart hammering.

She looks to the window, out at the overcast sky. "It's going to rain tonight," she says.

Tonight.

Tonight I will find Maeve.

Tonight I will drown.

And then maybe, just maybe, both of us will live.

**I CREEP BACK** to Westmore and hope no one will notice me. But of course that was never going to happen. Veronica and Zoya and Ruth are in the common room, and the way their conversation cuts off as soon as I enter makes it clear what they've been talking about.

Who they've been talking about.

"Hey," I say with a weary wave. "I'm pretty beat. I'm going to go crash." I start to make my way toward the back hall.

"Eden, hold on," Veronica says, standing. Ruth is scrunched up in the corner of the couch, looking deeply uncomfortable. Zoya chews her lip, folded up so her elbows and knees stick out at angles, giving her the air of an anxious daddy longlegs.

"I'm really not up for a What's Wrong With Eden Talk," I say.

"We haven't talked about what happened," Veronica says.

"What is there to say?" I ask.

Ruth makes a strangled noise. "Are you kidding? There was a ghost. Here. In this room. And it tried to kill you."

"Maeve didn't try to kill me," I snap. "She wouldn't."

"She almost killed Aubrey," Veronica points out.

"That was an accident," I say.

"According to who?" Zoya asks, her tone quiet and reasonable.

I glare at her. "She wasn't aware of what she was doing. Not really. She couldn't think—she barely knew who she was. All she knew was that she had to find Grace."

"And drowning Aubrey helped with that how?" Ruth asks.

"She wasn't *trying* to drown her. She was trying to . . . to communicate, to connect. But she couldn't. Not without hurting people."

"Like she hurt you," Veronica says. Her jaw is set. Anger is a hard light in her eye. She's always been set against Maeve, even before she really believed in her. She doesn't understand what Maeve has been through or what it's done to her.

“She doesn’t mean to. She hates that she did that to me,” I say. “But it’s getting better. She’s getting stronger, remembering things. She can even . . .” I trail off. *She can even touch me. Kiss me. She almost feels warm. She almost feels alive.*

Yes, she’s still angry, still wounded, still confused. How could she be anything else? With the things she’s been through, of course she lashed out. She didn’t mean to. It just happened.

“What’s your plan here?” Veronica asks. “Grace is dead, presumably. If her ghost wanted to hang around, she would have, right? We’re not ghost hunters or mediums or whoever could handle this kind of thing. Maeve needs to move on.”

“Would you?” I ask. “If someone was trying to keep you and Remi apart, wouldn’t you do whatever you could to be together?”

“Within reason,” Veronica says. “But if he fucking *died*, I’d move on eventually. Don’t get me wrong, I’d be completely wrecked, but he’s my high school boyfriend. Who even knows if we’re going to be together when we leave for college, much less for *all eternity*? You can’t know that at eighteen.”

“My parents got married when they were eighteen, and they’re still together,” Ruth says. “But they only got married because they’re super religious and wanted to bone.” There’s a beat as we stare at her. “Sorry. Not helpful,” she says with a mortified chuckle.

I rein in my anger. Veronica is trying to help. But she doesn’t know Maeve like I do. She doesn’t understand. She certainly wouldn’t understand what I’m planning to do.

Veronica comes toward me, hands outstretched. I let her take mine, holding them gently in her own. She stares meaningfully into my eyes, but I look down.

“Maeve is hurting you, Eden. I know you say she doesn’t mean to, but honestly, I don’t care. Maeve isn’t my friend, you are. And I’m not going to stand by while you let yourself get hurt like this.”

“Let myself get hurt?” I ask. “What, like I’m inviting it?”

“That’s not what she’s saying,” Zoya says.

I pull my hands away from Veronica’s and step back, looking between them. My eyes are watery. My throat has a hard, painful lump in it, and my chest aches with a pressure that feels ready to explode. They’re wrong. I

have no idea how to make them see how wrong they are. And worse, they think I'm an idiot. They think Maeve is some villain.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" I ask curtly. "I'm locked out of Abigail House for good. I've already lost Del. I doubt I'll see Maeve again anyway."

Veronica searches my face. I know she's trying to tell if I'm lying. And I know she'll never be able to figure it out. I've been lying to her for far too long.

"Eden," Veronica begins.

I hold up a hand. "No. Stop talking, please. I want to be alone." I whirl away. They don't stop me. I wait for them to call after me, for Veronica to grab me.

I shut my door behind me. I stand there for long moments, my fingertips braced lightly against the wood.

From the other room comes the low murmur of conversation. I turn my back on the door and sink down, wrapping my arms around my knees. Tears leak down my cheeks, but I don't make a sound.

They'll see. This will work, and they'll see that I'm doing the right thing. All this fear inside me, quick and dark and sharp-toothed, will vanish. Del and I will be together. Maeve will have Grace again.

I'm not extraordinary. I'm not a prodigy. I will never produce a masterpiece or win a gold medal. But this, I can do. With this, I can matter.

Everyone will live, and all the pain will be worth it.

*Together forever.* I shut my eyes against the tears.

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The rain starts an hour before midnight. I lie in my bed and listen. Did Grace do this the night they died? Lie waiting in her bed for the moment to throw off the covers? Was she excited? Terrified?

Someday, when the memory doesn't fill her lungs with water, she can tell me. We will share all our secrets and learn to survive them. But tonight, it's my turn to swing my legs off the bed, to brace myself and listen. No one stirs.

I slip out of my room, easing the door shut behind me. We aren't actually locked into the dorms, for fire code reasons, but opening the front door would send an alert to the house parents and campus security. The second-

floor laundry room, though, has a window with a broken lock and a sturdy branch growing just outside.

It's colder than I expected. I pull my knit hat down and bend my head to protect my face from the rain as I walk quickly away from Westmore. This is the part where someone is most likely to spot me. Once I get under the cover of the trees, I can walk along the fence without fear of being noticed, unless security is feeling particularly extra.

I reach the safety of the shadows without incident. I relax—and then I start shaking. Am I really doing this?

Yes. Of course I am. It's what we decided.

I don't know exactly what it will do to me. How it will change me. But maybe being a different version of myself wouldn't be so bad. Maeve is electric—intense, compelling, charismatic, even in her damaged state. She loves so fiercely, so intensely, that she has defied death to find Grace. There is not one ounce of surrender in her.

Maybe I can be *more* with her.

There's the old chapel. The weathered gray stones blend in with the darkness. The stained glass windows are caked with grime, grown over with ivy.

I skirt around it. The gap in the fence is up ahead. I'm two steps away when a voice sounds behind me.

"Eden."

I stiffen. Turn. Behind me, wearing a black wool coat and leather gloves, his breath fogging as the rain hisses around us, is Geoffrey Oster.

"What are you doing here?" I demand.

"You are the one who is sneaking out past curfew and past the fence," he says. In the darkness, he's exactly as he was forty years ago. Except for his voice, cracked through with age. The weight of years—and, maybe, the weight of what he did.

Now there's fresh fear singing through me. Geoffrey Oster killed Maeve to keep her from Grace. What will he do to keep that secret?

"I know what you did," I say. I mean for it to come out strong and accusatory, but it's barely a whisper.

"What I did," Oster repeats, stepping closer.

I flinch back.

He halts. "You mean keeping Maeve and Grace apart."

“You killed her,” I say. “You knew you couldn’t keep them apart forever, so you killed her.”

He makes a frustrated noise. “Eden, I did not kill Maeve Fairchild.”

“I saw it. She showed me,” I say, my voice wavering. He can’t fool me. However kind and fatherly he tries to be now, I know what he did.

“Veronica told me what’s been going on.” Betrayal lashes through me, anger chased by a yawning grief that almost makes me stagger. She knows what he did. How could she go to him? “I didn’t want to believe it at first. I don’t believe in ghosts. Or I thought I didn’t. That’s what I kept telling myself. When Delphine Fournier got sick, when people saw the Drowning Girl . . . I told myself there was some rational explanation for all of it. When you asked me about Maeve and Grace, I started to doubt myself. And then Veronica came to me, and I realized what a fool I’d been all these years to deny the connection.”

“You’re saying you didn’t know about the Drowning Girl?” I ask.

“I promise you I didn’t,” Oster says.

“Then why did you kick me out of Abigail House?” I demand.

He cuts a hand through the air in a frustrated gesture. “For exactly the reasons I told you. I was worried about your well-being. It was clear that something was happening to you. I never intended to bar you from seeing Delphine, but I had to intervene. Now, please, come with me. We can sit down and talk about what’s been going on,” he says. He sounds genuine. But then, anyone who’s gotten away with killing a teenage girl has to be a practiced liar.

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” I say.

It would be so easy to get rid of me. He would say I’d been acting erratic. Missing classes, grades plummeting, not spending time with my friends. Zoya or Ruth or Veronica would reluctantly admit to finding the pills. They would try to explain that it didn’t mean what people were making it out to mean, but by then it wouldn’t matter.

It would be simple to tell a story that didn’t leave any ugly unanswered questions behind. The mystery of what happened to me would vanish beneath the water with my body. Not even a ripple to mark it.

“Eden,” Oster says again. He’s an old man, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t dangerous. “Come here.”

I spin and dive for the gap in the fence.

The trail is slick. Roots and stones catch at my feet, threatening to send me tumbling. I hear Oster calling behind me, but I'm faster. And more reckless.

The rush of the Narrow calls to me, tumbling and sighing over the black rocks. I skid to a stop well clear of the banks.

"Maeve," I call. She has to be here. I turn in a tight circle, expecting her to be there in front of me, but I'm alone. Distantly, I hear Oster calling, but I still have time.

Then she's here. Down along the river, standing on the spur of rock where she stood that night so many years ago. She gazes down at the water, her hands slack by her sides.

"Maeve," I call. I struggle toward her. She looks up at last, and when she sees me, she straightens. She rushes up the bank and toward me, her steps light and nimble.

"Eden," she says, breathless. "Eden, I'm so sorry. What I did—I shouldn't have said those things."

"It's not your fault," I tell her. I reach out, catch her hand. The familiar thrum of pain travels up my arm, but it's almost comforting. Like proof that she's really her. Her skin is cool but not cold. More alive than ever. The moon breaks between the clouds and lights her hair with silver fire. "Listen. We don't have much time. We have a way for you and Grace to be together again, but we have to do it fast. Oster is here. He's coming."

She grips my hand tight. "Oster? Geoffrey Oster? He was our teacher," she says.

"I know. You showed me, remember?" I ask.

Her face contorts with anger. "He hated me. He thought he could control Grace. He tried to poison her against me," she snarls. "And then he—he—" She coughs, her words cutting off.

"No. Don't think about that right now," I say urgently. "Look at me, Maeve. You know where Grace is, don't you? You couldn't make me understand at first, but now you're nearly whole."

