

UNDER THE
PENDULUM SUN

A NOVEL OF

THE FAE

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An excerpt of Part One, supplied in the Hugo 2018 Voters Packet



*To the fictions of our childhood,
I add this apocrypha.*

PART ONE

Gethsemane

CHAPTER I

The Quiet in the Port

Great and ancient empires, Mahomedan and Heathen, have received a shock by the prowess of British arms, nerved and strengthened by GOD, which has broken down strong, and hitherto invulnerable barriers; and so a way has been opened for His blessed Gospel to pass from here to the remotest bounds of reality.

Thus, Palestine is now accessible; and Englishmen may travel freely through the length and breadth of the Holy Land. The enlarged, and still enlarging, boundaries of our dominions in India, open new fields of labour for the Lord's servants. China, its forbidding gates forced open by war, calls out to the faithful.

But it is the Faelands that arrest our attention. Arcadia's vast unknown, which has been for many ages closed against us and the Divine Word, is at last made clear and knowable. And, as Britain has had the high and singular honour, in the wonderful providence of GOD, the Lord of Hosts, of breaking down that barrier, it is but apposite that she should have the honour of being the first to carry in the balm of the blessed Gospel.

Rev William E Matheson, "Appeal on Behalf of Arcadia",

NEWS OF THE WORLD, 5th December 1843

My brother and I grew up dreaming of new worlds.

Our father had owned a paltry library of books and a subscription to the most fashionable periodicals, all of which we gleefully devoured. We would linger by the gate, impatient for the post that would bring new sustenance for our hungry imaginations. Bored of waiting, we told each other stories of what

could be. I remember my brother, Laon, finding one of our tin soldiers at the bottom of his pocket. The red paint was barely worn and it looked up at me with a long-suffering expression. I snatched it from Laon's hand, declaring it the Duke of Wellington, and ran off claiming that the two of us would adventure together. Like Lord Byron or Marco Polo.

We invented whole new worlds for our soldiers to explore: Gaaldine, Exina, Alcona, Zamorna. From our father's books we learnt of pilgrims and missionaries and explorers, and so we wrote of grand journeys, long and winding. As we read of the discovery of the Americas, of the distant Orient, and of strange Arcadia we added similar places to our ever more intricate maps. We mimicked the newspapers and periodicals we read, writing new ones for our tin soldiers. In the tiniest, tiniest writing, we detailed their exploits, the politics of their parliaments, and the scandals of their socialites.

But for all our stories, our imaginations were small and provincial. For the talk of tropics and deserts, our childish fictions filled them with the same oaks and aspens that grew in our garden. We built on their landscape, exotic buildings that were just our little whitewashed church in Birdforth in disguise. We rained down on strange soil the same Yorkshire rain as that which drenched our skins and drove us inside, peeling off our clothes, housebound by the weather and desperate for diversion.

As such, I could never have imagined Arcadia.

I was familiar with all the tales, mind. The first explorers had spun overwrought stories upon their return: *until I laid eyes upon the Faelands, I was blind, and now I see. I have never seen colour, nor grandeur, nor wonder, until I saw the shores of Arcadia.* Later travellers were more prosaic, but still offered no adequate description. There were few maps and fewer landscapes available, and almost all of them had been denounced by one explorer or another as fraudulent.

For all the many contradictory theories I had read on the relationship between our world and that of the fae, I was no more enlightened. It was said to be underground, but not. It overlaid our own, but not. It was another place, but not.

All I do know was this: Our ship, *The Quiet*, sailed in circles on the North Sea for six whole weeks. On the dawn of the first day of the seventh week, my wavering compass informed me that we were heading straight back towards smog-shrouded London.

Nervously, I clutched my compass. My brother had given it to me before he left for Arcadia to become a missionary. He was among the first to be tasked to bring the Word of God to the Fair Folk. He had been there three years now and had been nothing but terse in his correspondence. I tried to swallow the worry that consumed me, but it knotted around my heart.

That was when I caught my first glimpse of the Faelands.

Impossibly white cliffs rose from the white sea foam. For a moment my mind feared it to be Dover, that I had simply returned to those mundane cliffs of chalk and stone, that no foreign land awaited me.

Yet those cliffs were too white, too stark. They could not be Dover.

Behind them I expected the rolling hills of home. But instead the landscape was jagged and jutting knife-sharp from the sea. It seemed cobbled together, each part eerily familiar but set against something other. I recognised the leering profile of a hill, the knuckle-like crest of a mountain. Yet as wind and wave shifted the shapes, it all seemed different again and my strained eyes watered.

The Quiet glided gull-like into a wide, wide river. Unfamiliar structures sprawled against the green grey mass of the land in arching, crumbling lines. Squinting, I made out the spined turrets, barbed roofs and oddly leaning walls. For a moment I thought the town to be an endless dragon coiled around

the edge of the harbour, huffing smoke from its distended nostrils. It shimmered, the shingled roofs seeming scale-like, and then it *shifted*.

I blinked, and buildings were back to where I remembered them. There was no dragon made of shifting structures. Just a town of crowded streets.

The ship heaved under our feet like an unruly stallion. A shout broke out among the sailors in words I didn't understand. They started busying. As they clambered up and down the ratlines and hauled rope this way and that, they muttered invocations under their breath. I wanted to chide them for their superstition but we were sailing to Arcadia and none of it made any sense.

I tried to stay out of the way as the sailors blasphemously crossed themselves in the name of salt, sea and soil.

An unnatural wind curled around the sail, whipping it back and forth. It fluttered full and then deflated with each breath of the wind. *The Quiet* became anything but as the timber groaned. The cabin boy flung his arms around the prow and cooed at it.

It was a long while before the ship was tamed and brought to shore.

And then I was simply there, stepping unsteadily from the ship into the shamle of a docks. Twisting streets full of seeming people reminded me of crowded London.

The ground was a shock to my feet, and I staggered. My carpet bag and trunk joined me on the docks. I fumbled for my documents and scanned the milling crowd for my guide. I tried not to notice the oddities of each figure – the strange colours and the wings and the horns. There would be time aplenty for the wonder of Arcadia once my bags had been unpacked and I had found my brother.

“Miss Catherine Helstone, I presume? The missionary's sister?”

With an upturned nose, round chin and soft, brown eyes, the woman I turned to meet was perhaps one of the least ethereal people I'd ever met. She

was shorter than me. But as her skirts hung long and limp, without a murmur of wave or curve, her figure seemed tall and lank. She dressed in sombre, mortal colours, her gown being a muddy shade of navy blue and her shawl more grey than white.

A smile spread across her freckled cheeks as I nodded.

“I thought I recognised you,” she said. “You look just like your brother.”

“I do?” Though Laon and I shared the same dark hair and strong nose, few remarked on our resemblance. Features that were handsome on a man were becoming on a woman’s frame.

“I’m Ariel Davenport, as I’m sure you know. Your guide.”

“I am very pleased to finally meet you,” I said. We had exchanged a handful of letters through the Missionary Society in preparation of my journey.

She shook my hand vigorously between her two clasped ones and swooped in two sharp kisses. Her smile getting wider, she added, “Though I’m not the real one.”

“I’m... I’m not sure I follow.”

“I’m not the real Ariel Davenport, you see.” There was an unpleasant edge to her laugh; it was a touch too brittle. “I’m her changeling.”

“Her changeling?” Many of the intermediaries between the fae and humans were said to be changelings. One of Captain Cook’s botanists was said to have learnt of their fae origins upon arrival to Arcadia and was conscripted to their cause. Despite such accounts, changelings never seemed quite real to me. But then, given how sheltered I had been, the French were never quite real. “So you were raised as her—”

Ariel Davenport gave an exasperated sigh and rolled her eyes at my ignorance. “She was a human child, I was a fairy-made simulacrum of a

human child. We traded places. I grew up there and she grew up here.”

“What became of her?” I asked.

“That’s not for me to tell.” She gave me a disarmingly lopsided smile and in an impeccably proper accent, added, “And it’s hardly polite to ask.”

“I- I’m sorry,” I stuttered. I dropped my gaze. Our nanny, Tessie, used to keep a pair of steel scissors by our beds to ward off faerie abductors. In restlessness and boredom, I once said to Laon that we should close the scissors, so that they no longer formed the sign of the cross, and invite in the fae. He was horrified. And so I never suggested it again.

“Regardless, now I’m here again. Because I’m useful to them and I understand you humans,” said Miss Davenport. “Speaking of which, I am most remiss in my duties. I should hardly keep you talking here all day.” She waved for an expectant-looking porter to hoist up my trunk onto his shoulders. His sallow skin glinted green as it caught the sunlight.

Miss Davenport hummed tunelessly as she led our way to the rounded carriage. I tried not to stare at the flaring gills of the porter as he heaved my trunk and bags onto the carriage. He lashed them with rope to a wizened stem that jutted from the middle of the roof.

“How far to Gethsemane?” I asked, an ominous shudder passing through me as I said the name.

“That what the missionary called the shambles?” said the coachman.

“Yes, I believe so,” I said. “It is where Reverend Laon Helstone resides. Though I believe his predecessor did the naming.”

The coachman grunted, turning his attention from me.

“You’ve not answered me,” I pressed. Perhaps it was simply that Laon’s predecessor was overly enamoured with winning the martyr’s crown. After all, what other reason has one to name a building after the garden in which Christ spent his final hours before his Crucifixion? “How far to

Gethsemane?”

He tutted to himself, the space between his brows folding like an accordion. “Two revelations and an epiphany? No, there has to be a shortcut... Two painful memories and a daydr—”

“Sixteen miles,” interrupted Miss Davenport. “It is sixteen miles away. We’ll arrive well before dark.”

I nodded uncertainly.

“He says that for the tourists,” she added, glaring at the muttering coachman.

As I alighted, a cacophony of bells chimed midday.

Hand still resting on the carriage door, I turned and looked up. My breath caught, heart bursting with expectation. I had read so much of the pendulum sun of the Faelands. Foolishly, I half-expected to see it waver in the sky before rushing east again, like my own pendant did in my experimenting hands when I was trying to comprehend the very idea.

It did not, of course.

The sun was significantly larger than the one that had been a constant of my life. But it seemed otherwise the same, stinging my eyes as I squinted at it.

“It doesn’t move *that* fast,” said Miss Davenport. “You won’t see much by just looking up. Even at midday.”

I looked back down, white spots swimming in my eyes from the brightness. I pressed my own cold fingers to my closed eyes. I knew I wouldn’t see anything, of course. Arcadian days were as long as earthly ones.

Still, the temptation had been too much.

“Sorry. I should know better,” I murmured, shuffling into the carriage and sitting myself on the dappled upholstery. I even knew that I was at the very edges of the Faelands and that many of the oddities of the sun’s

pendulum-like trajectory would not be discernible here.

“Your brother also did that when he first got here,” she said.

I smiled. For all the distance that had come between us, I felt closer to him again.

Laon and I were inseparable from the second I returned from the Clergy Daughters’ School after the death of our sister, Agnes. I was seven and a half when I was bidden to press my lips on the cold, dead skin of her corpse. I tried not to think of the coffin laid out on the table. Of how the corpse seemed like a stranger wearing my sister’s clothes, of how hollow the promise of other worlds seemed then. I laced my own fingers, not thinking of the warm hands of my brother holding mine when we stood watching the soil swallow up the coffin.

“It’s not very far, Gethsemane,” said Miss Davenport, interrupting my reverie. “But it’s outside of Sesame, you know, the port town. Not many people go beyond the borders of that. Almost all the other missionaries we’ve had set up in Sesame or one of the other ports. Things are rather more earthly there, you know. Though perhaps it doesn’t matter. You do not seem alarmed by the carriage.”

I glanced about the bare, woody interior of the carriage and calfskin upholstery, which was scored by a disconcerting pattern of scrape marks.

“The seats are a little lumpy?” I ventured, resettling myself on the stubborn cushion.

“Ah, yes. The fabric is.... We are but borrowing the skin from the cows.”

“What?” I was understandably incredulous.

“It’s my fault, really,” she said, sheepishly, scratching her upturned nose. “The artisans had no idea what a carriage was so I had to describe it to them. I did so incorrectly, or rather in ways that weren’t correctly understood.

I try not to make that sort of mistake, but I was in a hurry and old fishbrains out there has a very specific mind. And more used to making animals. Point is that I forgot to mention that the cow was dead when you made seats out of their skin, so here we—”

“How is he?” I interrupted. I almost dared not ask. The thought clasped a cold hand around my throat. The allegedly living upholstery under me roiled; the carriage rumbled and I felt sick to the core. I had kept my worries in check for a very, very long time and now, and seeing the possibility of a reprieve, it was all the harder to endure. “Laon. My brother... the Reverend, I mean.”

Miss Davenport shrugged. “I don’t really know how to answer that. He’s as I’ve always known him. Alive and healthy, I suppose, you care about that.” She frowned, her high forehead furrowing.

“I- Yes, I do. Very much.” My fingers hurting with how hard I was holding myself, I forced myself to loosen my hands. I would be seeing him soon enough.

“Why! Pleasantries are a lot harder than I remember them to be.” Miss Davenport giggled behind her glove, a piercing twitter of a noise. “He’s very well. Better than the mission, truth be told. Which I probably shouldn’t say, but it’s not easy to be a missionary around these parts. He’s conducting services no one comes to, begging to gain access to the rest of the Faelands and asking them questions about their—” She cleared her throat and continued in a deep, ponderous tone, “cosmological and metaphysical importance.”

I attempted a laugh, but faltered. “That doesn’t sound like him.”

“That is rather the point,” she retorted. “That’s where the humour comes from.”

After a silence, Miss Davenport filled the empty space of the carriage with amiable, effortless chatter. She described to me the properties of the

pendulum sun and the fish moon. Much of what she said was familiar to me from my reading, but it was good to be distracted by her voice. Too long have I spent alone with my own thoughts aboard *The Quiet*.

I found myself staring and studying her mannerisms more than her words, trying to detect her fae origins. At first glance she seemed as human as me with that scatter of freckles and lopsided smile. Still, she had that awkwardness I heard rumoured of changelings, a certain deficiency in their simulation of humanity. Tessie once told me to stop my tantrum and to behave so as to prove myself not a changeling.

“You could look outside, if you want, Miss Helstone. The window does open.”

After excessive fumbling, I unlatched the window and leaned out. Mist closed around the spiny sprawl that was Sesame, like layers of gauzy curtains. We were alone on the road as it stretched into dense fog. Frowning, I could make out the hunched canopies of bearded trees. Above us, a cloud-bruised sky was heavy with rain.

“The weather isn’t always like this,” said Miss Davenport. “But at least you’ll feel at home. You could pretend that it’s moors behind the fog. It’ll chase away all those feelings of homesickness you feel.”

“I’m not homesick.”

“Not yet.”

Her eyes darted to the window and she hesitated, her gregariousness stemmed by some unspoken emotion. Studying her gloved hands, in a voice quite quiet and quite different to her earlier demeanour, she said, “I was raised in London. Spitalfields.”

I waited, unwilling to intrude upon her vulnerability. I realised after a moment that I was holding my breath. I tried not to stare, but glancing over at the now silent Miss Davenport and her features, I noticed there was

something odd about her, though if this was to do with something unsettled rather than unsettling about her aspect, I could not say.

She seemed to gather herself as she smoothed her skirts and disguised the brushing away of tears as the tucking of stray locks behind her ears.

“I’m not crying,” she said, quietly. “I can’t. This is just a force of habit.”

“I’ve only been to London once,” I said.

“It’s rather splendid,” she enthused, animation returning to her face. “There’s no place quite like it. Even here. Sort of.”

It was impossible to tell if the clouds burst open or if we drove into the storm, but at the first droplets of rain splattering into the carriage Miss Davenport urged me to close the window. The rain was sickeningly warm against my hand. Before I could marvel at the sheer strangeness of hot rain, a gasp of wind chilled the splashed raindrop.

Our vehicle slowed to a squelching walk, mired by the mud underfoot. Our coachman clambered from his seat on the roof to lead his horse by hand.

It was some hours before the rain lightened enough that I could again open the window to look out. An admittedly futile effort, given how my eyes failed utterly at penetrating the murky, roiling fog. Half curious, I clicked open the compass. I had expected to see its needle spinning indecisively but it pointed more or less ahead.

So there was *a* North.

The fog was a shroud, seeming to muffle everything beyond the ghoulishly yellow lamplight. There was a curious emptiness as many of the natural sounds of birds or the rustling of trees that I so often took for granted were simply absent. I told myself this was no different than any other isolating storm, that the silence was but a mundane illusion cast by the wind and rain tormenting the carriage.

Unearthly shadows shifted in the swirling eddies. Harsh lines pushed against the sky, implying severe cliffs and narrow valleys. Hulking shapes darted behind one another and I tried not to give them faces but, unbidden, my imagination began filling in the grey landscape before me. Half-remembered etchings from *The Voyages of Captain James Cook* and exotic phantasms from *Sketches of a New World* populated the space.

And so in the thick swirling eddies of the fog, I found ethereal sylph faces staring out at me and picked out gnome forms playing, imagining their gait like that of a strutting Lancashire moonie.

“There, you can see it now!” Miss Davenport’s voice summoned me from my reverie as she pointed out my brother’s home to me.

I blinked. At her voice, the fog parted like a curtain.

Laon had always referred to it in his few letters as his lodgings. Despite the name, I had not imagined anything particularly grandiose.

But the house defied such expectations as it coalesced from the sheets of rain before me. It was more castle than manor, a knot of spires and flying buttresses atop a jagged hill. Stone leaned against stone in a bizarre edifice, with nothing but scorn to the very concept of aesthetic consistency and structural purpose. Though silent and lonely, it was far too skeletal to be termed picturesque.

The vast edifice disappeared again behind dense fog and foliage.

“Gethsemane,” I murmured.

The gatehouse was flanked by two angular towers of dark grey stone, overlooking what appeared to be an endless chasm.

We stopped. There was no whisper of footsteps, no voices, no sound but for a loud undrawing of heavy iron bolts. I saw how overgrown the walls were, veiled in moss and nightshade. At the rattling of chains the portcullis gave way and we progressed ever so slowly under it. Further gates creaked

open and we were delivered into a courtyard.

When I finally stepped out of the carriage, I looked back to see the shattered outline of the embattled walls and I could not shake the sense of unease that welled up inside me.

Of all the places to grant him, why had the fae chosen this one?

CHAPTER 2

The Sister in the Tower

There may indeed be countless worlds revolving around countless suns, as Lady Cavendish described in her poems. These wandering worlds may indeed be hidden from us due to the brightness of their stars.

But Arcadia is not one of those worlds.

The Faelands do not possess a sun in the way we would understand a sun to be. The cycle of a sun rising from the east and setting in the west is a sight wholly alien to this place for it does not orbit a burning star.

If you would imagine a bright lantern hanging at the end of a long cord. Then imagine that it swings as a pendulum over a surface, bringing each part in turn into its light.

That surface is Arcadia and that lantern is their sun. Thus at the edges of the Faelands, the sun reaches the pinnacle of its upswing before falling back the way it came. The equilibrium position of the pendulum sun is near the centre of the Faelands, directly above the city of Pivot. There, it is almost never night, as the sun is always close enough to impart at least a hazy twilight of illumination.

Thus, periods of light and dark – I hesitate at using the word “day” – are very different along the length of the Faelands, depending on where under the swing of the pendulum sun one is. For those in the city of Pivot would experience two periods of light and relative darkness for every one experienced at the far reaches. Those in between would experience a long “day” followed by a

short “day.”

This makes the reckoning of days in Arcadia rather complex, to say the least. It has been proposed that regardless of periods of light and dark experienced by those beneath the pendulum sun, one should term one full oscillation a “day.” Inconsistent adoption of this has only caused further confusion.

The Faelands do possess something approximating seasons. As their year progresses, the arc of the pendulum sun grows smaller, but the duration of the oscillation, as with any pendulum, is independent of the arc and thus remains constant. The edges of the Faelands thus have less heat and light, giving them a recognisable winter.

The sun is also, I am reliably told, literally a lantern.

Adriaen Huygens, ON THE HOROLOGICAL NATURE OF THE FAELANDS SKIES,
as translated by Sir Thomas Rhymer & Coppelius Warner, 1839

A wide, maw-like arch and worn steps led me into the keep. A red door opened into darkness.

“We seem to have caught them rather unprepared,” said Miss Davenport dryly as she strode over to the far side of the room and pulled open the thick dust-coloured drapes. A stark, surprising light pierced in, through the startled moths and dancing dust.

Partially panelled in dark woods and edged by lacy balconies, the foyer was a grand affair. Ornate pendants of painted wood dripped from the intersection of each arched rib, holding up the ceiling. The tight weave of the elegant curves reminded me of a birdcage.

Gloomy faced lords and ladies stared out at me from rows of portraits in mismatched frames. Though long-faced and vacant-eyed, they seemed so

very human. Threadbare tapestries and faded carpets amassed from several lifetimes cloaked many of the surfaces.

This was a storied dwelling, its vast history written in a language I only half understood, though the seams of where ancient masonry met newer brickwork were visible even to my eyes. The patchwork of different styles alluded to a long succession of prior owners, each with their own eccentricities of taste. Each mark in the mortar, each old window placed into older walls, each revision and addition to the stone told of some greater past.

A short goblinoid being with speckled, silver birch skin introduced himself as Mr Benjamin Goodfellow. He bowed low and awkward.

“I- I was not expecting you so soon,” he said haltingly, squinting at me through his wire-framed spectacles. “The Reverend is away.”

“Laon is away?” I tried to suppress a flash of worry, remembering the letters I had received. “I thought—”

“Away-away,” he said, nodding. “Very away. Away for so long. Back soon. And we does what we must. We does what we cans. Does and the doings. The tower room is always ready for guests.” He paused in his mutterings, face crumbling in thought. “You are the sister, are you not?”

“I am,” I said. “But where is Laon?”

“Away?” he said, voice lilting upwards.

“Do you not know where he is?”

“The tower room,” he said resolutely. I was confused for a moment before I realised he had just ignored my question. “Yes, the sister in the tower. And the changeling in the green quarters. Yes, yes. That makes sense. I will lead you to it.”

“Then I thank you for your pains, Mr Goodfellow.”

“Mr Benjamin, if you please.” His accent assumed the affectations of the Oxford voice. “Just as the Reverend named me.”

Miss Davenport was by my side, curtsying at the creature. “Charmed, Mr Benjamin.”

He brightened at her display and so I mirrored her action. Miss Davenport gave me a solicitous smile and wink, though I was not certain entirely what she meant by them.

“You should get settled, Miss Helstone,” said Miss Davenport. “Or at least see your room. I’ll pay the coachman, take care of the luggage and see you at dinner. I can’t wait for dinner. I am very hungry.”

Tucking my carpet bag under his arm, Mr Benjamin led the way to the tower room. He gave his history as we walked. He identified himself as a gnome, which I understood from Paracelsus to mean an elemental of the earth. He had been the first and only convert of the prior missionary in residence, Reverend Jacob Roche.

“The Reverend always said Mr Benjamin seemed the littlest of the biblical brothers,” he said. “Little name for little gnome.”

“Do you mean Roche or my brother?” I asked.

“The first but not the last.”

There was also, apparently, a housekeeper somewhere in the castle, whom Mr Benjamin termed “the Salamander.”

As we wound through the keep, I felt as though we were coiling back in time, through the layers of the castle’s history. The comparatively modern foyer joined onto a corridor lined in dark flock paper that was the height of fashion just under a hundred years ago. The lush floral designs in dark green and gold gave way to tapestries hung over crisp walls and then finally a spiral staircase of worn, naked stone.

At the top of that tight twist was a single wooden door. Once unlocked, I stooped into the chamber.

“Here is room,” announced Mr Benjamin brightly. “Use water, throw

out of window after.”

I thanked the gnome as he set down my carpet bag. He bowed ornately, dragging a gnarled hand into the ground as he did so.

As he turned to leave, he started as though remembering something important. In the most solemn tones he told me, “Almost almost forgot. Remember, no walking down the silver corridor when it’s dark. No looking behind the emerald curtain. No staring portraits in the eye. No eating things without salt. And no trusting the Salamander.”

And then he was gone, the door bolting shut before I could ask him how I might recognise the Salamander, what food he had thought I would be encountering or, rather more practically, when I could expect dinner.

The room was round. All the furniture, from wardrobe to bookcase to bureau, curved with the wall. A window had been cut into the thick, ancient stone, but very little light filtered in through the lattice of lead and glass. A number of cushions made the recess into a window seat. Slivers of light from the knife-thin arrow slits cut through the shadows of the room.

A narrow door with an oversized knocker stood opposite me. Three pairs of brass eyes looked out at me from the foliage-wreathed face that held the heavy ring in its mouth. It was green with age but for where the hand would rest on the ring. There the brass had been polished by wear to a gleaming brightness. It reminded me of a hagoday, the enormous knockers affixed on cathedral doors that used to grant sanctuary to any who touched them.

Wondering what part of the castle I was in and what purpose this round room could have served, I unlatched the door. It opened silently.

The rush of cold air engulfed me; colder hands clawed at my heart. Hands still gripping the knocker, I shrieked and threw myself backwards. I was glad that I had not unthinkingly stepped through.

The door led to nothing but thin air. Perhaps there had once been a balcony or even a bridge of sorts. For all of Mr Benjamin's warnings, he had not thought to warn me of this particular danger.

Heart still thundering, I bolted the door with shaking hands.

It was a moment before my breathing settled and I was able to stagger to my feet.

I poured myself some lukewarm water from a pitcher on the sideboard and washed myself in the basin. Finally, I could lick my lips and not taste a shadow of the sea.