"The girl," Maeve says, her eyes wide. "She's in the girl that fell in. Grace saved her, but it trapped her somehow. She lifted the girl out of the water, and then she couldn't get back. She couldn't get back to me. *She left me there.*" Her voice rises to a wail.

"She didn't mean to leave you there," I say, my hand against her cheek. The starburst of blood in her eye spreads, then contracts again. "She didn't

remember. She and Del—the girl—they’ve become the same person somehow. Their memories got all jumbled together. She didn’t know she was Grace until today.”

“She didn’t leave me?” she asks plaintively.

“No. They kept her from you because whenever she got near the water, even a drop of it, she started to drown again.”

“‘They.’ You mean Oster,” Maeve says with a snarl. It’s like her death has scraped away everything but raw emotion. She saws back and forth between rage and grief and longing. They’re all she has left.

“Maeve, if you go near Del, she’ll die.”

“And I’ll have Grace back.”

“Delphine doesn’t deserve to die,” I say. “You can’t want that.”

“Who is she to me?” Maeve asks harshly.

“I love her,” I say. I squeeze Maeve’s hand tightly. I need her to understand, even in her tortured, altered state. I can’t let her anywhere near Del unless she understands.

Maeve laughs softly. She brushes the hair back from my face. “Of course you love her. She’s Grace. There is no one easier to love.” She bends and brings her face close to mine. “I could drown you, too, Eden. Then you could have infinity, like we were supposed to.”

I shudder. She doesn’t mean it. She doesn’t mean the things she says with that cruel edge in her voice. I lift my chin and speak steadily. “There’s another way. We think if you do what Grace did, you could be alive again.”

“But I wouldn’t be me,” Maeve says. Her thumb runs over my lower lip. “And you wouldn’t be you. We would rewrite each other. We would be someone new.”

“Maybe that’s not such a bad thing,” I say. The rain has soaked through my sweater. I’m shivering now. Maeve is steady.

“No. Maybe not,” she says. Her voice is distant. “You are a kind person, Eden. I’ve never managed that. Kindness. Maybe it wouldn’t be such a terrible thing.” She rests her hand over my heart, staring down at it. “Yes. I think I can see. How to slip inside. How to *become*.”

“Maeve, get away from her.”

I turn sharply, pulling out of Maeve’s grasp. Oster staggers toward us. He’s carrying a flashlight; the beam half blinds me. I raise a hand against the glow.

“My God, it is you,” he says, staring at Maeve.

She makes a sound like a growl and steps toward him, but I put a hand out to restrain her.

“Get out of here,” I tell Oster angrily. “You’ve done enough.”

“I don’t know what she’s told you, Eden, but she isn’t who she says she is,” Oster replies, holding his ground. “Maeve was expelled because of her relationship with Grace; that’s true. The girls’ parents wanted them separated because they didn’t want their daughters involved in a same-sex relationship—that’s also true. But it isn’t why *I* tried to keep Maeve away from Grace.”

I ignore him. *Whatever he says, it will be a lie.*

“We’re not supposed to have favorite students,” Oster says. “But of course we do. And Grace was one of mine. She was a serious girl, but bright, and the funniest one in the room when she opened up. When she told me about Maeve, I was supportive at first. I helped keep her secret.”

“He’s lying,” Maeve says. “He always hated me. Hated *us*.”

“Eden, Grace knew that she could trust me because she knew about me,” Oster says. “She knew I was gay. I was in a relationship with another teacher at the school at the time. It’s why she felt safe telling me. I was worried for her, but I was happy for her, too. Until I realized what was happening.”

“He wasn’t her friend. He wanted to control her. To do her parents’ bidding,” Maeve spits out, but I’m transfixed. It’s never occurred to me to wonder about the dean’s sexuality. He isn’t married, has no partner, and never, to my knowledge, discusses it with the student body.

But Atwood is certainly a safe place to be queer. And it hadn’t always been—Grace’s story is proof enough of that. I’ve always assumed the change was a natural result of society’s progression, but Atwood is its own world, isn’t it? It changes slowly. Unless there’s someone to push it along.

“Then, why?” I ask. “Why did you tell Maeve to leave her alone?”

“Because she was hurting Grace,” he says gravely.

“Liar!” Maeve shrieks, and now my outstretched arm does nothing to stop her. She blinks out, reappearing on the other side of me as she throws herself at Oster. He lifts his arms protectively, shouting in alarm. She stops abruptly in front of him. Her hair moves as if underwater, and beside us, the sound of the Narrow swells. Oster lowers his arms.

“You know it’s true, Maeve. You were controlling. Jealous. Abusive. You made her think she was all alone, and that no one else would love her or

want her or help her. And you hurt her. I saw the bruises. The marks you left on her skin and the ones beneath the surface. It took everything she had to come to me for help. Everything she had to walk away from you when she loved you so very much. But you didn't love her enough to let her go."

I look between them. Oster, with nothing but sorrow on his face. Maeve's expression contorted in anger. I remember her cold touch, the bursts of pain that came with it. Every touch reawakening the pain that was inflicted on me.

Not her fault. Never her fault.

Like it wasn't Luke's fault. My body is collateral damage, the sacrifice offered up on the altar of *not his fault*. Not his. Not hers.

"You killed me," Maeve says, her voice a gurgle of pain and rage.

"I didn't," Oster says. "I went home. Grace was supposed to be waiting for me, but you were both gone. Did she come here, Maeve? Did you argue?"

I feel like I can't breathe. This can't be true.

"No," Maeve says, shaking her head.

"Then how did she end up in the Narrow with you?" I ask, stepping closer. Because that was the thing we still didn't know, wasn't it? "Grace was here." And I was wrong about everything.

Maeve turns toward me slowly. Her expression is blank, scarlet tendrils spreading slowly through the white of one eye. "Grace was here," she repeats. Then, a whisper. "I never meant to hurt you."

Her eyes flick up. She stares at me, water trickling from the corners of her mouth. I was wrong. Oster is not the monster. Maeve is not the victim. I've told myself that she doesn't mean to hurt me, even as every wound she leaves on my skin makes her stronger. I've told myself she can't help her cruelty and her rage, but I was wrong.

"I have to fix it," she says—and vanishes—and reappears right in front of me. I yelp in surprise and stumble back. She catches me. Hand knotted in my hair. Eyes fixed on mine. Her fingers sliding over my throat as she looks down at me with a cold gaze, empty of mercy.

She kisses me—an icy, brutal kiss of teeth and pressure, of hunger and anger and want and need, of the current dragging us both down. Oster is shouting. He runs forward, but it's too late. I can't breathe. I can't break free.

I'm—

MAEVE

**OSTER'S HANDS CLOSE** around my arms as my knees give way. He lowers me slowly to the ground, murmuring Eden's name.

I cling to Oster, gasping. And then a wild sound tears free of me—laughter. I clutch at Oster's arm and laugh, and the laughter turns to weeping, and he holds me.

"Eden," he says urgently. "We need to get out of here. Before she comes back."

*Before she comes back.* I almost laugh again and catch the sound in my teeth, biting down with vicious pleasure. What an idiot. He was a young idiot and now he's an old idiot.

"Please," I say, teeth chattering. I let him help me up. I need it—my limbs feel strange, not quite my own, and the water soaking through me leaves me chilled and shaky. He takes off his coat and puts it around my shoulders, and together we stagger away from the Narrow.

*Come back,* it calls, as it calls me every time I claw my way free of it. But now I feel no urge to follow.

"Let's get you home," Oster is saying. Yes, home. I want to go home—and home is Grace. My thoughts come easily now. Not dragged up from the silt like they were when I lurched on a broken leg, wandering in the dark. What did Eden say? She claimed that Grace and Delphine were the same girl, the two of them swirled together like ink in water until no difference remained between the two.

But that isn't the only option, I know now. I *could* surrender the borders of myself, let Eden seep in and mingle with me, but I don't have to. She's still here. I can root around in her memories; I know she's experiencing everything I am. Experiencing it as *me*. But I don't have to let her will or her personality bubble up. I can keep her suppressed. Take what I want and bury the rest.

Did Grace realize the same thing? Even if she did, I know my Grace. She had no barriers, no selfishness. She would have given herself completely to Delphine, without hesitation.

By the time we reach the top of the hill, I've regained some coordination. There's a girl standing by the old chapel. She's wrapped in a puffy winter coat and wears a red cap with a little pom-pom at the top; she dances from foot to foot nervously. It's only when she lets out a cry of relief and runs toward us that I find the name, a splinter in the corner of my mind.

Veronica.

"Eden!" she cries and wraps her arms around me. Muscle memory saves me, returning the hug as I dredge up more of Eden. The more of her I let in, the more I feel muddled. I have to stay myself. She'd never let me do what I need to. She's too soft.

She didn't understand like I hoped she would.

"You shouldn't be out here," Oster says wearily. He's gotten so old. Time doesn't pass the same way beneath the water. It's flat eternity, punctuated only by pain and fear. When Grace was there, it was bearable. When she was gone, only the horror was left.

*Left, left, left me—*

I swallow down the water that floods my mouth.

"I realized you were gone. I was afraid—" Veronica cuts off with a sob. "What were you thinking? What happened down there?" She pulls back from me but keeps a hand on my shoulder, as if she wants to reassure herself that I'm not going anywhere. That *Eden* isn't going anywhere, and I need to keep that distinction in mind, because, oh, it's harder than I thought to hold her at bay, to keep her tucked up against the borders of her own mind.

"I'm okay," I say, and borrow a smile from Eden's memories. "Dean Oster told me the truth. Maeve is . . . she's gone, I guess."

"Good," Veronica says fiercely.

"Not forever, I fear," Oster says, and the word echoes in my mind. *Forever and forever and forever.*

I need Grace. But not yet. I can't just rush over there. I need to be patient.

"Let's get you two back to bed," Oster says. "We can talk more in the morning."

Veronica puts her arm around me, and I lean into her. Oster's coat smells strongly of wet wool. I hate having it against my skin, but at least it's warm. I haven't been warm in such a long time.

Oster lets us into Westmore and leaves us at the door of our suite. "I wish I could say that you'll be safe here, but I don't know if she can come back,

or if she will,” he says.

“Coming out of the water takes a lot of strength,” I say. “She’ll be too weak to do it again tonight.”

Oster gives me a considering look, and for a moment I fear he’ll realize that this isn’t something Eden has entirely pieced together, but he nods. “That makes a certain amount of sense, I suppose. As much as any of this does. I still can hardly believe . . . But that’s the problem, isn’t it? If I had believed earlier, I might have prevented so much of this. I could have stopped her from attacking Aubrey.”

“That was an accident,” I say immediately, and berate myself for the slip. This is proving harder than I thought. It’s been so long since I actually had a conversation with living people—other than Eden, and she isn’t doing much talking at the moment.