The majority of my belongings were still downstairs. But my writing case was in the carpet bag and so was a change of clothes, which I made use of. The gown was not clean per se after my seven weeks on *The Quiet*. But it and my last clean chemise were still a welcome reprieve from my woollen travelling dress.

The wardrobe was latched shut with a pair of interlocking wooden hands. I approached it to throw my carpet bag inside, but it was not empty as I expected. My hands found buttery soft wool, rippling silk, and velvet as thick and luscious as ermine. As I examined the wealth of stiff dresses, a flurry of moths spiralled out from the depths.

Some of the long trailing dresses seemed to be as old as the castle, belonging in a world of tapestries and paladins and courtly romance. A few of them I recognised as being no more than sixty or so years old; I had cut up similar brocade gowns when I had briefly been a companion to Miss Lousia March. The gowns had mouldered in their attic for decades but as the fashion began to favour again thick, rich fabrics over light muslins, they had raided the splendour of the past. They were things of such impractical beauty and it had saddened me to tear them apart even if it was to remake them for new use.

Of the dresses, only one bore any resemblance to recent fashions and it was ivory in shade. Wide necked and layered in lace, it reminded me of the etchings of the queen's wedding dress and the subsequent efforts to imitate it in the seven years since.

Opening my writing case, I found the letter from the London Missionary Society. Sitting on the bed, I read it again, though I had already committed its contents to memory. The preamble was mostly concerned with assurances that for all the numerical success of the Catholics in other lands, it was but built on a rotten foundation of formalism and thus we should not envy their cause.

After a barbed allusion to the work of the Society for Missions to Africa and the East, Rev Joseph Hale echoed my concerns for my brother. After two years of near silence, I had written to the Society asking after Laon. The Reverend had few answers for me and though he never outright stated what he thought had happened in the Faelands, his worry was evident in his circling of the issue, apologising for not having sufficiently prepared Laon for his post and making dark reference to others who had perished.

It also included a request that I recover the journals and notes of the previous missionary, Rev Jacob Roche.

In youth, I had shared Laon's restlessness. University had only nourished and nurtured his ambitions, but education had stifled mine. I had been taught to tame my wild impulses and desires that had agitated me to pain. I had folded it with my soul and learnt to drink contentment like you would a poison. Drop by drop, day by day. Until it became tolerable.

Laon disdained tranquillity. He could not learn my glacial stillness, for all that I had tried to teach him. When I had just turned nineteen and had no position of my own, I watched as he chafed under the surplice of priesthood. His parishioners desired a mild-mannered curate, but he had the soul of a

soldier, a statesman and an orator. He longed for all that lay beyond the petty concerns of his parish. He grew sullen and silent, withdrawing into himself.

It was a long winter, that year.

In spring, light had returned to Laon's eyes: He was to be a missionary.

I hated his epiphany. Selfishly, I had thought myself abandoned. I spared not a heartbeat for those that languished in the grim empires without word of the Redeemer. All I knew was that he would leave behind the scenes and skies of our shared childhood and, in seeking adventure beyond my reach, he would sever himself from me. Festering full of fear and envy, I took up a position as a lady's companion and later, a governess.

It wasn't until I opened his first letter home, all smelling of sugar and sulphur, that I discovered that he been sent to Arcadia. His letters were infrequent at best and spoke little of his life here. I had assumed he thought such details would agitate me and reawaken that buried wanderlust.

But my brother had apparently been just as worryingly terse to the mission society. After the extent of his silence became evident to me, I began planning my own journey. In a flurry of letters, I somehow managed to convince the London Missionary Society that though it may be unorthodox for an unmarried woman to travel abroad, I should follow my brother. I had never thought myself particularly persuasive in writing, but I must have been superlatively so for them buy my passage on *The Quiet*.

And so, here I was: clutching the compass he had left behind, knot tightening within my heart, under the light of a pendulum sun.

CHAPTER 3

The Sun on the Horizon

*Scorn the food and shun the drink,
For faerie food and faerie tricks,
Will snare the tongue and trap the sick.*

*Sprinkle salt from human lands
Sprinkle salt with human hands.*

*Meat loves salt and salt loves meat,
I pray the lord my soul to keep.
So sprinkle salt, else restless sleep,
So sprinkle salt, else endless weep.*

Traditional folk rhyme, collected by J Ritson in FAIRY TALES AND FOLK
SONGS,
NOW FIRST COLLECTED, WITH TWO DISSERTATIONS ON PYGMIES AND ON
FAIRIES

*And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt;
neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be
lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt
offer salt.*

LEVITICUS 2:13

The hazy light implied dusk when I awoke. I found a tray piled high with food by the door and a note informing me that the writer had found me asleep when they had tried to fetch me for dinner. The lettering stained my fingertips black. Squinting, I saw that the words had been scorched into the parchment rather than written with ink.

The rich scent of hare and juniper stew drew my attention back to the meal itself, reminding me how hungry I was. It was still steaming and the copper jug that held it was almost scalding to touch. A heap of breaded asparagus fenced in lightly charred mushrooms. Half a loaf of crusty bread sat in a basket. I sniffed at a small jug to discover it was full of blood, presumably hare, to go with the stew. Usually, though, it was stirred in before serving rather than after.

There was a salt shaker on the tray, but I found the grinder at the bottom of my carpet bag and ground salt onto a side plate. I threw the salt onto the stew, then upon the mushrooms, the asparagus and lastly, the bread. Hands pressed together, I murmured an *Amen*.

Some would dismiss this as superstition, but salt protected humans from the food of the Faelands. Captain Cook and his crew, the first British explorers to reach Arcadia, were said to have perished because of their misdealings with salt.

I thickened the stew with blood and started eating. I had missed such food on my weeks on *The Quiet* and it was a while before I saw that the mushrooms were an odd shade of purple in the middle.

It was then I noticed that the narrow door to empty air was unbolted. I frowned to myself, got up and bolted it tight. I had thought I had left it bolted shut after I had accidentally opened it.

A light rapping on the door signalled the entrance of Miss Davenport, who announced that we “simply must” watch the sunset from the roof. She had a bright, mischievous grin on her face and jangled a great ring of keys at me triumphantly.

“Oh, your dinner,” she said, lingering by the great vat of uneaten stew on the tray. She breathed in deeply, entranced by the aroma. “Are you finished with that?”

I nodded.

“It’s a little forward, I know, but may I?”

“If you want,” I said, hesitantly. “I thought we were in a hurry...”

“You remembered to salt, didn’t you?”

I nodded and watched her simply inhale my leftovers. She stopped short of licking the plate, drinking down the stew in large gulps and picking up the mushrooms with her hands. She mopped up the dregs of stew with bread.

Tucking the last sprig of asparagus into her mouth, she grinned at my appalled face. She brought a handkerchief to her lips with a dainty flourish. “I do apologise about my manners.”

“It’s quite alright,” I said. Idly, I wondered if this would be the greatest affront to my sense of civilisation.

“Now, to the sunset,” she beamed. “I ate quickly, so we shouldn’t be too late. And sunsets last so long in Arcadia. No horizon, after all.”

Throwing a shawl around myself, I eagerly followed her.

I had thought my room the highest in Gethsemane, but we ascended another flight of stairs and raised a trap door into an attic. Phantom relics of a bygone time rested under dust-laden sheets. Rolls of carpet and tapestry nestled against large trunks. I held the lantern as Miss Davenport struggled with the lock.

“When your brother returns, you should ask to stand atop the gatehouse at sunset,” she said. “It is rather different there.”

“How so?” I asked, trying to angle the lantern so that she could better sort through her collection. Key after key scraped against the unyielding lock.

“Only he could really force the Salamander to give up that set of keys... Aha!” she exclaimed, as the key finally turned.

The door opened onto the parapets of what she had called the north

tower, leaning into the innermost of the castle's curtain walls. There was a palpable chill in the air and I shrugged my shawl a little tighter around my shoulders.

The sky was awash with hazy greys, and beneath it, Arcadia was swaddled in mists and mystery. I could imagine fields and forests, but I did not think them true. A halo of golden light surrounded the pinpoint that was the sun, cast upon the clouds that enfolded it. It was now notably smaller than at midday and smaller than I had ever seen our earthly sun.

"What is Arcadia?" I muttered, half to myself. "How could this place truly be?"

There were no answers as we watched the sun recede further. There was no dramatic change in the light, as it did not set behind land or dip into the sea. It was far higher in the sky than it was at midday when it burned overhead.

"I asked myself that too," said Miss Davenport. "And you won't like the answers any more than I did."

"What do you mean—?"

"Nothing," she said quickly, glancing away.

I watched that strange, false light slowly dim and the darkness thicken upon the landscape. There have been some whose faith was challenged by the very discovery of Arcadia, a realm which the scriptures spoke barely of. Yet the Good Book made no reference to English shores. Our clouded hills and green mountains are no more false for that silence than the landscape before me. How could I limit an infinite God with finite words?

"And now the moon," said Miss Davenport.

My eyes followed her pointing and turned to where the darkness had already fallen. The landscape seemed dark and hard, like charcoal, and the clouds were but a softer reflection of that harsh, brittle heap.

The moon was, at first, but a luminous shadow behind a mist, flashing for a moment before disappearing again behind the burnt-scone clouds.

Then suddenly, a bright silver shape swam out. Clouds clung to the arc of its gleaming fins, trailing thin wisps of seeming light.

I gasped in wonder, and rather secretly, chided my younger self for the limits of her imagination. More than being on the moors of home, more than standing on the docks of London, more than being lost on the North Sea, *this* reminded me of how limited my twenty-five years has been. All the restlessness that I thought I had buried alongside my sister, returned with a passion that left me breathless.

The moon was a fish.

Or rather, the moon dangled from a pole in front of a wide-jawed piscine. As it swam closer, I saw the light gleaming off its long, long teeth that curved from its lips. Its eyes bulged from its face, white, lidless and staring. Tail whipping back and forth, its scales shimmered, iridescent in its own light.

I cast my eyes to the limits of my vision, where unfocused sight made my eyes water. I hungered to know what lay beyond. A medieval heretic once wrote of standing on the encircling walls of the universe and shooting arrows ever outward. Would there not always be more walls and more arrows? There were more suns and more worlds than I could dream. My mind would always be more finite than that of God. And still, I wanted to behold greater, to become greater than my frail bones could hold. With each laboured breath I felt as though I would tear the papery skin that held the coals of my soul in check. Glimmering embers had lain hidden among those ashes, and now these alien climes had breathed upon them and nurtured new flame.

The moon grew hazy as it swam behind a cloud and the body of the fish was obscured from sight. For a moment, it seemed like an earthly moon,

suspended in the air through divine Providence rather than a sea monster that dwelt not in the sea.

“We should go inside.”

Miss Davenport’s voice was a surprise. I turned to her, unclenching my fists and wincing at the painful imprint my fingernails had bitten into my palms. I had tensed without thought.

“It gets cold very quickly out here.”

I nodded, and Miss Davenport led the way back into the keep. Casting a backward glance at the moon, I thought of Laon and the passions he had sought to burn and bury. I wondered what he had thought when he first saw the Arcadian moon, if it too stirred in him such restlessness and if he knew how to quench it.

It was written that in Arcadia, everything – even your eyes – would lie after dark and thus it was perhaps unsurprising that I would get lost the moment Miss Davenport left me. She had assured me that my room was at the end of the corridor, but somehow, without turning, the walls were no longer lined in portraits and instead were starkly whitewashed and draped with faded tapestries.

I retraced my steps but could not find the stairs that led into the attic, nor the gimlet-eyed portraits, nor the corridor of bare stone. I must have taken a wrong turn; corridors don’t change for no reason.

A breeze from a loosely latched window danced over the back of my neck. My lantern jerked in my hand, and the glass door swung open. The flame within flickered. Panic welling up inside me, I fumbled to close the lantern.

My fingers slipped.

The lantern clattered to the floor, smashing against the stone and spilling wax and glass. The soft glow of the guttering wick extinguished. I

was plunged into darkness.

The cold felt keener in the dark and I could hear my heart beating, steady but fierce. I glanced up to the inky blackness of the corridor, hoping to catch a glimpse of light to guide me. Seeing little, I closed my eyes, knowing I needed to adjust to the dark. Another snarl of cold air painted gooseflesh down my spine. Fear flickered in me. I drew a steadying breath and reminded myself that night would not last forever.

When I opened my eyes again, everything was still bathed in shadow. Resolving to simply wander until I found somewhere bright and recognisable, I walked forwards, hand trailing on the wall to guide me.

Ahead, I noticed a half-open door behind one of the tapestries. Imagining a glimmer of light, I ventured within.

I was in a study, of sorts. It had a bookcase and bureau. White sheets shrouded most of the furnishings, transforming them into childish phantoms.

Laon and I used to play games, scaring each other under the sheets. We had no words for what we felt then, but the very idea of ghosts both enthralled and repulsed us. We had buried so many in our youth. I still remember huddling against him, hooking our fingers together and promising under every token that we held sacred that if one of us were to die, we would come back and haunt the other.