“So she *claims*,” Veronica says viciously.

Why does she think she can know what happened? How could she believe that she can understand even a fraction of what it was like?

Dragging myself from the water, across the campus, the only thought twining through the labyrinth of suffering was that single name: Grace. Following an instinct I wasn’t aware of, much less could explain. Finding in her place that girl, who looked at me in terror, who wouldn’t tell me where Grace was.

I only wanted to speak to her. To make her understand. When I held her face in my hands, when I showed her the rush and the current and the clamoring rocks, it wasn’t out of malice. I only wanted her to know my suffering, so she could understand why I needed Grace. So she would stop standing in my way and let the water in.

“Eden?” Veronica asks, a quaver in her voice.

I tame the anger lashing inside me and let out a weary sigh. “I don’t want to argue about this right now,” I say. “I just want to sleep.” I shrug out from Oster’s coat and hold it out to him. He takes it, folding it over his arm.

“Please be careful,” he admonishes us. “Be safe.”

Veronica takes my hand. “I won’t let that drippy bitch anywhere near her.” Her expression is fierce.

*I am going to wipe that look off your face. I am going to make you afraid. You are going to find out what forty years in the dark have made me, and you are going to taste the darkness, too.*

I squeeze her hand and smile.

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I don't dare sleep. I don't want my mind to rest and shutter itself and risk Eden waking up in my place.

When morning comes, I find myself moving through Eden's routine as if it is my own. I'm up before anyone else, and I pad down the carpeted hall to the bathroom and turn on the shower. I'm not sure until I extend my hand beneath the droplets whether it will have the same deadly effect on me as it does on Delphine, but the water flows harmlessly over my hand.

I know what I am. The river has never left me. Maybe that is enough protection, for now, against the Narrow's pull.

I undress, taking a moment to examine myself in the mirror—this unfamiliar body. Shorter and stockier than mine, with a curved belly, larger breasts. *Pretty girl*, I think. But I liked her better when I was a ghost and she was the bright living thing that drew me like a moth to a candle flame. Except I'm the one that burned her, of course.

I step into the shower. The water patters against my back, my shoulders, my hair. Just like the rain.

*The rain that night*

*Pattering against my shoulders*

*The rain, cold, sliding down my back, droplets in my eyelashes.*

I gasp, bracing a hand against the wall. The cool, hard tile brings me back to the present, and I twist the faucet quickly, cutting off the water.

The shower was hot, but I'm shivering as I towel myself off quickly. Grace subsumed herself in Delphine. Forgot everything she was. And still she had to go to extremes to stay alive. How long will I last?

I look at myself in the mirror again. There's a single red pinprick in the white of my eye.

*Not long.*

I dress quickly. Outside, the others are stirring. I don't want to know their names. They're annoyances, things I have to deal with to get to my goal, but even unbidden, Eden's mind supplies me with details. That's Zoya, stretching as she comes out of her room. She looks like she'd snap in two if you blew on her. The fat one with the pimples is Ruth.

“What the hell happened last night?” Ruth asks, scratching the back of her head. “Where were you two?”

Veronica leans against the doorframe of her room, arms crossed. She looks at me as if waiting for me to supply an explanation.

“None of your business,” I say testily.

“Eden decided it was a super-brilliant idea to go commune with the ghost by herself. At the Narrow,” Veronica says.

“What?” Ruth squawks. “Do you have a death wish, girl?”

“Why would you do that?” Zoya demands.

They’re all in my way. A gauntlet of teenage girls. I might have died at nineteen, but I was never like this, fluttering around and screeching in worry. That’s why I noticed Grace. Quiet, serious. Not like these chattering birds.

“It doesn’t matter now,” I say.

“The Drowning Girl would have killed her if Oster wasn’t there,” Veronica says, still glaring at me.

I hate that name. The Drowning Girl. Reducing me to my death. “I didn’t die. So why are we still talking about this?” I ask.

“And get this—it turns out Maeve wasn’t some lovelorn lesbian; she was an abusive piece of shit. Grace was trying to get away from her,” Veronica says.

“That’s not true,” I snarl. They all look at me, startled, and I put my hand to my forehead. “I mean . . . We don’t know exactly what happened, and I’d really rather not talk about it right now.”

Veronica straightens. “We’re going to have to talk about it, because Oster wants us to go to his office in half an hour.”

“No thanks,” I say dismissively.

“We don’t have a choice,” Veronica says. “Unless you want to get kicked out of school.”

What I want is to rake my nails down that perfect face, liven up its topography. But I need to be Eden. For a little while longer, at least. So I sigh and shake my wet hair back from my face. “Right, I know. I’m sorry. I’m just exhausted, and last night was . . .”

“It was a lot,” Veronica supplies.

“Is the ghost going to come after us again?” Ruth asks.

*She doesn’t want anything to do with you,* I want to say, but I make myself shake my head. “I don’t know. I hope not.”

“We’ll figure it out with Oster,” Veronica pledges. “We’re all in this together. It’ll be okay.”

The other two nod. In this together? Can they be that deluded? Eden turned to me because she was alone. I felt that ache inside her. I know that pain.

That’s the end of the conversation, blessedly. I drift along in the others’ wake as they get ready and troop out for a quick breakfast before our meeting.

Outside, the daylight strikes my skin, and I almost laugh with joy. The sky is patchy with clouds, but between them is blue, a blue so bright it hurts my eyes. I haven’t seen sunlight in—

*The moon shines between the clouds, illuminating us briefly.*

*“You came,” I say as she steps from the trees.*

*“I came to say goodbye.”*

I stumble. Ruth catches me. “Careful, klutz,” she says, and I stop myself from biting out an insult in return.

The cafeteria hasn’t changed at all. The pictures on the walls are different, but with everyone in uniform, only the hairstyles mark the passage of the years. The food is the same, too. Eggs scrambled until there’s not a trace of moisture in them, sausages slippery with grease. I put a bite in my mouth and almost moan.

Eating. I didn’t realize how much I missed *eating*.

I’m so focused on the flavors, it’s easy to tune out the others.

Until finally, Veronica is tugging at my sleeve. “Time to go.”

I lower my fork reluctantly.

“We’ll get your plates,” Zoya offers, all treacly sweet. I can tell she’s the sort of girl who pretends she doesn’t know how beautiful she is. Plays up being nice and sweet and shy because it’ll only make people compliment her more.

Veronica keeps glancing at me out of the corner of her eye as we walk, almost like she expects me to dart away, make a run for it. Oster called *me* possessive? Veronica can’t stand Eden getting away from her. But I’ve seen Eden’s memories. I know what’s really going on. Veronica doesn’t want a friend; she wants a lackey. Someone not as pretty as her, not as talented, not as clever.

She wants an audience.

That's why they keep Eden around. Not because they care about her, but because beauty doesn't matter if there's no one there to adore it; wit doesn't matter if there's no one there to laugh at it. Eden is just a mirror for them to marvel at themselves in.

We enter the administration building. The last time I was here I—  
“... *have you corrupting the morals of...*”

“*Mr. Fairchild, that isn't the issue here.*”

“*Isn't it?*”

I blink back to the present. I'm sitting in Oster's office, and I don't remember entering. Oster is here, behind the desk where Dean Lawrence sat the day I was kicked out. Veronica sits in the same chair where Oster himself was then, his hands folded in his lap, his expression troubled. And where my father had been sits Ms. Fournier.

She was beautiful once. Now her face is lined, her body sagging, no longer that pert little starlet. Funny, though. We're nearly the same age, aren't we? I'm only a few years older.

“Ms. Fournier and I have had a long talk. We have laid all our cards on the table,” Oster is saying.

How long have we been sitting here? How much of this conversation have I missed?

“Something we should have done a long time ago, I think. The facts are these: the spirit of Grace Carpenter has, somehow, found its home in Delphine; this is the cause of her condition. The Drowning Girl—Maeve Fairchild—is drawn to her. She believes they are meant to be together forever.”

*Because we are.*

“Eden, you have been drawn into the middle of all of this through no fault of your own. We do not know how to protect Delphine from Maeve or from the symptoms Grace's presence causes. But we will work to find a solution. In the meantime, we need to make sure that no one else is harmed. Eden, I believe it would be best for you to leave the school and return home.”

“No,” I say immediately, in the same breath as Veronica. I look at her in faint puzzlement. Doesn't she want Eden bundled away somewhere she can't help me?

“Eden can't go home,” Veronica says quietly.

Ah. Right. The brother.

*Let him try to hurt me. I will drown him with a touch.* I wonder if I can still do it from this body. I wonder if I can even leave Atwood. Delphine can't, after all. But, oh, it would be interesting to try. And getting rid of that brother and his brute of a friend—that seems like a proper thanks for everything Eden has done for me. If I can find a way, I will.

I don't think I'll have the time, though. Pity. I do owe her.

"Eden?" Oster prompts. I wet my lips, not sure what the right move is. Oster folds his hands on the tabletop. I find myself staring at the gray in his hair. He's so old.

*You're old, too. Old bones beneath the water. Long-lost.*

*"Nothing can keep me from finding you. We're destined for each other."*

*"You have to let me go."*

"When you last sat in this office, it seemed you were having a difficult time at home," Oster says. "I didn't push the matter, but now I wonder if that was a mistake."

"No," I say. When I slipped inside Eden, I didn't have a plan. I wasn't capable of thinking clearly enough to form one. Since then, I've thought maybe I could find a way to pull this off—to live as Eden, to reach Delphine, to be with Grace. Both of us living girls once again. But the only way to stay in this flesh is to become Eden, and I know that will never happen. I'm not like Grace. She can bend without breaking. I am sharp and brittle. I can't be Eden and be me, the way Grace and Delphine are themselves and each other. I just can't.

I have to make other plans.

"My home life is difficult. And this summer . . ." I look over at Veronica. If I lie, she'll rat me out and say it's for my own good, but I can skirt close enough to the truth to satisfy her and mollify Oster. "This summer was particularly bad. But it's not going to happen again. My parents know what happened. We'll manage."

"I'll need to speak to them."

My first instinct is to tell him not to—but that's *Eden's* instinct, Eden's fear. She's too self-sacrificing, this girl. Willing to bear that pain so she won't cause trouble. I've never been a martyr, though. *You'll thank me later*, I tell her.

*"You want me to give up everything I have. All of my friends. My family."*

*“They don’t love you. They love the version of you they pretend you are. You’re better off without them.”*

*“Am I better off with you, then? Am I even safe with you?”*

*“You know I never meant to hurt you.”*

“—tonight,” Madelyn Fournier is saying, and I jerk, startled back into the present. Fournier and Oster look expectantly at me.

“I’ll do whatever you think is best,” I croak. “But only if you let me see her one last time.”

They exchange a look. All these quiet conversations, as if I can’t tell exactly what they’re saying to each other with meaningful glances and weighted silences. My fingers curl in my lap, claws I’d like to rake across their skin.

*Fingers wrapped around one white arm, perfect lips parted in a shattered second’s surprise.*

My nails dig into my thighs instead, my teeth clenched, holding the past at bay. I thought it would make me strong, knowing what I am, but my death pulls at me like a fist in my hair, its teeth against my neck. A drop of water slides down my knuckle and darkens the fabric of my jeans.

“I think that could be beneficial for everyone,” Oster says. “Let them say a proper farewell to each other.”

The only thing anyone ever wanted us to say to each other was goodbye. But our love held a different promise. It shouldn’t have ended like it did. We should have had years together—a lifetime. Lazy summers and winters by the fire and a dog that grew old curled at our feet.

We should have had a bright forever, and instead we had only the dark.

If we’d lived, I would have told her how sorry I was, enough times that she understood. She would have known how afraid I was of losing her, how the panic had welled up, cold and caustic, and scraped my insides hollow. It wasn’t me that did it, not really, but the fear. It wasn’t really me that hit her.

“No,” Madelyn Fournier says. Her lips are pressed tight, split with a dozen wrinkles all her beauty treatments can’t hide. “We can’t risk it. You can call her when you’re gone. Not before.”

Madelyn Fournier thinks she is a strong woman. She believes that love can make you strong. She has a great deal of love, after all. But she cannot comprehend how weak she is—a paper napkin crumpled easily in one fist.

Your strength dictates the quality of your love. A weak woman can only ever be made weaker by love, and she is weak.

I am not.

I don't really mean it as an insult. Grace was weak, too. She always had been. She needed me to draw her out. To teach her how to laugh and straighten her spine, to feel the weight of herself in her own feet. She taught me how to soften. How to yield to her, to love, to the possibility of something other than pain.

I ruined all of it with a careless moment, and Oster made sure I never got the chance to fix my mistake. But now I can.

"Maybe it's for the best," Veronica says. She reaches over, takes my hand. Her skin is dry and cool.

I imagine her pinned beneath the water, gape-mouthed as a dead fish, held fast against an unyielding spar of rock. I squeeze her hand.

"I'll have your things packed for you," Oster says. "We'll have a car take you into town, and you can stay at the hotel until we can arrange things with your parents."

"Tomorrow," I say. I make my voice small and sorrowful. I cling to Veronica's hand. "Give me one more night with my friends, and then I'll go. I checked the weather. It isn't going to rain. Please."

I didn't check. I just know. This would not have been a night I could go wandering, but it doesn't matter anymore.

"One night, then," Oster says gently, suffocating in his own kindness. He wants us all to suffocate with him, wrap us in soft, downy worlds with no sharp edges to bruise. Until we can't breathe.

They're still talking, but not to me. They consider Eden's part of this to be over. Neither of them understands how little of this concerns them at all. It never has. They are staring at their own reflections on the surface of the water and imagining they can see its depths. But living in the light blinds you.

It's only looking up from the darkness that you see the true shape of things.

**WE LEAVE MADELYN** Fournier and Oster still deep in conversation. Veronica tugs at my hand. Behind her eyes, I see her need for Eden to move on, move past. She won't say it out loud. She has that much scant wisdom in her too-young bones, at least.

Girls like Veronica have only ever known infatuation and affection. Not love. The real love that lives not in your heart but in your gut and your lungs and your throat. Every part of your body wrenched violently by the impulse—the need—to be with one person. It's an ugly, glorious thing. That's how you know it's real.

"I know how hard this must be," Veronica says.

I'll give her this: She really is worried for Eden. Even if she's entirely wrong about what Eden needs. Eden doesn't need protecting, walling off from all the cruel things of life. She's met them already. They're part of her. It's too late to be soft; she needs to be strong. And she will be. I like her, my Eden. I like her more the longer I live in her skin, the edges of her soul bleeding into mine. She's kind, which I've never been. But she hides the best parts of herself, afraid to be seen, to take up space.

We would be good for each other, I think, if I let her rush into me, let myself rush into her. But we can't survive like that. It's foolish to think I could reclaim the life stolen from me.

All I have left to claim is death, but it will be on my terms.

In Westmore, Ruth and Zoya are sitting on the couch. Zoya is folded up like some exotic insect. I picture her pinned to a card—and a ripple of guilt goes through me. Self-reproach.

Eden's good influence. I stiffen, mapping the edges of myself. Still whole. Still me. Eden is still only the shadows at the back of my mind.

"So how did it go?" Ruth asks, and another image flashes through my mind—a memory this time. Ruth throwing a piece of popcorn, catching it in her mouth. *Ten in a row. You owe me a kiss.*

I jerk, startled. I didn't know Ruth and Eden were ever together. But Ruth left her. Was with a boy until only a little while ago.

I told Grace that if she ever left me for a man, it would be the worst thing she could do to me. A humiliation and a betrayal. But Eden doesn't seem to care about that part.

Veronica is explaining the agreement. I stand like a lump, not sure what expression Eden should wear right now. Weary defeat, maybe. I glance at the window. A long time to sundown, and I'll need the darkness for what I want to do.

"I'm going to bed," I declare.

"Wait," Veronica says, snatching at my hand. "I don't think you should be alone right now."

*I'm not. Eden is plenty of company.* But I only split my mouth into a tired smile. "I know you're trying to take care of me, Veronica. But I feel like shit, and I just want to hide under the covers until this all goes away."

"You said you wanted to spend one last night with us," Veronica reminds me.

"Well, I lied," I snap.

Veronica flinches. Zoya shifts, concern knitting her brow.

"I know this sucks, but you don't have to be such a bitch to us about it," Ruth says. "We're just trying to help you."

*"I don't want to hurt you, Maeve. I've never wanted to hurt you."*

*"It was an accident."*

*"It's over, Maeve. I love you, but we're over."*

I rock back on my heels, the past a merciless echo in my ears. A snarl twists my lips.

"But you're not helping me, are you? You don't want to. You just want me to get over it and move on and stop being a *problem*. Because you don't want a sad, angry friend. You want the Eden that listens and gives you presents and does all the dishes and cuts your hair and does whatever makes you happy. The one that never complains about her own life. You really thought you were friends? None of you had any idea what she was going through. You only liked her because she was whatever *you* needed."

The words come in a torrent, the world tilting around me, and only when the shocked silence solidifies do I realize what I've said.

In the quiet, a drop of water slides down to the tip of my finger and falls glittering to the floor. Veronica steps back, eyes wide in horror. "You're . . ."

"Maeve," Zoya breathes, unfolding herself.

The river roars around me. I run my hands through my hair. They come away wet, the water tinted red with blood. I grind my back teeth together. I sink deeper into Eden, stealing pieces of her to keep myself afloat. My eyes snap to Veronica, her weight canted toward the door.

“Don’t,” I say, my voice a croak of sound. “No one is going anywhere.”

“Like hell. I’m getting Oster,” Veronica says. She turns and strides toward the door.

I’m on her in a flash. I shove her hard between the shoulder blades, making her stumble forward, then grab her arm to spin her around, pushing her up against the wall with my arm at her throat.

“Get off her!” Ruth yells. She takes hold of my arm and tries to pull me off her friend, but she doesn’t want to hurt Eden. And pain doesn’t bother me. Not after decades of the river’s relentless violence.

“Let Eden go,” Veronica says, her voice strained as my forearm presses against her throat.

“I have no desire to hurt Eden,” I tell her. I let Ruth pull me away at last, falling back as Veronica coughs and rubs her throat. I keep myself between them and the door. Zoya rushes to Veronica’s side, checking on her. Ruth stares at me, her hands balled into ineffectual fists. “What are you going to do, Ruth? Attack me? Pummel those fists into Eden’s ribs and feel them splinter?”

Ruth’s jaw tenses. “What do you want with her?”

One could almost be fooled into thinking they really care about her.

“A place to be a while, that’s all,” I say. “I don’t want to hurt any of you. All I want is to get Grace back. And you’re going to help me.”

“Why would we do that?” Zoya asks. She has her arm around Veronica, both protective and restraining. Veronica’s eyes are a storm of anger and distress. She really doesn’t like not being in control. She’ll have to get used to it.

“I told you I don’t want to hurt Eden. But I can,” I say. I lift a hand. Water spills across my palm, brackish and muddy, dripping to the floor. I hear the roar of the river. And this time, I let it come. Let it rise. Feel the current nip and tug at me as my mouth fills with the taste of it. I cough, choke.

“Stop,” Veronica says, wrenching free of Zoya. “Stop, you’re killing her!”

I gasp, dragging myself back to the surface. I spit out a glob of silt and roll my neck, feeling my bones pop and resettle. “Do what I tell you, and Eden gets out of this unharmed. Maybe a little damp,” I say steadily. I didn’t plan on this, but maybe it’s for the best. There’s no way I’m going to make it through a full day of playing nice with these vapid children.

“You b—” Ruth starts, but Veronica cuts her off.

“Do you swear it?” she demands.

“Cross my heart and hope to die,” I tell her mirthlessly. “Help me, and by the morning you’ll have Eden back safe and sound.”

“Then what do you want?” she asks, her anger incandescent and irrelevant.

“I told you. I want Grace back. And you’re going to bring her to me,” I say. I spread my hands. “I’m not an evil person. I’m not a monster. I don’t want anyone to get hurt. I just want things back the way they’re supposed to be.”

“You want us to bring Delphine to you?” Zoya asks. “Then what? You’re not going to . . . to drown her or something?”

I shake my head. “That won’t be necessary.” The world has enough dead girls in it already. I’ll spare Eden and Delphine if I can.

But if I have to drown them to get my Grace back, I won’t hesitate.

“I told you. I don’t want to hurt anyone. You bring Del to the river, Grace and I leave. Del and Eden are safe and whole and everyone goes home happy.”

“And what about you and Grace? You go back to the river?” Ruth says doubtfully. “You’d really be willing to do that?”

“All I want is Grace,” I tell her. I laugh a little. “You don’t understand. You couldn’t. The river doesn’t matter. We’ll be together.”

We will never have the bright forever the world owes us.

I will take the dark eternity in its place.

**IN THE DARKNESS**, there is no past, no future; there is no room for them. There is agony, and there is an endless thundering, a tearing and tumbling. There is you, and there is the one who is with you: your arms around each other, your fingers tangled in her hair, locked together in the churn of the deep. And there is the one consuming, sustaining thought: *Together—we are together—we are one.*

Imagine, then, finding the darkness suddenly empty. The bulwark against the horror vanished, only the greedy deep and no solace within it. The exultation of eternity with your beloved turned into a promise of unceasing hell.