The light scattered into glowing pinpoints of pale red. Squinting, I could just about make out the flutter of insectoid wings furling around each tiny glow as they settled again on the far side of the study. Fireflies.

The moon swam from behind a cloud and silver shone in through the window. The stained glass gave the light a shimmering, underwater quality. That light guided my gaze to a bureau.

Despite being half closed, frost-like dust clung to every item within it. The icicles of cobwebs dripped from the end of the birdlike claw of the letter

opener, the edges of the half-open drawers, the mouth of the bottle of desiccated ink, the leaning pens.

Spindly, long-legged shadows flickered at the edge of my vision. Startled, I spun around, startling again the red fireflies, but there was nothing.

My eyes scanned the loose pages, each crowded with a scrawl. I traced a finger against the filigree of dust, squinting to make out the faded words. Easing myself into the creaking chair, I leafed through the spread of documents.

A shiver spidered up my spine.

I did not recognise the script as from any mundane language. It was angular, full of squares and dots. Many of the symbols were scratched out. Others appeared in lists. Others still curled around strange spirals, wide-eyed, coiling creatures and crude charcoal sketches of moths.

Then, a line of Latin: *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.*

It took me a moment to recognise it, having spent so long staring at the unknown symbols. I mouthed the words to myself.

In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was with God.

Not so much a translation as a memory of the line within my Bible.

Fleetingly, I wondered if these could be the missing diaries of Rev Jacob Roche, but why would he write these strange symbols? Rev Hale had warned me that I should not read them, but surely these ancient papers could not be those journals. Every stone in this castle alluded to a long history, surely it must have been one of its previous inhabitants?

Yet such assumptions rendered me no answers.

I smoothed open crumpled papers, each speckled with holes. My eyes followed each dot and flourish of their meaningless words. I sorted through

page after page of arcane nonsense. As I leafed through, more and more pages were riddled with holes. Some were so fragmentary that they fell apart at my touch into a dusting of inky snowflakes.

Attempting gentleness, my hands trembled. I swallowed. Recognisable English words roamed on the edges of the broken pages, but few of them were informative.

My breath was heavy, though I did not know if it was excitement or the dust. The final layer in my excavation was a worn leatherbound notebook. Its gilded spine was cold to the touch. Coughing at the dust that swirled up as I turned the page, I read: *Translation of the Bible into Enochian*.

My brow furrowed. Enochian. I had heard that word before, but I could not recall where. It tugged at the edges of my memory.

A tuneless humming roused me from my excavation. Leaping to the conclusion that the owner of the voice would be able to help me, I called out.

“Hello? A little help, if you please, my lantern was broken—” I rolled up the scattered pages and bundled them into a writing case that rested against the bureau. I wanted to keep studying the pages.

The humming seemed to grow fainter. I latched shut the writing case and gathered up my skirts, stumbling towards the sound.

“Hello? Is there anyone there?”

There was a faint tinkling sound, somewhere between bells and laughter. I felt warmth flutter against my neck, like a candle going out.

Once out of the study, everything was but shades of shadow. Half blind and hand reaching out before me, I followed. Making out the edge of a wall and the faint lines of a silver mirror upon it, I felt around the corner.

My eyes stung.

After a moment of furious blinking, I saw that in the middle of the floor there was a lit lantern. The bright, painful light was itself a relief. Beside it

was the arch that opened onto the stairs of worn stone, the top of which was my room.

I spun around, trying to catch a glimpse of who could have left it here, but I heard no footsteps.

I noticed a smudge of coal on my fingers when I put down the lantern in my room and I wondered at who could have left it for me.

CHAPTER 4

The Bird in the Cage

The deliberations of the Royal Society in 1767 and the beginning of 1768, seconded by the liberality of the government, produced a result highly interesting to our navigator, opening to his genius new and extensive spheres where he was destined to shine. At this period, and for some years before, the British government had the honour of instituting voyages of discovery very different from those early navigators. Expeditions of this kind were formally set on foot for the purpose of conquest, the acquisition of territory and of wealth. But now commenced a new era in the annals of navigation, when the voyages of discovery were undertaken for the interests of science; for acquiring a knowledge of the different seas, continents, and islands on the face of our globe; and for ameliorating the condition of the savage tribes that might be discovered.

From the triumph in observing the Transit of Venus over the sun's disc in June 1769 to his meticulous mapping of the South Sea, to his crossing of the Antarctic Circle and the further mapping of the Northwest Passage, Cook proved an unparalleled navigator and was celebrated throughout the Empire.

Yet still beyond the calculations and projections of any of these involved parties was the fourth and most fantastical voyage of our captain, when the greatest navigational mind became impossibly lost and thus impossibly discovered a different realm. Many have no doubt gotten lost on high seas and brought their ships to the coast of Arcadia but it is only Cook who could have realised that getting lost is intrinsic to journey.

Rev George Young, THE LIFE AND VOYAGES OF CAPTAIN JAMES COOK,

DRAWN

FROM HIS JOURNALS AND OTHER AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS; AND COMPRISING

MUCH ORIGINAL INFORMATION

I did not get lost again after that first night in Gethsemane.

Life at my brother's castle – strange as it still is to even think of it as such – settled into a rhythm, of sorts. Laon hadn't returned yet from whatever mysterious errand he was on and neither Mr Benjamin nor Miss Davenport were much help in working out where he had gone.

"He'll return when he returns," said Miss Davenport with half a shrug, pausing in her knitting.

"Doesn't he need to be here?" I said.

"I suppose he would run out of salt eventually," she said thoughtfully.

I suppressed the flutter of panic at the thought. Folktales warned of the claim Arcadia had on any who consumed its food, that one would be forever trapped under its unearthly sun. I pressed on: "I meant the mission. Doesn't he have a congregation?"

She laughed, an airy sound, breathier and more high pitched than her speaking voice. "Heavens, Miss Helstone. There isn't a congregation."

"I thought—"

"The Mission to Arcadia has, at present, met with little success. We urge you, dear reader, to open up your purses and pray harder so as to sway the soulless to turn their godless minds heavenward," she said, over-enunciating in the manner of mocking quotation.

"Miss Davenport!" I said, quite appalled. Though my weeks on *The Quiet* had taught me to hold my tongue at little blasphemies, Miss Davenport's teasing touched a raw nerve.

"Aside from Mr Benjamin, of course," she added. The wide, flat grin

that spread over her face showed that she was clearly taking inappropriate pleasure at my distress. “That is one resounding success. Even if it isn’t your brother’s.”

In that, she was indeed correct. Though the gnome proved to be an odd character, he had a fervour for the faith that was rivalled only by the ancients who hunched over their Bibles and loved nothing more than to snarl quotations at the curate whenever he saw fit to paraphrase.

Mr Benjamin grew no more or less disconcerting the more I knew him. He exuded a sense of earthy familiarity that made it hard to stare for too long, but his warmth felt genuine. He even offered a little of his past, speaking of his time as a miner of azote at the far reaches of Arcadia.

“It’s very, very cold out there. The sun is too far to make light and so the azote and vital air form seas and mountains. We mine it and cart it back to Pivot.”

“What *is* azote?”

“Air,” he replied, oblivious to my incredulity. “The winds blow outwards, see? So it all congeals at sides. Solid wind and solid air. So we mined it and brought it back. But the Lady of Iron closed the mines.” The gnome’s features drooped despondently, but lifted as he said, “Then I came here.”

His conversion he spoke of with but sparse detail, but he would sometimes allude to his companions from his miner days. It seemed that they had all come to speak to the prior Reverend together, but only Mr Benjamin stayed. He prided himself on being the mission’s only convert and often came to me with odd questions.

“I was thinking, Miss Helstone,” Mr Benjamin said. “Could I ask a question?”

“Yes?”

“So, Jesus Christ the Ever Anointed Son of God, Hallowed Be His Name...” His voice trailed off. He took off his spectacles and cleaned them nervously. “I mean to ask, Miss Helstone, the question is: Why does the parentage of the Holy Cuckold matter if he’s the Holy Cuckold?”

“Pardon?” It took me a moment to realise he meant Joseph and before I could correct him, he rattled on.

“The Genealogy of Jesus is given twice in the book Mr Benjamin was given by the Reverend. By two of the writers... Their names be...” he paused, clicking his tongue, thinking. He scratched his jutting chin. “Luke and Matthew, yes, yes. That be. The two writers say Jesus is of David’s line through Joseph, which is to say the Holy Cuckold. I recall this. Luke said: *And Jesus himself began to be about twenty years of age, being (as supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli...* And Matthew wrote: *And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*” Mr Benjamin was panting, breathless at his barrage of words. “You see what I mean?”

“I do follow,” I said. It was a question I had asked before, at Clergy Daughters’ School. My palms stung for days afterwards as I was whipped for impertinence. I gritted my teeth through the pain as I wrote to Laon about it, my letters curling all wonky. Looking back, the pain and my injured sense of justice distracted me from the question. I never found an answer.

“So... so, why matters Joseph’s parentage?”

“Well,” I swallowed, mind blanking at the abruptness of the question. “That is a very interesting question.”

The answers I had toyed with as a child started bickering in my mind like geese. Maybe Matthew and Luke were both mistaken and it was Mary who was related to David (but if they can be wrong about this one detail, what else might they be wrong about?). Maybe the fact that Joseph can be

said to have adopted Jesus and he is thus of his house (but even then the two genealogies diverged significantly, which suggests one must be wrong). Maybe Matthew and Luke were reporting it for the benefit of those who thought the Messiah had to be from the House of David (and if so, how wrong is a falsehood told to support something true?).

I remembered Laon's letter back to me, filled with condolence and encouragement. His hand had been shaking too, though I knew it to have been from anger rather than pain.

My mind wandered back to the rose window at the Whitehead chapel, panelled to suggest the inside of a ship, a curving hull and arced wooden beams. It was dedicated to martyred missionaries. I had always thought that it was where Laon had his epiphany, though he never really said as much. That chapel's window, however, had nothing to do with missionaries. It depicted the lineage of Jesus, with David in the centre and each of the ancestors upon the petals of the rose, each name picked out in black – barely legible – gothic lettering. But its vivid splendour held no answers.

“Miss Helstone?”

Mr Benjamin looked up at me with his large brown eyes, expectant and trusting, like the sloping eyes of a dog.

He cocked his head to one side. Waiting.

“I... I think, I think you should ask Laon when he gets back.”

“Very wise. I will ask the Reverend!” The gnome nodded his head and pottered off, seeming to accept my answer.

But I was not content. The question continued to haunt me. I wondered where my brother's books were; I knew he had a copy of Cruden's *Concordance*. But I had been unable to locate my brother's study, or any sort of house library – even the room in which I found those dusty documents.

I was left to scour my own Bible, turning back and forth between the

pages of the testaments. Before I had sufficient time to content myself with all the particulars of the two lineages of Joseph, did Mr Benjamin totter up to me with another theological quandary.

“Miss Helstone, is it possible to make restitution for sins one doesn’t repent?

“Has the fig tree been forgiven by Jesus? Should we stop eating figs altogether or is it just that one tree that got cursed?

“If the Christ Our Lord was made wholly human in order to bear human sin, does that mean he must also have been wholly fae to bear our sins? Or is that the Covenant with the divine been extended to both fae and humans the way it encompasses more than simply Abraham’s descendants?”

My brother’s house became to me a place of questions without answers. Over time, the lineage of the Redeemer simply became one of the many questions that haunted my sleep.

Miss Davenport appeared each day to keep me company. For the first few days, I politely indulged her desire to sit in the solar and knit, making conversation about the idiosyncrasies of her gauge and teaching her how to turn a heel on a sock.

“It is good to make things with one’s own hands sometimes,” she had said. “Other methods simply don’t have the same tactile satisfaction.”

The yarn she had brought was ethereally light and frothed around the needles as I wound it round and round. Every clicking stitch I made was a step back to Yorkshire and the confinement of my previous positions. I remembered sitting with Miss Lousia March when I was her companion and after, for all my stated title of governess, I spent as much time darning socks as educating young minds.

The solar was bright. Had this been a mortal castle I would have guessed that the curved wall was evidence that it had been a chapel in the

past, but this was no such thing. The thick stone was interrupted with stained glass windows that were obvious additions. One spiralled dark medieval colours, fragmenting the dust-dancing light into flecks of oxblood red. Another showed a knight battling a web of serpents. Given their diverse styles and shapes, the windows had probably been taken from another place and installed here by one of the castle's previous masters. I wondered who had lived here before Laon, before the Reverend Roche, and what they called it then.

"The windows here remind me a little of Ariel Davenport's home. In Spitalfields," she said. "It weren't stained glass, of course, but we had latticed windows all along the front of the house. So there could be enough light to weave. We had three looms to keep all our hands busy."

Perhaps it was simply out of a desire to avoid other subjects, but she often spoke of her past in the mortal world. Sometimes I thought it merely a distraction, but at others, it genuinely seemed as though she wanted more.