It would drive anyone to madness and rage. I can hardly be blamed.

I sit cross-legged on the floor. Water drips steadily from my fingertips and the ends of my sodden hair, and I swallow constantly as it pools in the back of my mouth. The others sit on the couch or stand or pace in tight circles.

The hours crawl by. For them, it's excruciating. For me, it's nothing. I have waited years. These last moments are nothing but sand cupped in my palm, spilling slowly between my fingers. Quickly spent.

Then the sun makes its slow way below the horizon. Even in the glow of electric light, I can feel the night's approach. The dead aren't meant for daylight. I'm more awake in darkness. Not more alive—it's a fallacy to suppose I could become less dead. But I am different in the dark. More powerful.

I stand. The air is cold against my skin—or rather, my skin makes the air cold. Eden's heartbeat is sluggish. When I catch a glimpse of my reflection, there is a burst of blood in the white of my eye.

"You and you—you'll get Delphine. Bring her to me by the Narrow," I say, pointing to Veronica and Ruth.

"No way. I'm staying with Eden," Veronica says, arms crossed.

"Del knows you best," I remind her. "She'll trust you enough to follow. Don't tell her about me or what's happened. Just get her to come to the

river.” I want to explain things myself, without Veronica poisoning her against me.

Veronica’s stubborn resistance crumples like tinfoil. “Fine. What about Zoya?”

“She’ll come with me,” I say.

They’re still expecting some grand betrayal. I don’t have the time or the inclination to convince them that I’m being perfectly honest when I tell them what it is I want. A “hostage” will make things go more smoothly for everyone.

We all leave together. Veronica and Ruth split off. Zoya, folded in on herself with her elbows tucked tight against her ribs, looks to me.

“You know the way,” I tell her.

She starts out. Bracelets click softly against each other at her wrists.

*She’s quiet, but her stories will rip your heart out and make you thank her for it,* I think. Eden thinks. A fierce scorch of pride warms my chest. I narrow my eyes at Zoya’s back. *Wait your turn,* I think to Eden. If she’s aware enough to understand, I can’t tell.

Zoya keeps sneaking glances at me, her face a perfect picture of sorrow.

“Is there something you want to say to me?” I ask as the silver ribbon of the Narrow edges into view. She stops, looking more at the stars than at me.

“I’ve been wondering,” she says softly, “if there were someone I loved as much as you say you love Grace, would I want to be with her forever, even if it meant she suffered? I think I would want them spared, even if I had to suffer because of it.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about. You’ve never been in love.”

“Why do people always think you have to be *in* love for love to count?” she asks, but she isn’t really asking me. “I love Eden. We all do. And if you hurt her, we will find a way to make you suffer more than you can imagine.”

“It’s cute that you think that’s possible,” I tell her, and resume my trek down toward the water.

The moonlight makes the surface pale. Sly and unassuming, it slithers between the rocks. I know its falseness, its vast and hungry heart. I walk to the edge. I can feel them down below—the rest of the drowned. The Narrow lets nothing go. It’s kept us all, losing ourselves piece by piece until there’s nothing left but the raw scream of our last panicked moments. We have nothing to hold on to but each other, and we claw and bite and tear, an

endless threshing below the water. But Grace and I, we had each other. And with her in my arms, the others couldn't claim me, and neither could the Narrow.

It will be that way again. We'll drift within the maelstrom, and we'll persist.

Once Grace is here.

**I KNOW THEY'RE** coming before I see their silhouetted forms among the trees, groping their way through the night toward where we wait. Zoya's expression is precariously balanced between relief that she's no longer alone with me and anxiety at what comes next. Eden frets for her; with a wild grin, I wait to meet my beloved.

She steps out of the trees, into the moonlight. Red hair, pale face, a wide, serious mouth. For a moment I can't remember which of them I'm seeing, Delphine or Grace, can't remember which one is dead and which is the living girl. Both souls inside of me are wracked with love and longing.

Del walks forward, steps tentatively. She hasn't been beneath the sky and the stars in so long. Her body has forgotten how to move in wide-open spaces.

"Eden?" she says. Veronica has kept her word, hasn't told her. She draws close to me as the others hang back, their anxiety like a mosquito's buzzing.

"There you are," I say, my voice choked with wonder.

"What happened last night?" she asks.

I step toward her. "Don't you remember?" I ask. Eden's voice is lighter than my own, more sweetness than smoke, and the words tumble strangely from my lips.

Confusion sketches a line between her brows. "What do you mean? You were going to see Maeve."

I halt. Last night. Eden's last night, not mine. The timelines are all tangled. "I'm sorry. It's hard to keep things straight. When you said last night, I thought you meant . . ."

"It worked," she breathes. "You're . . ."

"Me," I tell her, a quicksilver smile breaking fleetingly across my lips. "It's me."

"And Eden?" she asks, still uncertain, and something snakes through my gut, slimy as an eel. I am standing in front of her, flesh and blood, and it's another girl's name on her pretty lips.

"She's here," I allow. "But right now, it's me."

“Maeve,” she says, and there it is at last.

I sink through the air between us and come to rest only when my fingertips find the soft skin of her throat, her pulse trembling beneath the surface.

“It’s me,” I say again, and tears streak down my cheeks. “I found you, Grace.”

She lets out a quiet sound, neither joy nor sorrow, and I press my brow to hers. Our breath stirs the air between us. Alive, alive, both of us alive and here in the bright tomorrow we never got to claim.

“I missed you,” she whispers, eyes shut.

“I couldn’t find you. I searched and searched, but you weren’t there,” I say.

Her lip quivers. “I remember you,” she whispers. “But only in bits and pieces. I know that I loved you. But I’m not that same girl. I’m someone else. Someone new. I don’t want to go back there. Even for you. There has to be a way to help you, without . . . without that.” Her eyes are full of feeling and sorrow. And she’s right. She’s not Grace, not really. Grace has been subsumed in this stranger.

This stranger who is standing outside, standing by the river, bearing my touch without drowning. She’s not dying. She’s whole. Or close to it, at least. “How are you not drowning?” I ask her.

“Once I knew what I was, I almost drowned again, but I found my way out. By being Del,” she says. “The water pulls at me, but now that I know why, now that I know who I am—both parts of me—I can keep myself here.”

I see it: the long road stretching out ahead of her. Not as Grace, not as Delphine, but as this new girl. Del. She has a future. She can survive this.

I can’t.

“You could do the same,” Del says. “It’s what Eden wanted. But you have to surrender to each other.”

“I can’t,” I say. I won’t give myself up to cling pathetically to a life that isn’t mine. Even if I tried, it wouldn’t work. I don’t have Grace’s compassion. Her ability to yield. I would always be fighting for space within Eden.

So she will have life. And Eden. And I will have the Narrow.

Eternity, without her. Anger and panic fill me.

“We will find a way to help you,” Grace is saying. *Del* is saying. Her hand on my cheek.

“No. You’re going to leave. You’re going to forget me,” I say. “You’re going to leave me down there to choke and drown, and I won’t have you. Eden will.”

She blanches. “What’s the alternative, Maeve? Both of us go back and suffer?” She takes a step back. Veronica and the others inch forward, protective.

“If you let Eden go, we promise we’ll find a way to help you . . . move on,” Veronica says.

I hiss, baring my teeth. “Move on? You want to destroy me. Send me off into oblivion where you don’t have to worry about me.”

“Wouldn’t it be better than this?” Zoya asks softly.

“I know how much you and Grace loved each other,” Veronica says imploringly, the past tense like a slap in the face. “Let her go, Maeve. She doesn’t deserve to suffer down there.”

“And I do?” I snap. I stalk forward, putting myself between Grace and the other girls. Veronica is the only one who holds her ground, rooted in place.

“That’s not what I said.”

“I am not going back into the water alone,” I remind them. “If it’s Eden who’s going to join me—”

“No,” Grace says quickly. She looks at the others. “Give us a moment. Please.” She gestures, imploring them to give us space. Veronica stays stubbornly in place, but Ruth puts a hand on her arm, drawing her back and whispering something in her ear. They retreat a dozen paces, and Grace turns back to me.

I look at her, shaking my head incredulously. “They think you’re an innocent in all of this,” I say. “They don’t know what you did.”

“What are you talking about?” Grace asks, sounding fearful.

“You don’t remember what happened the night we died,” I say.

She wraps her arms around herself, shaking her head.

“Then let me remind you,” I say. I walk to the edge of the water, looking down for a moment as I summon the memory. I turn toward the trees. “Oster stood there,” I say, pointing. “He’d always hated me. He was trying to convince you that I was no good for you. He told me you weren’t coming, and he left.”

“But I did come,” Grace says. Her gaze tracks from the edge of the trees to where I stand, and I know she’s remembering.

“I was so happy, that moment when you stepped into the moonlight.” My throat tightens at the memory. I reach out my hand, and tentatively, she takes it, her fingers cool in mine.

*“I love you, Grace.”*

*“And I love you. But we’re no good for each other. You’re no good for me.”*

*“Why? Because one time I made a mistake—it was an accident.”*

*“An accident is something you didn’t mean to do. You wanted to hit me and so you did.”*

“And then I told you I wasn’t going with you,” Grace whispers.

I close my hand around hers, holding her tight. She doesn’t pull away.

“I’d lost my temper a few days before. I hurt you. I didn’t mean to,” I say, drawing her close to me.

“It wasn’t just that, though, was it?” Grace asks. Her brow wrinkles, as if she is summoning memories from far away. “You hated when I spent any time with my friends. You were always convinced I was cheating on you. Flirting with other people if I even smiled at them. You called me names and screamed at me and told me that I was worthless, that no one else would love me. And then you hit me, and I couldn’t even tell anyone. I couldn’t ask for help, because you were my secret.” She looks up at me, tears shining in her eyes. “Oster was the only one I could talk to.”

“I made mistakes. You were so good for me, though. You were going to save me. Fix me.” I run a gentle hand over her hair. She swallows hard. A thin trickle of water escapes the corner of her mouth.

*It’s not my fault you drive me crazy, Grace Carpenter.*

I wrap her shirt around my fist, against the small of her back, crushing her against me, our faces only inches apart. “I told you that you were wrong. That I was never going to let you go, no matter what. I said I would tell your family everything you’d been doing, and then you would see what *their* love was worth. You wouldn’t have anyone left but me, and then you’d understand how much you needed me.”

“Let her go,” Veronica calls warningly, forcing me to remember that they’re there. Like they can do anything about what’s happening. This is older and bigger than them. They’re nothing next to us.

“It’s all right,” Grace says, but her voice shakes.

I put a finger to her chin, directing her gaze back to mine. “That night,” I say, searching her eyes for signs of recognition. “Do you remember how clear it was, until suddenly the wind rose up, and the clouds rolled over the sky? Do you remember how it started to rain all at once, soaking us through to the bone? Do you remember what I said to you?”

*Remember, I will her. Remember what I hid from Eden.*

What happened after I turned away from Oster and he left me there.

*Do you remember, Grace? You, emerging from the trees. The rain pummeling us. Me, trying to find the perfect combination of words to make you see how much I love you, how much we need each other. They spill out of my mouth in an endless torrent, all meaning and meaninglessness. I am begging you, pleading, making a thousand impossible promises, and my fear becomes rage, and my hands that hold you grip too tight, and I’m hurting you—*

*And I realize it, and I let you go. More words bubble up. I’m sorry. And another word repeats and repeats in my mind. Forever and forever and forever.*

*And I say, with all my being—I will never let you go.*

*Your face goes slack, empty. You nod, and I think you finally understand. Let’s go, I say, and you nod again. I turn. Our future is on the other side. I stretch out my hand to take yours.*

*You shove me hard in the back. Here at the edge of the Narrow, in the pouring rain with the moss and rocks turned slick and treacherous. You aren’t strong, but it’s enough, and I fall*

*forever*

*and I twist and reach out for you*

*can’t let you go*

*and my hand closes around your arm, I pull you with me, because*

*forever and forever and forever*

*we are destined for each other. We are infinite.*

*We hit the water, and I wrap my arms around you. I hold you as the river drags us down. As our lungs burn. As the cold steals the life from our limbs. As the current dashes us against the rocks, once, then twice, then three times. The water pins us against a snag of rock and holds us there together. My hand in your hair, your empty eyes staring into mine.*

*And there we stay.*

*Forever.*

“I killed you,” Grace says, her voice so soft only the two of us can hear. Tremors run up and down those limbs that aren’t hers. There are tears on her cheeks. No, not tears. River water, streaked with silt. Memory rises up like the river around her, and she is not so whole as she supposes. “I *killed* you to get away from you. Why would you want to be together after that?”

“Because I love you. I forgive you. It was one mistake, that’s all,” I tell her, smiling. “If I can forgive you for that, you can forgive me for what I did, can’t you? We love each other too much to let it stand in our way.”

“But I don’t love you,” she says softly.

I stumble back as if struck.

“Grace did,” she says. “Up until the very end, she loved you, and I remember that love. I thought I still felt it, but it’s only a memory. I’m someone else now.”

“That’s only because of the girl. You’re not *you*, but you can be again. When you come with me,” I say, but she’s shaking her head.

“I wanted to leave you. *Grace* did. It was never going to be forever, Maeve. We were never infinite. Not really.” She pulls free of me, stepping away. The others have obediently held back, but now the balance shifts. They move forward, closing the distance between us.

Grace is wrong. Confused by her muddled existence, by the childish mind she’s been forced to inhabit. She loved me even as she pushed me into that river. I loved her as I dragged her down into it with me.

She will understand. I will make her. When she is Grace again, she will love me again. And if she doesn’t—

We will have eternity either way.

“I won’t let you go. Not ever,” I say.

“Seems like she’s made her decision,” Ruth says, approaching. “Breakups suck, I get it. Time to move on.” She crosses her arms, and it takes all of my control not to fling myself at her, tear her face with my nails. Zoya puts an arm around Grace’s shoulders. Veronica steps in front of her, wedging herself into the scant space between us.

“Del made her decision. If you really love her, you’ll accept that,” Veronica says.

“You don’t know what love is,” I say. “Love is not patient. Love is not kind. Love is hunger. It’s a knife in your guts and your skin on fire. It

*should* feel like you're drowning. That's how you know it's real. I will never let anything come between us again. Never."

I fix my eyes on Grace, whose shoulders are slumped in Zoya's embrace.

"Leave the girl and come with me. Back where you belong. Or Eden drowns with me instead."

Grace gives a shuddering, startled gasp. She straightens up. "No."

"You know me. You know that there is *nothing* I wouldn't do to keep you," I tell her. I love her too much to let her walk away. "There's nothing you can do to make me spare her, except coming with me. *You know me.*"

Veronica looks back at Grace. A muscle in her jaw twitches. I can read her perfectly—because Eden can. She believes me. And however sympathetic she might be to Grace, she isn't going to let Eden be sacrificed to her stubbornness.

"You already died, Grace," Veronica says haltingly. "This way at least Eden and Del get to live."

Grace looks at her with hollow eyes. "Eden would. And another girl would. But Del? *I'm* Del. Whoever is here when Grace is gone, it won't be me." She shuts her eyes.

I take a step back. Toward the edge. "Time to choose. I'm not going into the river alone," I warn her. "With you or with Eden. Choose."

"Don't hurt her," Grace says, voice ragged.

Exultation and anger twine through me. She's going to agree. She's going to come with me.

For *Eden*. Not for me.

"I'll go with you. But only if you let me say goodbye." Her chin tilts up, a sliver of defiance. She's never had more than that. Not in this life or the last. Thin, vanishing moments when she made an impulsive demand, struck out. She ended both our lives with such a foolish split-second act. But I'll give her this.

"Don't. This isn't right," Zoya says.

"Isn't it? The living live. The dead keep on being dead," Ruth says, but she sounds disturbed. They will each have a hundred stories they tell themselves about tonight. The stories that say it isn't their fault—or it is—or they could have done something differently—or it was always going to end like this.

"Let her go," Veronica says. It isn't an order. Her voice trembles. But the other two girls act like it is. They absolve themselves of the decision. They

peel away from Grace, falling back with gratitude they dress up like reluctance. Veronica, too, retreats, and once again it's just me and Grace and the river softly gleaming.

“Well?” I ask as Grace approaches. “Say goodbye.”

“Not to you. To Eden,” she says, fingers curling into fists. “Let me talk to her.”

She doesn't realize how cruel the request is—that her last request before returning to me is to talk to the girl she loved in my place. But I can forgive her. I can forgive her anything as long as she comes back to me.

“Only a minute,” I tell her.

I shut my eyes and plunge back below the surface of Eden's mind.

EDEN

**I BREAK THE** surface gasping. At first I don't know where I am or why—or how Del could be here, under the dark sky, holding on to me as if for dear life. Then my heel hits the edge of the rock and I realize what lies at my back, placidly waiting for that single careless slip.

I freeze. The events of the last twenty-four hours present themselves like murky images, scenes watched from below the water.

“Eden? Is it you?” Del asks.

“It's me,” I say, voice grating.

“I don't know how much you know,” she begins.

I blink, shaking my head to clear it. “It's all muddled,” I manage. I grab her hands. “You said you'd go back with her.”

“I don't have a choice. Not if I want to save you,” Del says. “It's okay. I got more years than I was supposed to. I got a chance to meet you. That's more than I should have had.”

“You should have had *decades*,” I tell her, my throat tight. “I don't want to lose you, Del.”

“Delphine will live,” she says.

“But Grace will go back to that horrible place. And you—Del—you'll be gone,” I say.

“I was never supposed to exist in the first place,” Del reminds me. “Eden, we don't have much time. I just wanted to tell you—I wanted to say . . .” She trails off helplessly.

I lean forward and kiss her. Gently, carefully. She kisses me back, all grief and longing and things we will never get to say.

It isn't fair. She never got to live. Not as Grace or Delphine or Del. All of them were stolen by the Narrow.

“I never got the chance to love you,” I say. I step back from her. Inches from the edge of the Narrow, my feet planted firmly. “I can't let you die again.” I can feel Maeve rising up through the dark water once more to claim me. I look past Del to Veronica and the others. Veronica's expression

is contorted in fear and the agony of helplessness. We are all just frozen here. Trapped.

I am done being trapped. I am done with surrender.

I wrap my hand around Veronica's silver pentacle, still hanging around my neck. "I love you," I say. Maeve's spirit wraps around me, dragging it toward the dark. "I love you all."

Veronica screams, as if she realizes immediately what's happening. But she's too far away and too late as I spin around, holding Maeve at bay for a second, two seconds—

Long enough to jump.

**THEY SAY THE** Narrow drowns all it takes, but they are wrong. I know because I watched a girl fall in. I watched the water fold over her as she vanished instantly into the dark.

And six years later, I kissed her warm lips. I felt her heartbeat under my palm and her breath on my skin. A miracle like that, you don't waste. You don't let it get dragged back under.

So I jump. And I take Maeve down with me.

We hit the water. What little light there is on the surface is obliterated instantly as we plunge below the surface. Bits of wood and leaves and dirt strike my skin, but it's hardly noticeable next to the pummeling of the water itself. My lungs burn, my flesh is ice. Maeve tears herself free of my body, desperate to reach Del, but I wrap my limbs around her, tangle my hand in her long dark hair. She cannot escape me. I am too close to death, and she has become too real.

My arm scrapes against a rock, pain jolting through my body. Maeve thrashes and strikes at me. I hold on.

The water slams my back against some unseen obstacle. What little air is in my lungs goes out of me at once. My grip fails. Maeve twists free of me as my vision goes dark, as my sense of my own body fades.

And then I'm not in the river. I'm standing in the dark, in silence except for the dripping of water from my hair and my clothes. Beyond me is only an infinite black. I'm not cold. I'm not hurting.

I'm not anything.

There comes a slow, cruel laugh behind me. I turn, and there it is. The bright room. The ratty couch, the pills spilled over the coffee table. Luke, glassy-eyed. Dylan, his elbows on his knees, looking straight at me.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asks. "There's nowhere to go from here."

I look behind me at the emptiness that I mistook for darkness. It's not night but a vast nothing. That's why I can never get away—this room, this light, is all that exists.

I'm back in the room. Dylan pats the cushion beside him. "Come on. Get comfortable. Have something to relax."

Where was I a moment before?

*The Narrow.*

"You were right here. You never left," Luke says, his empty eyes fixed on me.

"Sit down," Dylan says.

Water drips from my fingertips.

*Maeve.*

"There's no one here but us," Dylan says, and he's right. Even Luke is gone. So are the walls. There's just Dylan and the couch and a tiny wedge of light. I step leadenly toward the couch. The carpet is soaked, squishing beneath my feet. "Come on, Princess," he says, except it's Maeve who speaks. Maeve sitting on the couch, blood billowing lazily in the air around her from the wound on the back of her head.

"What is this?" I ask.

"The last frantic synapses firing in your brain," Maeve suggests, one shoulder shrugging. "Or the hell you'll get to live in when you're dead. The Narrow keeps most of the drowned, but some have prior claims."

"I'm dying."

"You jumped in the Narrow, Princess. Of course you're dying," Maeve says. "Idiot."

"I had to stop you. I couldn't just sit by and do nothing. Not like with Dylan. Not again."

"Idiot," Maeve says again. "You didn't do *nothing*. You did the only thing that mattered. You survived. Whatever it took. It's everything you did *after* that was surrender. You kept quiet. You played nice. You destroyed yourself for everyone else's comfort, and you've done it again."