"What did you weave?" I asked, feeling provincial. Having grown up in the strange uncivilised little place that was Birdforth, Spitalfields and London itself was an unimaginable world away.

"Silk. Everyone was in the silk trade round those parts. The littles would quill it and pick it. I wanted so much to be useful. I begged and begged to be taught weaving early. I remember my arms being barely long enough to reach the end of the loom and I was learning how to weave."

"They must have been proud of you."

Miss Davenport gave a brief laugh. "Got me nothing but beatings. I was awful at it. Wasted so much good silk."

I smiled at her humour, but added gently, "I wasn't much of a quick learner either."

"Ariel Davenport's father always talked about getting a fourth loom,

but I was never good enough. The rooms were cold with all the windows, but it was always awash with light.” Her eyes were no longer looking at me, but past me to the flock of dark birds on the stained glass. “We worked to the sound of birdsong. Our roof was lined with traps, you see.”

“Traps?” I was confused.

“Weavers are good at making traps, I suppose. Nimble fingers and all that. Ariel Davenport’s father liked to listen to birdsong whilst we worked.”

“What did you do with all the birds?” I asked. I turned my knitting, and glancing over my completed stitches, my fingers counted their diaphanous flow.

“Sold them. Songbirds are worth a pretty penny, especially the pretty ones. Though I’d prize more one with a pretty voice. I assume the London gentry like to keep them about. We did, filled the house with song. We’d drop all arguments when the right bird sang.”

“Sounds beautiful.”

“I wasn’t much good at weaving traps, but I could train the birds. We’d have one of ours call the others down. I thought their song loveliest then. When they’re tricking their kin.”

“You... You must have caught many birds then,” I said, haltingly. I was no stranger to baiting traps (moles were a perpetual menace, after all), but I couldn’t help but be reminded of the warnings in Captain Cook’s memoirs, of how the fae were inherently a duplicitous race.

“I didn’t like it much, but you can’t really argue with beauty. They just sang best then.” Ariel was lost to her memories and she heaved a sigh. She smoothed a hand over her knitting, fingers dwelling lovingly on each stitch. “Ariel Davenport’s mother always wanted me to learn to braid pillow lace. Kept lying to me about it being simpler than weaving. And there’s better money in selling lace, she always said. You’d never be hungry if you had a

proper trade.”

“I know that sentiment,” I murmured. I gave a bitter smile, glancing down at my trade-less hands. A clergyman’s daughter is genteel enough to be educated and accomplished, but never useful. Caught between the world of labour and that of letters, I had lamented my lack of employment under my brother’s room. Those were long months of inactivity.

“I’d always retort that you can knit lace as well, which would earn me a cuff to the ears. You don’t really knit silk, you know,” said Miss Davenport. She held her knitting up to the light, squinting at the sun’s weave through the intricate pattern. “I just don’t have the hands for pillow lace. Too many bobbins.”

“I wasn’t ever taught lace-making.”

“It involves a hundred bobbins. And a pillow. Because there’s nothing more precious than partly made lace that it needs its own pillow.” She gave a huff. “It’s a horrid art.”

“You must miss them all terribly.”

“Sorry?” she said, confused and startled out of her memory.

“Your – I mean, Ariel Davenport’s family. You must miss them.”

“No, I don’t. Not really,” she said, shaking her head. “I do not miss them at all.”

“But you speak of them often.”

“It’s good that you think I might miss them. I like that.” Miss Davenport smiled weakly. “Not many here understand why I might miss them. Why I could miss them. The others, they’re just not made that way. Much like my hands. I could try to make the shapes for lace-making, pass the threads over one another, and something like lace sometimes results. But it’s not quite the same. Doesn’t come naturally.”

For all my restlessness, I was unable to leave the castle. I was beginning to

regret not looking about the bustling port of my first day. Though the strange sights I had seen then fuelled my daydreams, they were fast fading into fantasy.

As consolation of sorts, Miss Davenport took me walking around the courtyard. She seemed to dislike the gardens. Miss Davenport explained that until Laon returned, the protections that bound the inhabitants of the Faelands to not harm him would not extend to me.

“Blood binds blood,” she said, a little primly. “And blood knows blood. You can’t expect mortal salt to do all the work. You need to keep yourself out of harm’s way too.”

I winced; Miss Davenport was developing a habit of reprimanding me for carelessness, all dark warnings and strange taboos.

“There’s a *geas* that knows you.”

“A *geas*?”

“A ban, though some call it fate. It keeps your brother and those of his blood safe. The Pale Queen has promised him that he and those of his blood would not die in these walls and it protects you because you’re staying within them. They can’t touch you here, no matter how much they want to. So you really shouldn’t go wandering about out there by yourself, Miss Helstone.”

“Who do you mean by *they*?” I stopped to turn and look directly at her, hoping to read something in her disconcertingly human eyes.

She gave a half shrug, avoiding my gaze. “Simply what is beyond the castle walls.”

“Then what is beyond the walls?” I said, my voice rising in frustration. “What should I be afraid of?”

“I’m not sure I could, that is to say, should—”

“I saw faces,” I said. At the crossing of her brows, I hurried an elaboration: “In the mist. The day I arrived. There were faces, figures in the

mist.”

“It was probably just your imagination running wild. You... you shouldn’t be so curious,” she said. “Remember what happened to the original missionary.”

“No one’s ever told me what happened to Roche.”

She stopped herself, rolled the unspoken words over her tongue like a boiled sweet and swallowed. She cleared her throat and without a hint of sheepishness, said, “Best you don’t know.”

“I would rather know, Miss Davenport.” I jutted out my chin stubbornly.

“That may be the case, Miss Helstone, and I may rather tell you, but I fear I cannot.”

“You haven’t even told me who Laon is petitioning or what you’re hoping to achieve by keeping me here.”

“Secrets keep you safe.”

I wanted to argue with her, to press her further for the truth. But given how she was one of the only two people I knew in Arcadia, it seemed short-sighted to cross her.

We walked in silence for a while after that, a coldness settling between us despite the closeness of the pendulum sun.

It was Miss Davenport who spoke first. I looked at her, noting a disconcerting, deceptive humanity in her eyes. A smile wavered at her lips and she spoke quite gently, as though her words were actually a reconciliation. “Not all knowledge brings joy.”

Miss Davenport reached a reassuring hand towards me and I took it. I nodded and offered her a smile, trying to bury my discontentment.

Eyes suddenly faraway, she added: “There are things I wish I didn’t know.”

With peace so recently restored, I allowed her that cryptic remark, though one day, I promised myself, I would have answers.

“You are a lot like your brother,” said Miss Davenport. “He was also full of questions. He couldn’t just accept the way things worked.”

Laon had been particularly distant during his first days abroad.

“You seem very familiar with Laon,” I said, and asked if she had similarly acted as his guide and companion.

“It was rather different with your brother,” she said. She never called Laon by his name or even referred to him by title; he was always *your brother*. “Being a companion to a man is not exactly the same thing as being that to a woman.”

I had the decency to blush, but for all my flustered feelings it wasn’t until afterwards that I realised how opaque she was being. She had not actually answered my question. Surely any indigence was akin to a refutation.

When I reconsidered the impudence of my question, I came to realise that for all her outward appearance of humanity – she even took her food and drink with salt – I had never quite forgotten her to be fae. Thus I had entirely not considered her to be a woman.

Still, the imagination was a traitorous thing and, after that it took a force of will not to imagine her with my brother. Perhaps to goad me, she spoke more often of him – always, always in those terms, *your brother* – and yet these scraps, these glimpses of Laon did little to satiate my curiosity.

Whenever we sat together she would allude to him, holding up her knitting as though a veil between us as she spoke. She had thoroughly mastered the art of saying a multitude of words without any substance. In passing, she would tell me that my brother was careless on his first day, or that he had gotten lost in the blue wing, but such detail gave me no sense of his whole. I continued to worry about him and his curt letters, and my own

harsh words at his decision to become a missionary echoed within me.

I could not now bear to articulate the hopes that I had when first setting foot on *The Quiet* at Dover, but I had not thought that I would be again sitting in a solar, needlework in my hands, empty conversation in my ears, waiting.

CHAPTER 5

The Changeling in the Chapel

Hymn 47. Trichinopoly. P. M. (7's & 6's, double.)

*From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand;
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.*

*In newly discover'd Elphane
Long shrouded from our sight
Where creatures strange 'n' profane
Have never known his light.
Salvation! Oh, Salvation!
The joyful sound proclaim
Till each remotest nation
Has learned Messiah's name.*

*What though the spicy breezes
Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle;
Though ev'ry prospect pleases
And only man is vile;
In vain with lavish kindness
The gifts of God are strown;*

*The heathen in his blindness
Bows down to wood and stone.*

*Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole;
Till o'er our ransomed nature
The lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign.*

Collected by Rev John Sanford, PSALMS, PARAPHRASES, AND HYMNS,
ADAPTED TO THE SERVICES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

It was Sunday, and after weeks of mumbled service from *The Quiet's* captain, I longed to hear my brother's sermons again. He had a passion that surged under the measured cadence of his voice and, more than that, I had begun to miss his discordant singing.

I wandered into the dining room to find Mr Benjamin in his Sunday best, which constituted the addition of a large straw hat, a grubby handkerchief to his front pocket and a bright lilac fern to his lapel.

"Good morning, Miss Helstone." He bowed, sweeping off his hat. "I look forward to your sermon today. Will we be singing *Jerusalem* today? I do love that hymn."

"Pardon?"

"You will be speaking today?" His eyes seemed to widen with hope. "Yes?"

I shook my head, taken aback by his assumption.

“But a sister for a brother, is fair trade,” he said. “And the brother has been away for so long. The chapel has been empty and—”

“How long has Laon been away?” Worry leapt in me. “You said he’d be back—”

“Long! Forever and a day!”

“That—”

“He’ll be back. You have faith. We all believe he will be back.” He gave a long sigh. “All the parishioners were excited because we had you. Thought we had a Helstone to spare.”

“All the parishioners? I thought you were the only convert.”

“Me is all. All is we. We is me.” Mr Benjamin faded to a mumble, playing with variations of the words; he was easily delighted by wordplay.

“Well, I cannot give a sermon or conduct the service or sacraments. I’m afraid I am not a priest the way my brother is. I am not a priest.” I was moved by his obvious need. I had always been a timid thing growing up, relying on Laon to speak for me, and thus I did not entirely believe my own voice when I said, “But I can pray with you.”

For all the thoughts of adventure, I had not forgotten that his purpose here was that of a missionary and he – we, even – were here to turn whatever simulacrum of soul the fae possess to the service of the Lord Above.

It was a great work, though not one I imagined myself capable of being part of.

Yet here I was, being led by a gnome to the chapel in Arcadia.

“Chapel in the garden,” he told me with a backwards glance. “Is where the Reverend Roche put it.”

Walking behind Mr Benjamin, all I could think was that he was even shorter than I had originally observed and that the soles of his bare feet were very dirty.

He led me through half a dozen dizzying corridors that seemed to all spiral in on each other until we reached a large courtyard.

Looking up, I saw a blue sky hemmed in by high stone walls. A great history of glazery stared down at me, from small, stained windows to elaborately latticed contrivances.

A small brick chapel had been built leaning against the far wall of the courtyard. In shape it was squat and inelegant, not unlike my father's church at Birdforth. A bell tower had also been built against the corner of the courtyard, completely dwarfed by the surrounding walls.

"Is Miss Davenport joining us?" I asked. Remembering her tales of growing up in London, I had assumed her at least passingly devout. But now I could not recall a single mention of church.

Vigorously, he scratched his head. "Think not, though your brother used to wait."

"Then we should too."

He shrugged. "Changelings. Their fingers bend out and not in."

"Do you care to explain that?"

"Changelings just need to be not like their people. They need to be a little odd, not quite fit in. Is just their way of being made wrong. It's in her nature."

"That..." I swallowed. "That seems quite sad."

"No, no. Isn't in their nature to be."

I unlatched the double doors and pushed in.

I had expected the whitewashed severity that I had grown up with, where all the medieval excess had been purged by the Reformation and all that was left was a hollow shell of a building.

This was not my father's church.

A series of elaborate gothic bay windows looked into the chapel.

Whoever built this place against the castle had not bothered to dismantle the windows that were originally set into that wall. The ornate stonework set the simple brick chapel to shame. Stone vines and stone rosettes framed each window. The faces and hands of the figures that crowded the surrounding panels had been worn away and their stories were unrecognisable to my eyes.

As I lit the candles and set them in their wooden holders, the light reflected against the thick, uneven crown glass. Each tiny pane of it in the lattice bulged in fishy scrutiny of us below.

Four rows of dusty pews faced an altar and a lectern.

“I ring the bell?” said Mr Benjamin.

I nodded.

I pulled out my handkerchief and, coughing at the dust, wiped down the pews.