"That's not what I did," I say angrily. I pace in front of her. Water oozes from the carpet with every step.

"Martyring yourself is a hell of a lot easier than standing up for yourself," Maeve says. "You killed yourself to save a girl who was already dead. How does that make sense?"

"Del isn't dead."

"Del isn't Del. She's three people, and two of them are going to die tonight, whatever happens. You chose to let Del live, which means Grace and Delphine don't exist anymore, not really. At least if you'd let me take

Grace, everyone would be back to where they were supposed to be. The living and the dead.”

The circle of light is getting smaller. The water is rising at our feet. Lapping against my ankles now.

“It doesn’t matter anymore,” Maeve says, leaning back with one arm flung casually over the back of the couch. “You did it. Surrendered to your suffering.”

“Sacrifice isn’t the same as surrender,” I tell her, a scrape behind the words. I stand in front of her, my hands fists at my sides.

“A real sacrifice has to be something of value. You don’t think you have any,” Maeve says with a vicious twist of her lips.

“That isn’t true.” Is it?

“You didn’t even try to fight the current,” Maeve says, eyes locked with mine. “You let it take you under without a fuss. Just like you always turn back to this place. Because you think this is what you deserve. And maybe you do.”

“No. I don’t,” I say fiercely. “I don’t deserve any of this.”

“Then why are you still here?” Maeve asks.

I wave a hand at the darkness around us. “There’s nowhere else to go. Every time I leave, there’s nothing but the dark, and this place is right behind me,” I tell her. She should know that. She was in my head long enough to remember my nightmares.

“Oh. I guess you should just give up and die, then,” she says.

I glare at her. There’s water dripping from the ceiling now, cold rivulets streaming down my back. Maeve’s face is sunken, her skull gleaming beneath her skin.

She’s wrong. I don’t think I deserve to die.

But maybe that’s not the same thing as thinking I’m worth fighting for.

I did what Dylan told me to. Survival, not surrender. But then I’m sitting safely at the kitchen table, my mother’s appalled face across from me. *You aren’t going to tell anyone, are you?*

Moving my flight to give my bruises time to heal.

Hiding my arm from my friends.

Agreeing to Oster’s deal so I didn’t have to confront my parents.

Avoiding Veronica and the others.

Inviting Maeve to crawl inside my skin, even knowing it would change me—end the *me* that exists now.

There were countless small moments of surrender.

Jumping into the water, though, hadn't been surrender. She was wrong about that. *That* was a chance to save Del—and to save Grace from an eternity in the Narrow's grip, and Maeve's.

But what about now?

Waiting for the lights to go out. For the river to rise. Waiting for time to catch up with me and my death to find me. This *is* surrender.

The Narrow drowns all it takes. I don't for a moment believe that I am an exception. But I'm done surrendering. If the Narrow wants me, I will die fighting.

Fighting for myself.

I turn away from Maeve. Away from the ratty couch, the white pills that have turned to knuckle bones on the coffee table. With water sloshing around my calves, I stride toward the darkness.

Every time I've had this dream, I walk and walk and never get any farther away from the light, the room. As soon as I turn back, it's there.

So this time I don't turn back. I walk blindly ahead into the empty dark. The water rises. I wade through knee-deep water, then thrash my way along as it swells to my thighs.

*You will die anyway, I think, and keep moving. You already took that lungful of water into your body. You are dying or you are dead. You are circling around in the last seconds of your life, and it is too late to do anything about it.*

I keep walking. A sob rises in my chest and I let it out—and then I scream, raw rage and fear and hurt.

*I want to live, I try to shout, but my voice has failed and the dark is all around me. Why did I waste so much time? Why did I let myself sink so deep and never let anyone see that I was drowning?*

I fall to one knee. I shut my eyes, which changes nothing, since there's nothing to see. All of this is a dream, anyway.

Why fight now, when it won't matter? It won't change anything. No one will know.

Because now it's the only thing that matters. The last thing. Not if I die but how I die. It matters to me.

I open my eyes and I stand. I keep moving. I don't turn back.

And then, all at once, the empty dark isn't empty. I stagger to a halt, staring at the girl in front of me. She has light brown hair that falls to her

shoulders, brown eyes a touch too big for her face.

“Grace,” I say, staring.

“Eden.” She smiles—a bright, genuine smile that crinkles the corners of her eyes. “There you are.”

“What are you doing here?” I ask, confusion and apprehension stealing the last warmth from my blood.

“Looking for you, of course.” She stretches out a hand. The water has gone still around us. My hand trembling, I take hers, and she pulls me lightly but firmly toward her, until we’re inches apart. She runs the fingers of her other hand down my cheek in a tender gesture. “Eden, I’m so sorry. I had two lives to find you, and I still only managed to steal a few days for us to spend together.”

“How are you here?” I ask her, my voice shaking. If she’s here, that means—

“Hush,” she says, and kisses me. It isn’t like kissing Del—not quite. And yet it is the kiss of a girl who knows me, and I know her—know the taste of her lips and the touch of her hands. There is love in that kiss, and grief. Hers and mine, because her being here can only mean one thing.

“Grace,” I breathe.

She touches her fingertips to my lips. “Don’t. It’s too late. I made my choice.” She takes hold of my arm, fingers wrapping tight around my wrist. “Don’t let go.”

The ground beneath my feet vanishes, and we plunge beneath the water.

The dark does not relent, but suddenly my lungs are empty, burning. My body is alight with pain.

But Grace’s hand is still around my wrist. She floats in the water before me, limned in strange light. For a moment we hang there—and then she begins to swim toward the surface in utter contradiction of the punishing current. I rise with her. I don’t have the strength to kick my legs, but it doesn’t seem to matter. A shred of light appears above. The moon.

Something snags my ankle. I jerk to a stop, kicking frantically against the thing that holds me—a hand, a pale arm. A thin white face, dark hair billowing in the water around it. Maeve. Her other hand wraps around my leg. For an instant, we stare at each other—the dying and the dead.

And then there are other hands. Clutching at her arms, her throat, wrapping rotten fingers around her mouth. The drowned drag her down. Begin to drag us down, too—

She lets go. Her grip relents, and the current and the drowned rip her away.

I'm rising through the water again, but my oxygen-starved brain has reached its limit. Bright spots appear in my vision, pulsing like alien jellyfish, and the flat circle of the moon vanishes. My grip on Grace's arm weakens.

The last of my vision flickers—

Goes dark—

The hand around my wrist hauls me upward. I break the surface. I gasp, gulping in a desperate lungful of air, catching water with it. I choke as voices shout.

"I've got her! I've got her!" It's Veronica's voice, Veronica's hand on my wrist, and Grace is gone. I cling to Veronica as the greedy water drags at me. Ruth throws herself down beside the bank, reaching out so far that Zoya has to grab her waist to steady her. I manage to get my other hand around Veronica's arm, and then Ruth gets hold of my shirt and pulls.

We topple onto the slick rocks of the bank as I gag and cough, expelling the Narrow from my body.

"Eden, talk to me," Veronica says on her knees beside me.

I only cough again, tremors convulsing my body.

"Jesus, don't make her talk, let her focus on breathing," Ruth says, pissed off the way she gets when she's scared, and I want to weep because I thought I would never hear her voice again.

"She's okay. She's okay," Zoya is repeating, and her fingernails tease back the wet hair from my face as she makes soothing noises. Well back from the water, Delphine stands with her arms wrapped around her body, her expression lost. She looks at me as if I'm a stranger.

For just a moment, I think I see another girl standing on the shore. Then she's gone, and she might have never been there at all.

Veronica grabs my hand and holds on tight.

With all my strength, I squeeze back.

**THE DAY DELPHINE** and her mother leave Atwood, the sun is shining in a perfectly blue sky. A black car idles in front of Abigail House as Madelyn Fournier supervises the driver moving suitcase after suitcase into the trunk. I stand a distance away, arms around myself to guard against the bitter wind.

Madelyn catches sight of me. Her face goes still, and she quickly looks away. She and I haven't spoken since that night—since she and Oster came running down to the Narrow, having discovered our absence. I didn't have the chance to talk to Delphine before Madelyn whisked her away. I haven't been allowed to see her, but Oster assures me she is well. She shows no signs of her previous affliction.

I was carted off to the hospital to be bandaged up and x-rayed. No broken bones this time. Just bruises that turned half my body exciting shades of purple and some aspiration of the water that left me with a wracking cough for days afterward.

Delphine comes down the steps wearing jeans and a bright red sweater, something tucked under one arm. Her hair is pulled back with a black headband, her makeup spare but girlish. She looks well. But she doesn't look like Del.

She's already spotted me. She must have seen me from the window upstairs. She says a few quick words to her mother, then walks in my direction. I stiffen as she approaches, heart hammering.

I've wanted to go see her a hundred times, but Oster told me Madelyn wanted some time for things to "settle" before she saw me again. Whatever that means.

She stops a few feet shy of me, biting the corner of her lip. "Hey," she says. Her voice sounds strange.

"Hi," I manage, though it comes out more of a croak than a word. "How are you?"

She gives a one-shouldered shrug, looking off a few inches to my left instead of at me. "Okay, I guess. It's weird, mostly. I don't necessarily feel

different, but I keep going to watch a show I like and suddenly I hate it, or my favorite food is just *off*. Things that are habit feel uncomfortable and wrong. It's not like I was someone else. I was *me*. And I'm still me, but not the same me, and . . . Like I said, it's weird. Are you . . . ?”

“All better,” I say. “Just a few bruises left.” And a ragged hole in my heart. I search her face, not sure what I'm searching for.

“Thank you for what you did,” she says. “For trying to save me. Us. Her.” She gives a little breathy laugh. “I have no idea how to talk about any of this. Mom wants to act like none of it ever happened, and honestly, that might be easier. Move and start over and pretend to be normal.”

“You're going back to New York?”

“Is it really going back if I haven't been there since I was eleven?” she asks. “But yeah. New York and then London, and then we'll see. I haven't gotten to go anywhere at all for years. I'd like to do some traveling. Finish school online, and then . . . then the whole rest of my life, I guess.”

“Are you angry with her?” I ask softly. “For keeping you trapped here all this time?”

That familiar small line appears between her eyebrows, her expression quizzical. “Grace? No, of course not. She saved me. I didn't mean to—*she* didn't mean to possess me, or whatever you want to call that. There wasn't anything evil or violent about it. I just . . . *was*. Or we were, or . . .”

“Right,” I say, and we both chuckle with forced humor.

“Oh. I brought you this,” Delphine says. She holds out the object that has been tucked under her arm. *Grave Belles*, I realize, neatly tied again.