A single bell sang out, clear and very loud. It was an earthly sound, very like that of the church at Birdforth. Though I knew it should raise up my thoughts to heaven, it merely reminded me how far away I was from home.

I struggled to imagine this church full of fae. I tried to fill it with all the strange faces and twisted forms I neglected to study on my first day at port and now felt as though I would never see again. I tried to imagine my brother by the altar, his curate’s surplice always seeming too short on his tall frame. I remembered his smile.

My eyes stung from all the dust as I shook clean my handkerchief. I pushed the water from my eyes with the back of my hands.

I missed Laon. I used to tickle him in church to keep him awake. All too often, we’d giggle and bicker under our breaths until our father cast us a stern gaze from the pulpit and we’d silence. I’d keep holding his hand, though, as he needed my nails in his palm to not fall asleep.

“We start?” said Mr Benjamin, re-emerging.

“The bells call to the faithful,” I said. “We should wait. If my brother waits, then we should wait.”

Perhaps all missionaries thought that of their own place, that it was uniquely difficult in the challenges it presented the devout soul. Yet where else would hold inhabitants so familiar with the English mind yet alien to it? For all the weird and wonderful accounts of Captain Cook, I had no idea what to expect beyond the walls of this castle.

“What is beyond the castle?” I asked.

Mr Benjamin looked up from the hymnal he was clutching and drew together his wide brows. “Beyond?”

“Yes,” I said. “I want to know what’s outside. When I came in the carriage, I saw nothing but mist. And Miss Davenport tells me I shouldn’t go out.”

“You shouldn’t go out.”

“What is outside?”

“Not much, mot nuch.” The gnome grinned to himself, causing the lines of his face to deepen as he noticed his verbal fumble created words that pleased his mouth. He savoured them like someone would sweets or chocolates. “Mot nuch, not much.”

“That isn’t much of an answer, Mr Benjamin,” I chided.

He shrugged. “It’s not much of a place.”

I could not help but think on the missionary reports that I had studied in anticipation of this journey. How differently they had described the distant shores that teemed with savages and cannibals, each unenlightened race finally brought to the faith through the eloquence of the missionaries and the good work that they do. It was not simply a battle of words, however, as for many the cultivation of the hearth mirrored the cultivation of the heathen. The accounts described the world beyond as a wide, wild waste awaiting the

seed of instruction so that sure word of Prophecy could grow.

I had always wondered at those wastes, if they truly were wilder than the blasted heaths of home.

When I was young and I walked on the moors with Laon, I could not imagine a wilder place, given over to nature. The biting chill in our faces and the mists hanging over the endless, treeless dales. We chased each other, through the rippling heather, through ruined farmhouses. We would pretend that we were the only people left alive in the world; there was such a loneliness under that infinite Yorkshire sky.

Yet even those seeming wastes were carefully cultivated. Heather, sapling trees and other plants were culled with fire so that they might be suitable for grouse and sheep.

I still remember seeing it for the first time: the sea-like fire engulfing the banks of heather. It was a rising tide – that consumed seemingly everything. I remember the blaze on my face as I clutched Laon's hand and explained as our nurse, Tessie, had explained to me that morning: *It is how things are done. The moors need to stay the moors. It's just like cutting your fingernails.*

For all that we may be surrendering that land to nature, we chose for the moors to be empty.

As such my mind simply could not imagine truly empty, unclaimed land and I wondered if the wild wastes that those genteel missionaries wrote back to us about were as carefully cultivated as our own. If someone was choosing it to be empty.

Still, none of the lessons taught by those faraway tales seemed relevant here.

We waited for an hour for Miss Davenport.

In that time, Mr Benjamin asked further questions that arose from his

reading of the Testaments. He asked them most sombrely, though some I had to smile at. I had resolved to answer each of his questions with a referral to my brother, but the gnome's enthusiasm was infectious. He took a great interest in the importance of sacrifice and the significance of price – he explained that fae liked numbers and costs.

“It is as a debt paid in full by Christ with his death, his sacrifice. A debt to redeem the first sin,” I said. “The transgression in the garden, the forbidden food.”

“But it is human sin? Or is it the sin of all? Did we all fall or is it just Mankind?” Mr Benjamin had a habit of referring to Adam by the literal meaning of his name in Hebrew, Mankind.

“I would hold that it is shared, by she who first bit into the fruit, at least.”

“It is dangerous eating forbidden foods.” He frowned, nose wrinkling as he tried to remember. “This is in the Psalms, is it not? *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me?*”

I nodded. “Yes, it's often cited in reference to original–”

“It is about fae. I think. Maybe. But we are made that way. So it is about us, yes?”

“I don't know.” I was dreading his answers. “How... how are you made?”

“Like it says. They are true words.”

From there he pressed me to explain more of ransom theology and original sin, but an aside soon had us talking of antediluvian monsters. Soon we were in a lively discussion about the apocrypha and how an archbishop once decreed any who published the Bible must do so with the apocrypha intact, else be imprisoned for one year.

“What's in them, this apocrypha?”

“Wild stories,” I said, only half remembering. “Some of the youth of Jesus and how he gave life to clay birds. Judith and Holofernes is apocryphal, of course. And there’s all the fallen angels and nephilim in the books of the watchers.”

“It’s the wild word weeds,” said Mr Benjamin. “They spring up even if you pull them out. No place for them in gardens.”

“Scotland’s Bible Society thought so. They petitioned the British and Foreign Bible Society to not print it. I still remember my father marching up and down his study about that.”

“He was angry?”

“He was opinionated on the matter, but also torn. He no more wanted to teach us the apocrypha than to uproot it entirely.”

“Weeds happen. You can never pull them out completely. I’m a gardener, I should know.” He nodded very sagely at that, and I could not help but laugh.

My various disagreements with Miss Davenport only made me all the more hesitant to share my discovery of the papers with her. It was thus a few days before I was able to study them in earnest.

I waited until the few hours of true night, when the fish moon swam from the dark clouds and its light reminded me of standing at the top of the coal cellar stairs in the dead of winter, gleaming black blocks of brittle coal beneath me. I opened the travelling case of papers and reverently took out each page. Carefully, I sorted through them, spreading them out on the threadbare carpet.

I allowed myself a moment to appreciate the beauty of a simple mystery before plunging in.

The papers varied greatly in size and shape and texture. Some had torn edges, some were crudely scissored and others caught the light as though they

were pages torn from a gilt-edged book. Most of them were scrawled over in that arcane lettering.

Enochian.

The name was one I had encountered before, but I still could not quite recall where. Medieval gnostics perhaps? Or part of Nostradamus' speculations? My father didn't have a copy of the seer but one of his books did quote the mystic for purposes of refutation.

Then I came to the book I had found on my first night here. I flicked through it, noting that it was written over in several different hands and that the words jostled against each other for space.

...There is something they aren't telling me. I can feel it in my bones. The house they keep me in is wrong, everything is wrong. I should have known. They are duplicitous by nature, but more than that, I can tell that they are keeping secrets. Yet truth is their weapon. How can I make them tell me? I am full of fear, but also so very full of hope...

...They barely speak our tongue, more a mockery of it. I cannot keep my salt close enough. The covenant will protect me...

...I know now more than I thought I could and I thought I should. Things that should not be written down...

I was then on the first page, which declared it the private journals of Rev Jacob Roche. The original missionary.

I snapped shut the book.

My heart was thundering. I should not be reading this. The Reverend Hale had warned I should not read the journals of the previous missionary. He was explicit in how I needed to find them and bring them back, untouched.

And yet.

My eyes followed as my fingers caressed the worn leather spine. He did not ask that I refrain from studying the bindings, after all.

It was bound in a very thin, papery leather. The candlelight exaggerated the rough rise and fall of the leather's texture, though it was hard to see the animal's exact scarring.

There were a series of half-moon scorch marks down the middle of the back cover, arranged in a slight curve. Wondering, I placed the tips of my fingers against each of the marks. Under my thumb was the fifth half-moon mark, soot-black against the pale leather. Squinting, I could see the suggestion of whirled patterns in one of the half moons and indents at the arch of each.

As I turned the volume over and over in my hands, I reasoned that Rev Hale had asked me to not read them so that I would know to not tell him that I *had* read them. He couldn't possibly expect me to restrain my curiosity.

I knew so little of Arcadia and, after Miss Davenport's cryptic warnings about what happened to the previous missionary, I couldn't help but wonder if his journals could contain a clue.

Resolute, I set down the journal and turned attention again to the papers.

Translation of the Bible into Enochian.

That one line in the Queen's English was my key. Assuming this to be the work of a student of these strange glyphs, "Enochian", then the lines by the Latin could be but translations. This also made sense of the more repetitive, shakily written pages which had the air of someone practising their letters, like Laon and I used to do, filling page after page with our intertwined names.

I had a firm grounding in French and German, taught to me so that I may translate poetry and pursue other such genteel pastimes. My knowledge of Latin and Greek was rather paltry, borrowed, as it were, from Laon's books.

Still, I knew enough of Latin and translation to start comparing the verses. I didn't think it entirely possible to piece together an entire language through these fragments, but the recognition of a few repeated words seemed very much in my grasp.

There were more edges to maps than simply the physical. Though confined as I was to Gethsemane, my soul was singing in the excitement of exploration. I could not help but imagine myself now standing at one such border of our knowledge, staring into the shadowy abyss of mankind's ignorance.

It was, perhaps, a foolish thought. But I had been restless for days and both soul and mind needed more than simply bread to sustain them. Presented now with something more, I eagerly plunged into that darkness.

My fingers itched for something to note my observations. My haphazard guesses needed to be recorded to be made sense of and picked apart later. It was all too easy to leap to conclusions when one was clutching a dozen disparate pages. Experience has taught me the importance of being systematic about such things.

I glanced up from my work and noticed that the door to empty air was unbolted. I had assumed myself negligent or forgetful the first few times it had happened, but now suspicion was festering in me. I tried to pay no heed as I pulled the bolt firmly across the lock.

It was just a door. There was no need to be afraid.

Glancing down at the lock, I saw that it had little angular symbols etched into it. I brought the candle nearer and upon closer inspection they

seemed similar to those in my papers. It might even be a word that I could translate. I smiled in anticipated triumph.

Vaguely remembering there to be writing implements at the bottom of the case, I opened it and felt around its base. There was, indeed, a bottle of ink and an archaic glass-nibbed pen. Noting there was more at the end of my fingers, I pulled from the case a small corner of paper, folded over in upon itself.

A loud, long wail came from the door to empty air.

I turned, startled.

It was just wind. I knew it to be just wind, wind strong enough to rattle the heavy door in its hinges. I heard it howl against the other towers of the castle and I heard a distant shutter clatter against its window.

Having dropped the folded page, I fumbled for it on the floor. The candle cast long shadows and my hands were chilled from groping about on the cold stone floor when I found it.

Unfolding it, I found a printed page. The scrawl down the side identified it as being from Meric Casaubon's *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years Between Dr John Dee and Some Spirits*. Though the gothic print was awkward to read, I began to understand in part the veiled history of Enochian.

I did not sleep much that night.

CHAPTER 6

The Mysteries of the Night

Just as the mind of man is moved by an ordered speech, and is easily persuaded in things that are true, so are the Creatures of God similarly stirred when they hear the words with which they were brought forth into the world. For nothing moves, that is not persuaded; neither can anything be persuaded that is unknown.

The Creatures of God understand you not; you are not of their Cities. You are become enemies, because you are separated from him that Governeth the City by ignorance.

Mankind in His Creation, being made an Innocent, was not made partaker of the Power and Spirit of God.

Not only did he know all things under His Creation and spoke of them properly, naming them as they were, he also partook of our presence and society, yea a speaker of the mysteries of God; yea, with God himself. Though he spoke in innocence, he had communed with the Almighty, and us, His good Angels. Thus was Adam exalted.

The Speech which I will teach you, it is not to be spoken of in any other thing, neither to be talked of with Man's imagination. For as this Work and Gift is of God, which is all power, so does He open it in a tongue of power, to the intent that the proportions may agree in themselves: for it is written: Wisdom sitteth upon a Hill, and beholdeth the four Winds, and girdeth herself together as the brightness of the morning, which is visited with a few, and dwelleth alone as though she were a Widow.

Thus you see the Necessity of this Tongue.

Meric Casaubon, A TRUE AND FAITHFUL RELATION OF WHAT PASSED
FOR MANY YEARS BETWEEN DR JOHN DEE AND SOME SPIRITS, 1659

Mysteries had a way of keeping me awake, gnawing at the edges of my mind until they crept into my dreams as a jumble of nonsense. Sense eluded me as I tossed and turned. I chased shadowed secrets down the serpentine corridors of Gethsemane.

When dawn filled my room with light, I awoke to ink-stained hands and blotted pages. I had fallen asleep atop the pile of spread papers.

Dried ink stung my eyes as I scrubbed sleep from them. I stumbled to my feet.