“You can keep those,” I say, not reaching for them. “I have the scans. I'd like for you to have them. And I have more pages to send you. The ending. I've been working on it, finally.”

“Oh,” Delphine says. Then, hesitatingly, “The thing is, it's not . . . it's not really my thing. I loved it when I read it before, but now . . .”

“I see,” I say, feeling like I've been punched in the stomach. I blink back tears and reach out to take it. My finger bumps against hers. She flinches back, pulling her hands in against her body. I take a deep breath. I can't let her go without knowing. “Delphine, you and I—”

“Please don't,” she whispers. She looks me in the eye at last, her lower lip trembling. “I loved you. Completely. And now I don't. I wish it weren't true, because I remember what it felt like, and I care about you a lot. And

I'm grateful. So, so grateful. But I'm not her anymore. Del. And I can't—I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry," I say, my voice a wreck. I hold the pages of *Grave Belles* flat against my chest, both arms folded over them. Like a shield between us. "It was Grace all along."

Delphine shakes her head fiercely. "I *did* love you. I did. And I feel like I've lost you, but I'm the one that . . ." A sob tears out of her. Her face crumples, and she jams her knuckles against her lips as tears stream down her cheeks. I reach out for her, desperate to comfort her, but she shakes her head, backing away.

She turns and strides back toward her mother, arms stiff at her sides. Madelyn gathers her up, casting me a pained look. There is sympathy in that expression, but a warning, too.

I force myself to turn away.

The girl I loved, whoever she was, is gone.

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—

They say she haunts the Narrow's shores. She is a slant of moonlight, a brush of wind, a whispered warning.

Every stone of Atwood holds a haunting. She is nothing remarkable, the lady of the shore, but she is new.

"Are you sure?" Veronica asks me as we make our way down toward the Narrow, snow crunching under our feet.

"I'm sure," I tell her. "Wait here. I'll be back soon."

She is waiting on the rock where she died forty years ago. Where seven years ago, she saved the life of a young girl and became someone new. Where less than three months ago, she lifted me from the water. The moonlight shines over her skin. She wears a blue dress the color of the morning sky.

"Grace," I say. She sees me, and a smile lights her features. Damp strands of hair cling to her cheeks. Her dress flutters, not in the breeze but in the tug of the current. When she touches my face, her hand is cold and wet. I cover it with my own, lean into her touch.

"You're still here," I say.

She looks behind her at the river. "I still belong to it. I have held on this long. I don't think I can last much longer."

“I should have come sooner,” I say. “I didn’t know.”

“Time doesn’t matter,” she says. “I was always going to be here when you came to find me. And when you’re gone, I will return to the Narrow.” She looks down at the water, her expression troubled. “She’s down there, somewhere. I can still feel her.”

“Maeve.”

“I loved her, you know.”

“I know. And she loved you.” I felt it. It’s easy to say that a love like that isn’t really love, but I know that’s wrong. It was a poisoned love of possession and jealousy. A love unworthy of the loved.

“I don’t know if that makes it better or worse,” Grace admits.

“Maeve thought that love was a storm. Violence and passion,” I say.

“And what is it, if not that?” Grace asks.

“A shelter from the storm, maybe,” I say. We stand shoulder to shoulder, looking down at the water. Our hands don’t quite touch. “The scent of rain in the air before you feel the first drop. The flowers that bloom after. I don’t know.”

“It sounds like you do,” Grace says. She lets out a breath and looks up toward the sky. Tears or river water trickle down her cheeks—I can’t tell which. “It shouldn’t have ended like this. We shouldn’t have died. She wasn’t evil. She was . . . she could have changed if she lived.”

“But the dead don’t change,” I say.

My fingers brush against the back of her hand. It feels insubstantial, as if I’m only imagining her touch.

“She let me go,” I say. “At the very end. I don’t know why. Maybe she did change. Just a little bit.”

“We got to live again, she and I,” Grace says. She laces her fingers with mine. “Maybe that was enough to change us.”

“How much of her was you?” I whisper. I don’t need to explain what I mean.

“I don’t know. It wasn’t *this part is Grace* and *this part is Delphine*. I was just me. And I still feel like me. I still feel like the girl who loves you. I love you, Eden.”

“Then stay with me. Stay,” I say, knowing she can’t.

“I can hear the river calling me,” she whispers. There is a tension in her limbs, a trembling. “I have to go.”

“No. This can’t be what happens. You can’t be trapped down there forever.”

“What the Narrow takes does not return,” she says. She touches my cheek, thumbing away a tear I didn’t know I’d shed. “I know how it should end.”

“What?” I ask, confusion stealing past my devastation.

“*Grave Belles*. You said you didn’t know how to end it, but I do. Lenore and Belle, they end up together. They’re happy, and they’re safe. They live. Both of them live.”

“Grace, I—” I begin, but she kisses my words away. One soft, swift kiss, too quickly ended. She steps back.

“I have to go,” she says. “The Narrow is calling. I can’t hold on any longer.”

I look at her helplessly. Can this be it? In the end, a surrender after all?

No.

“Take my hand,” I say, voice shaking.

“Eden . . .”

“Take my hand,” I say again, and this time, puzzled, she does. I lace my fingers with hers. I face the river. Only a short jump to the other side. To the east, the sky is growing light with the first hints of the dawn. I look at Grace; she nods.

And together, we jump.

We jump to defy the Narrow.

To be free.

For a moment, we are in the air, only our linked hands to tether us to anything at all.

And then I land on the other side, alone, the first rays of sunlight slicing through the air where we leaped. The air stirs across my cold, damp skin, and Grace is gone.

Not below. Not lost in the deep, in the dark.

Gone.

My knees shake. I sink down into a crouch, unable to stay upright. I stay there until Veronica comes to find me. Gathers me in her arms, plants a kiss against my brow.

Light spills across the Narrow, and we make our way back along its banks.

**THE VOICES FROM** the common room intrude on my solitary grief. Zoya and Veronica are exclaiming over something in impressed tones, Ruth shushing them. I roll out of bed. Tears soak my pillow. My head aches from crying, but at least it's a tangible pain.

I push open the door and walk toward the sound, swathed in an oversized Atwood sweatshirt, my hair frizzing the edges of my vision. I'm already packed to go to Veronica's place over the break. My parents didn't put up a fight—they're going out of the country for the holidays anyway. Luke is gone, God knows where. He left a voicemail a few weeks ago to tell me he was sorry for everything, that he hadn't spoken to Dylan since, that he was trying.

I love him. I hate him. Both can be true, and neither one changes what I need to do. I have to protect myself.

I didn't call him back. I don't know if I ever will. If even the dead can change, maybe he can, too, but I will not be sacrificed to that hope ever again.

Veronica, Ruth, and Zoya are clustered around the coffee table, bent over something that it takes my cotton-wrapped mind a few seconds to recognize. The *Grave Belles* pages.

I found them when I was packing, shoved in the back of my desk drawer where they've been since Del—*Delphine*—gave them back. I threw them in the trash last night, unable to stand looking at them. They must have fished them out. "What are you doing?" I ask.

Veronica looks up with an accusatory expression. "Are these yours?"

"I threw them away," I say by way of answer, stepping forward to grab the page she's holding. She yanks it out of the way.

"Why? They're fantastic," she says. "Why didn't I know you could draw?"

"Please tell me there's more," Zoya says. "I have to know what happens."

Ruth is carefully stacking the pages back in order, pausing to read each one as she does. She stops, looks up. "Eden, these are *really* good," she

says. “How long have you been working on this?”

“A few years,” I admit. I stare between them. I’ve kept *Grave Belles* hidden for so long, and suddenly I can’t remember why.

“I told you she was the sneaky one,” Veronica says in a voice filled with—pride? “Why the heck didn’t you let us read this?”

“It’s just doodles. I know that you . . .” I stop myself. Take a deep breath. “I was afraid that it wasn’t as good as something you could draw. Or something Zoya could write. I thought you’d think it was silly or . . .”

“Eden, babe. We need to work on your self-esteem,” Veronica informs me.

“Is this what you want to do?” Zoya asks. “Draw comics?”

“I don’t know. Maybe?” I say. “Yes. Or write. Or something. I’m not sure. I don’t have things figured out like you all do.”

“You don’t have to,” Ruth reminds me.

“What you do have to figure out is how this ends,” Zoya says. “Because right now it’s a cliffhanger, and I may actually die if I don’t find out what comes next. At least tell me it’s a happy ending.”

They look at me expectantly. “They live,” I say, a small smile at the corners of my mouth. “They both live, and they’re together, and they’re happy. That’s how it ends.”

Quietly, Veronica reaches out a hand. She draws me down to the floor beside her, and I settle there, her head resting on my shoulder. “Tell us. The whole thing,” she says.

*Lenore looks for Belle, but she’s missing. And so is the gravedigger’s shovel, and a rope . . .*

I sit with my friends as rain begins to fall against the window.

It’s only the rain. The night is empty and still and calm. The Narrow lies neatly within its banks.

Deep beneath the surface, a drowned girl with nothing left to reach for surrenders to the undertow.

## Acknowledgments

**I FEEL THAT** before anything else, I should thank the River Wharf. I'm sure a number of readers have correctly identified the Narrow as the fictional American cousin of the famed Bolton Strid, a lovely and deadly stretch of water that forms a small section of the River Wharf in England. I hope the locals (and local spirits) don't mind that I have borrowed a pale reflection of it to haunt my woods.

So many people have had a hand in bringing this book to its readers, but this time around I'd like to shine a special spotlight on Maggie Rosenthal, who has been my editor since *I Am Still Alive* and who has never failed to provide the kind of editorial insight and partnership you dream of as an author. She has been collaborative, kind, clever, and wise; I talk about "our" books, and it's absolutely true. They would not be the same books and I would not be the same writer if Maggie had not spotted the potential in *I Am Still Alive* and helped transform it into the story it became. Maggie is frequently involved from the very earliest stages of developing and choosing ideas to pursue, and her edit letters are always delightful (once I get over melting into a dramatic puddle because no, I didn't manage to write a flawless first draft and yes, that is twelve single-spaced pages of edits to tackle, which Maggie sadistically refers to as "light notes," the monster).

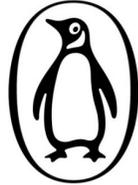
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## About the Author

Kate Alice Marshall started writing before she could hold a pen properly, and never stopped. She lives in the Pacific Northwest with a chaotic menagerie of pets and family members, and ventures out in the summer to kayak and camp along Puget Sound. She is the author of the young adult novels *I Am Still Alive*, *Rules for Vanishing*, *Our Last Echoes*, and *These Fleeting Shadows*, as well as the middle grade novels *Thirteens*, *Brackenbeast*, and *Glassheart*. Visit her online at [katemarshallbooks.com](http://katemarshallbooks.com).



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