Reflexively, my eyes darted to the door to empty air. I moved to secure the door before my eyes even focused. It was, however, as I had thought, and I firmly pulled the bolt in place. It was probably loose. Even as I told myself that it was just the wind shifting it in the night, a cold chill danced up my spine.

I scrubbed my hands and face at the basin until my skin was red instead of ink-black, my mind still entangled in what I had learnt of Enochian, the divine tongue, named for Enoch, the last man to know it. The pages made grand claims, that this language of frail and angular marks was used by the Almighty to create the world and then given to Adam so that he might name all creatures and all things within the gardens. The pages promised that within this language of angels lay all sorts of secrets, that there was a power in the knowing of the first and truest names of all things.

My heart was thundering. I told myself it was just the shock of the cold water on my face.

I wondered at the intentions of the person – Reverend Roche? – trying to translate the Bible into Enochian. Perhaps they had thought it an act of restoration, that the Word of God needed to be in the language of God. Or

perhaps there is more to it.

My eyes ached. I closed them and pressed my too-warm fingers against my lids.

At the edge of my mind, I wondered if this was an evangelical tool and if so, was it the true language of the fae? Was there truth in the old theory that the fae had been angels? Or was it simply that they remember it from the time of Adam?

I changed, fingers fumbling over the tiny cloth-bound buttons of my clothes. Questions tumbled through my mind, twisting into one another in endless, writhing circles. I had made lists of unique symbols and began comparison of the words. None of it made sense, but it was progress of a sort. A foothold upon the cliff of unknowing.

More than ever, I missed Laon. I wanted to tell him about this, to press my forehead against his and whisper to him what I knew like old secrets shared in the dark under blankets and sheepskins.

I wondered what he would make of such revelations, if he would be dismissive of paper scraps found in a random room of his castle or if the questions would haunt his mind the way they haunted me. I wondered if he already knew of the contents of these pages and that was what was keeping him silent.

I had cried the day Laon began his lessons in Latin and I was left alone; he offered afterwards to teach it all to me and share his books. He promised then that we were the same and he would treat me as such even if others refused to see that.

Secrets have a way of making me feel lonely.

I tried to imagine his voice. I remembered the curve of his ears against my lips and the warmth of his hands in mine. We had not laced together our fingers for a very long time. He didn't even shake my hand before he left.

But this felt too big for susurrus words and cupped hands; I felt too big. Had it really been so long ago that we were chasing each other on the moors and hiding among the ruined farmhouses?

I remembered how close Laon and I used to be and, all at once I realised that it may never be that way again. Had it been simply the physical distance of when I was sent to school? Yet I wrote to him every day, each moment catalogued for his eyes, and he wrote back just as faithfully. Was it after? Yet we exchanged letters even then, though work dictated that neither of us could be as diligent in our correspondence. And then, being without a position, I returned to him and found him—

It didn't matter. He was still my brother. Nothing could change that.

There was a knock on my door and I heard the voice of an enquiring Miss Davenport.

My panicked eyes darted over the documents still spread about the room.

"A moment, if you please!" I said, trying to keep my voice even as I gathered up the papers and hid them among my own. I pushed over the neat stack of books I had brought with me. They spilt across the writing desk and onto the floor with a heavy thud.

A low creak signalled Miss Davenport's intrusion. I tried to steady my hands and slow my rapid breathing.

"You weren't at breakfast," she said cheerfully, keeping the door open with her hip as she manoeuvred a large heavily laden tray into the room. The scent of sweet bacon and buttery toast wafted over. "So I thought I should bring it to you. I didn't think I should trust the Salamander to take care of you. Even if she is the housekeeper."

There was a soft clink as she put down the tray and danced over to my elbow.

“Whatever have you there?” asked Miss Davenport.

“P-primers,” I said, slamming shut the writing case and latching it closed with too much finality. “I was organising them.”

“Primers?” She stooped to pick up one of the books.

“I was given them by the Society.”

Leafing open the volume, Miss Davenport haltingly read out its frontispiece. “*The... Child’s Spelling... Primer, or... First Book for... Children...*”

“The Society wanted to put me to good use, I suppose.”

She laughed, the mocking note unmistakable this time. It was as sharp as an untuned violin.

“I do have passing experience as a schoolmistress,” I said, prickling.

“Had they assumed there would be surfeit of pagan children eager to learn?” she said, a wide grin stretching tightly over her teeth. “Grubby-kneed brownies and adorable little pixies all gathering around Miss Helstone asking to be taught the most noble English language?”

“I don’t think I had any particular expectations.”

“Oh, but surely you had wished to teach them whilst you all sat on mushrooms together and sipped nettle tea from buttercups.” Laughing, she hooked her fingers around an imaginary teacup and mimed dainty drinking. “We would curtsy to you in our precious little daisy petal dresses and tip at you our caps made of rue. We would be ever so grateful for your bequeathing language to us...”

“I had expected to make the acquaintance of more than two fairies and roam further than my brother’s home.” I crossed my arms. “I had expected some answers.”

At that, Miss Davenport stopped laughing quite abruptly. “You needn’t—”

“I’m sorry—” I said reflexively, seeing her discomfort. It was too easy to see her as my gaoler.

“We should eat,” announced Miss Davenport, cheer returning to her voice. “I am rather famished.”

I nodded, eager to make peace between us. I helped her rearrange the furnishings of my round room to accommodate two to dine. She shook out a tablecloth over my trunk and unloaded the full extent of the breakfast tray onto it.

She gave a satisfied sigh as she pried open a row of boiled eggs. Glancing over at me, she pushed it under my nose and gave me the salt.

“Sprinkle for me,” she said.

“Pardon?”

“Human hands and human lands,” she said, referring to the folk rhyme. “Meat loves salt and salt loves meat, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” She added a sarcastic edge to the pronunciation of *soul*.

“Oh, of course,” I said, sprinkling salt upon the opened eggs. She had been demanding that I do so during our meals together but I had not quite managed to ask her why. Enquiring about her changeling state always seemed a little intrusive for an acquaintance, especially given how she was shunning services. “What do you do when I’m not here?”

“Not eat.”

“Oh,” I said, softening. I wondered how long she must have starved when my brother was away. “Don’t you—”

“Can you do me another?” she interrupted. “I am very hungry.”

I nodded, complying with her request and adding salt to the fruit tarts, pound cake, butter and the pot of chocolate coffee. The strawberries gleamed green atop their lemon-yellow crust, but turned pink at the touch of salt. The pound cake seemed to heave a sigh and drooped in its plate with dense, moist

weight.

“Have you news of my brother?” I asked, knowing the answer before I spoke. It was a question I asked her almost every day.

Miss Davenport shook her head. “I’m afraid not, he’s still at... I’m not sure where. Inland. Where the court is.”

“Court?” It was more than she had said before. I sipped the spiced chocolate before stirring in another spoonful of sugar. I was still not used to the tinge of salt in everything I consumed.

She squirmed under the directness of my gaze. “I don’t really know. Faeland politics isn’t simple.”

“But you at least acknowledge that there is politics. Thus entities who are politic.” I put down the chocolate and studied her expression closely, trusting that she’d flinch if I neared the truth. “A court implies a judge or monarch? Something or someone presiding. Thus all I’m really missing is a title...”

“Don’t bait me for answers, I beg you.”

“If you won’t answer me that,” I said, reasoning that fae were keen on bargains. “You could at least tell me how Roche did his work.”

“What do you mean?”

“Proselytise,” I said. “I know you can’t tell me how he... how he earned his crown of martyrdom. But surely you can tell me how he did his work here. How he spoke the word.”

She stopped in the spreading of butter into pound cake. She put down the knife.

“It’s so isolated here. I can’t imagine who he would be talking to.” I hated the pleading note that crept into my voice. “Can’t you tell me?”

Miss Davenport remained silent.

“All I really know about him is that he disappeared and that he had

converted Mr Benjamin. I don't even know if his body made it back. Who else was even here? You make these jokes about my childish imagination and yet you would not—" I stopped myself. I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

I forced myself to turn my attention to the breakfast laid out before me. I took a slice of bread and despite being cool to the touch, the butter melted as it touched its dark surface. The pound cake was rich and very sweet, more pudding than cake. Grainy with sugar crystals, it melted in my mouth.

"He had visitors who called on him," Miss Davenport said, very slowly and very carefully. There was a tremble to the way she held herself. "He didn't have many places he could go."

"Thank you..."

"And Mr Benjamin... he wasn't always gardener and groundskeeper. It's easy to give hope to those who have lost. Who *are* lost. They were searching. He found."

"What does that—"

"We should take a turn in the garden," she said, with a bright smile, all traces of earlier tension vanishing as she tucked away the last of the pound cake. She drained her cup of chocolate coffee and glanced over at mine. I shook my head at her silent request to finish my drink.

"You have taken me around the courtyards before, Miss Davenport."

"The courtyards, of course, but not the gardens. I'm sure you will agree afterwards that it rivals even that at Kew."

"I daren't say I've been to the Royal Botanic Gardens."

"Well, neither have I," said Miss Davenport with a calculated wink and sharp giggle. "But it wouldn't do to be too humble about these things. Even though I hear their stove boy has a green thumb."

"Stove boy?"

"The John Smith who curates the place. He has a certain way with

plants.” Tight grin splitting her face from cheek to cheek, Miss Davenport tapped her nose knowingly. “I say too much sometimes, far too much.”

CHAPTER 7

The Tower in the Garden

Balaenoptera wickeris, often termed a “sea whale” due to idiosyncratic fae humour, is believed to be more vast than any other beast, being twice again the size of the largest sea-dwelling whale. They are said to swim through soil and not water. They are distinct from the beasts known as the “see whale”, an invisible piscine that lurks in the seas around Arcadian ports, and “C whale”, the uncommon name for the Balaena sinistris.

According to Sibbald, the inhabitants of Arcadia believe the sea whale to be constructed of wicker. He had described to him these strange shipyards at Fishforth which built them. They say entire ecosystems of fishes can live within the whale once it has consumed sufficient “sea.” Whale “bones” of wood can often be found on sale at the Goblin Market.

This is all, of course, preposterous. Whilst the sea whale is a true creature, its presence on land is but a form of the Fata Morgana, a superior mirage, a result of the reflecting and refracting of the whale’s image from its native sea inland, especially into the more misty parts of Arcadia. The mist is key to understanding this natural optical illusion as the water droplets provide purchase for the projection. Just as a Fata Morgana can cause a ship to seem as though it is inside the waves, the Fata Morgana causes the whale to appear inside the earth.

Robert Walton, THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE WHALE: TO WHICH
IS ADDED A SKETCH OF A SOUTH SEA WHALING VOYAGE

I did not expect a castle to have much of a garden, encircled as it was by the vast walls and moat. My walks with Miss Davenport had made me familiar with the courtyards and their prosaic vegetation.

As Miss Davenport wound a path past the chapel, I thought of her remark on the stove boy with the green thumb.

“Did you mean to say he’s a changeling?” I asked.

“I didn’t exactly say that now, did I?” Her voice turned singsong and she pulled back a veil of ivy on the far wall of the courtyard. So thick were the leaves and vines that it seemed a heavy green curtain. I thought of Mr Benjamin’s warning.

Miss Davenport detached a key from a bracelet, winking at me as she did so. “Don’t tell the Salamander I have this.”

“I won’t because I can’t,” I said. “I’ve not met the Salamander.”

“It’s for the best.” She smiled to herself as though she had just committed an act of wit and unlocked the ironbound door behind the ivy.

Behind the high, embattled wall was a half-wild garden, artfully overgrown.

Bordered by ruined roman arches and colonnades, it seemed as though a long-forgotten lord had sealed away a ruined villa on a whim and turned it into a pleasure garden. A trellis guided roses to form an elegant canopy by the tall, sheltering cedars. The trees scented the garden like a church. Four paths quartered the grass, leading the eye to a central grove of olive trees.

I had stepped into a medieval manuscript, an illumination of the *hortus conclusus*.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” said Miss Davenport, studying my face with interest. “I told you it would be.”

“You did...” I muttered.

Behind the spiralling trunks of the olive trees, in the middle of that

grove, was a stone fountain overgrown with water lilies. The water was completely still and the spout was sealed.

I dipped my hand into the cool water and stroked the petals of the lilies. I smiled at the beauty of it all. Unlike the faded grandiosity of the castle, the walled garden had been reclaimed by something greater. It gave an illusion of a sublime infinity imperfectly captured and imperfectly held, like rainbows in water.

“What is the history of Gethsemane?” I asked.

“Of Gethsemane? You mean this place?”

“The history of this castle, this garden. It’s obviously old. Who lived here before, well, us?”

The changeling shrugged. “No one.”

“But—”

“No one I know of,” she added hastily. “There was the previous missionary, Roche, of course, but I don’t know more than that. This place is built on secrets, after all.”

“Too many,” I murmured to myself, but I did not press her further. Her first answer felt meaningful though, given as it was, unwittingly. This verbal tug of war reminded me all too much of luring answers out of teachers at school, when ambushes worked better than stubborn interrogations. Still, some things had to be bargained for.

Miss Davenport idled by the roses. Having plucked one, she was absorbed by the dismantling of its petals, carefully tearing each one off.

Wind rustled the branches and wafted over the rich scent of mint. It drew me down the path and into the cedars. Laon and I used to crush mint in our hands until they were stained with scent. We would look for it in the wild or steal it from Tessie’s garden. Laughing, I would put on airs and proclaim myself a London lady and daub it behind my ears.

A round tower stood in the middle of the trees, too small to be more than a single chamber.

The pendulum sun was overhead, granting a warm glow to the ivory-white stone. Part of the tower was joined to the castle by a narrow, roofed bridge. The bridge was not of white stone; it was red brick. A curio, certainly, but arguably no stranger than the rest of the garden. And, like the garden, it seemed a moment suspended in time, drawn from the imagination of a long-dead monk. I could imagine his shaking hands dappling shadow onto the covered well and smooth, pale stone.

The door was too big for the tower. Its snarling knocker was green with age and stained my hands such when I used it.

I peered inside.

“Hello?” My voice echoed within the stone chamber.

I eased open the door and it gave a low creak.

There was a coppery tang to the still, undisturbed air. I felt as though I was unsealing an ancient tomb, breathing again the stale air of the past.

Sunlight lancing through the windows suspended dust in seeming timelessness. At the far end of the room, beyond the broken benches and toppled candlesticks, was an altar, slightly recessed into the wall. An altarpiece stood upon it, the triple frame of tarnished gold imposingly empty and the colours of its panel painting made muddy by the river of time. Soot and grime from long years’ candles and incense smeared its surface. Shadows obscured all but the round, gilded halos that framed each of the faces.

Only their holiness remained.

I drifted towards the altar, entranced by the destruction that had been wrought upon this chapel. The benches had overturned and were scarred by a heavy blade, an axe, perhaps.

A chill came upon me as I wondered who could have desecrated this

chapel. Popish it may be, I could not believe the hands that wrought this destruction meant me and my brother anything but harm.

On the floor was spilt a dark, ominous stain and a chalice. A communion table lay on its side; battered Bible, silver dish, wafers and candlesticks lay scattered upon the bare stone besides it.

Do This in Remembrance of Me.

I was not so enamoured of the new fashions in theology as to think the wafers sacral outside of their ritual, but it still seemed wrong that they were left in the dust and dirt. They may not be the literal flesh of Christ but His touch is on them. They are more than bread.

I picked up the Bible. Pages had obviously been torn from it. My heart felt again the cold clutch of fear.

Taking a step closer to the lonely altarpiece, I thought I could make out the outline of Christ upon the Cross in the central panel, the huddle of three by his feet the three Marys. The left panel depicted a kneeling, haloed Christ within the garden of Gethsemane, begging his heavenly father to spare him the cup of suffering. Behind him were his apostles, barring the way of the shadowed, benighted figure of Judas. From that, I had expected the right panel to show Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus, but the composition of figures was wrong: Only one large shining figure stood at the fore of a red door of sorts with a small, paler figure clambering either in or out. Blocky birds swarmed behind.

With a handkerchief, I tentatively cleaned the panel. The grime clung to the altarpiece, only smearing further. Frowning, I spat upon my handkerchief and scrubbed a little harder.

It was not a red door, but the yawning maw of a monstrous beast. The small, pale figures were fleeing, even as the beast's lashing, forked tongue was wrapped around one such figure. The birds that blacked the sky behind

were demons.

Slowly, it dawned upon me. I was uncertain if I was making it clearer or if I was becoming more familiar with the subtle colours of the faded piece, conjuring details to make sense of the fragments.

Yet the answer became inescapable: it was the Harrowing of Hell.

The painting was done in a different style to the other two panels, its human forms less lithely elegant in their composition. Even as they screamed and clutched at each other in their cages, I guessed the painting older, perhaps medieval, and then later added to this altarpiece for eccentric reasons. The Harrowing was not a popular subject for altarpieces, after all.

“There you are,” came the voice of Miss Davenport. “I didn’t mean for you to come in here.”

I heard her footsteps entering the chapel.

“What is this place?” I asked, gazing at the white lattice of ribs within the mouth of the hell-beast.

“The other chapel.”

“Other?”

“It doesn’t really matter, just another old place in a place full of old places.” She gave a nervous laugh. “None of it is real anyway.”

“Who was—”

She shook her head. “I shouldn’t have brought you here. It should have all stayed locked.”

“You need to explain. You can’t show me a secret second chapel with the remains of some interrupted communion and expect me to stay silent, Miss Davenport.”

“We should go.” She cast her eyes to the dark corners of the chapel, to the altar.

“No.”

“We shouldn’t be here.”

“An answer for a step.” It was a ridiculous bargain, but I stood my ground.

“I’ll tell you when we’re outside.”

“Tell me now.”

Miss Davenport swallowed before speaking. “It’s just a folly. The fae stage these all the time. Like how you might arrange teacups in the woods to trick children into thinking fae are picnicking there. Or arrange toy soldiers in a scene of escape from their tin. It’s a game.”

“But who was meant to see it? If it’s a game, there must be a player.”

She was trembling but her voice remained steady. “No one yet. It’s not ready.”

I waited another heartbeat as her hands agitated, folding and unfolding by her face. I relented and took a step towards the door, accepting her answer even as I distrusted it.

The relief upon her face was immediate.

I murmured my apology as we stepped outside the chapel. It assuaged my conscience even as Miss Davenport did not hear it. I only hoped that the answer was worth my guilt.

We walked back in silence. At the foot of the stairs that led to my room, Miss Davenport apologised for having brought me to the garden.

“I wasn’t thinking. I’m sorry,” she said, avoiding my gaze. “I shouldn’t have brought you there. It was my fault.”

“Would you like to eat with me, at least?” I remembered what she had said about salt that morning.

“Changelings don’t really need food. For all the feeling of hunger, we just like it. And unsalted food doesn’t—” She took a deep breath.

“Why do you ask me to invoke the covenant of salt for you then?”

She studied the floor for a long moment. “It would be best if you forgot the garden behind the veil of ivy.”

With that, she wished me a good day and turned to leave. Part of me wanted to bid her stay and ask her to tell me what had been weighing down her words, but I knew I shouldn’t. We were not friends. For all her talk of protecting me and the time we spent together, we discussed little of substance. I had already strained what we had with my earlier interrogation. To overstep again our intimacy would only drive her further from me.

As my hand lingered on my door, a feeling of being watched came over me. The hairs at the back of my neck stood on end as I felt the scrutiny of a thousand eyes, like the rush of heat when brave fingers dart through naked flame.

There was a rustling noise: a jostling of wings or the rippling of leaves. I turned. But for my shadow, the space behind me was empty.

“It’s you, isn’t it? Salamander?” I called out. “You helped me that time...”

I heard a high, bell-like laugh. Or perhaps it was bells that sounded like laughter.

“In the dark. With the lantern. I remember.”

I followed the sound, but the castle was as empty of people as it always was. I stumbled down an unfamiliar corridor.

“Won’t you talk to me?”

The sound of bells grew fainter until I was certain I was alone.

I sighed and returned to my room, winding up the tight knot of stairs. I was troubled by Miss Davenport’s departure and further unsettled by the elusive Salamander.

Of the mission’s inhabitants, I had yet to meet the aforementioned Salamander. When asked, Mr Benjamin merely muttered darkly about the

dangers of fickle fire and his attention would wander off, abruptly changing the subject to a remark about the weather.

I had pieced together some impressions of the presumably fire-aligned fae. I was, after all, well acquainted with the theories of Paracelsus that proposed all fae were fundamentally elemental in nature, and I had no reason to believe this untrue at present. The Salamander was allegedly in charge of the household, with Mr Benjamin as merely groundskeep, but there was little trace of the Salamander's work.

Sighing, I pulled out the papers I had hidden from Miss Davenport that morning. This all, at least, allowed me time to work on the Enochian manuscript.

The shapes of the symbols were slippery in my mind. My unfamiliarity with them meant that I found them difficult to differentiate. My inability to even guess at Enochian's pronunciation meant that I wasn't even able to sound them in my mind, making it wholly an exercise in matching glyph to glyph. Each word required a painstaking cataloguing. I remembered trying to learn Greek from my brother's textbooks and how my eyes rebelled against an alien alphabet. I laughed now at how heartily I had complained at him about Greek's awkwardness. Enochian was far, far worse.

I imagined myself Jean-François Champollion reading hieroglyphs for the first time. Laon and I read of his breakthrough in our father's periodicals.

The lists of words were incomplete, to say the least, and the spellings were not always consistent. Most of it was even glossed in Latin rather than English and I cursed my own feminine education.

It was a sort of madness.

One of the oddities that struck me was that there was a series of glyphs that only ever appeared by themselves. They were never repeated with any of the other letters. It made me question my assumptions. There was no reason

to expect this to be an alphabet like the Cyrillic script or even runes. There was no reason to expect texts written in the same alphabet to be in the same language. Surely to an outsider, a page of French and a page of English would look similar enough.

My mind was panicking as I studied my great catalogue of words. The pattern of their repetitions suggested sufficient overlap in vocabulary that they were probably the same language.

That word with the unique letters, though.

It was in that first line of Enochian I had read beside that Latin.

In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was with God.

Of course.

I laughed to myself at how obvious it was: those letters were the name God.

I looked at the page before me and seeing it repeated throughout I knew I had to be right. I was holding the gospel in Enochian. This must have been an effort to translate the Bible.

And yet, why would this language have a unique word for God? For all our own reverence His title in English is merely made of everyday letters. Hallowed His name may be, but there was nothing unique about its writing. Before I had learnt letters, Agnes told me that the letters in God and dog were mirrored; it was a fact that boggled my tiny mind. I had thought anagrams to be a sort of verbal magic that would make one thing into another.

I thought of Champollion recognising Cleopatra's name in a cartouche. Perhaps it was only apt that this should be the first word I read in Enochian.

There were those who would not write divine names or made taboo their pronunciation. There were those who forbade His depiction. Perhaps

this was like that, writing the name of God in a way that was alien to the rest of the script.

But I wanted it to mean more. I wanted it to confirm my wild theories of this being the language of angels, stolen and preserved by the fae. I wanted this to be that sacred first language that God spoke to create the world, that He taught to Adam and that was sundered at Babel.

And so I pressed on, trying to make sense of the other words. Whilst nothing made sense as passage, other recurring short words began to linger a little longer in my mind.

As I worked, I thought again of Miss Davenport's answer at the scene in the chapel. I could believe there to be artifice in the arrangement, that there wasn't an interrupted act of communion, only someone's desire to suggest that. But such dioramas were always made to be seen, and if not by my eyes then there must be another pair it was all intended for.

But who?

As my candle guttered, my fractured thoughts no longer followed one another and their haze bordered on sleep. My eyes were no longer focusing on the words before me.

Tired beyond thought, I stumbled towards the basin and splashed water from it onto my face. The water soothed but washed away none of the exhaustion. The bed was but a few aching steps away.

As my eyes closed and I lost myself to the enveloping sheets, something agitated at the back of my mind. It was like a loose tooth or a stray thread, tugging at my thoughts. There was something I had forgotten.

That night, I dreamt of Laon.

He lay under a willow in a garden, resting his head on the lap of a pale, pale woman. She wound her arms around him and he sighed as she stroked his face. Her locks of white gold and brown were draped over his black hair.

The long, delicate fronds of the willow framed their idyllic scene and my presence felt like an intrusion.

At the edges of my hearing, they were whispering to one another. Soft and gentle words were pressed against ears, like kisses, intimate and secret.

Suddenly, I couldn't breathe.

I did not know her face. It was sharp and strange. She turned and looked straight at me, amber eyes piercing. I was trapped in them; I saw myself reflected in them. I saw myself as she saw me, pathetic and worthless, nothing more than an insect. I felt long-limbed, ungainly and drab, a moth to her butterfly.

I shrank from her gaze, but her eyes pinned me. I was a moth newly drawn from the bottom of a killing jar and unfolded onto a specimen board, my flaws on lurid display.

She laughed. My brother gazed at her with worshipful eyes and he could not see me. He drew from the air a ribbon of bright scarlet and wound it through her white and brown hair, his long, beautiful fingers catching her misty, cloudlike tresses.

I wanted to call out to them, for him to notice me. I wanted to tell him I had been waiting for him, that I had come all this way to see him, but I found I had no voice.

I struggled to run forwards but they only seemed all the further away. I could not look away as the distance between them closed, skin against skin.

The dream continued for some time, and when I finally awoke, I found my eyes gritty and sore from unshed tears, and my heart aching.

CHAPTER 8

The Words in the Book

Iron or steel, in the shape of needles, a key, a knife, a pair of tongs, an open pair of scissors, or in any other shape, if placed in the cradle, secured the desired end. In Bulgaria a reaping-hook is placed in a corner of the room for the same purpose. I shall not stay now to discuss the reason why supernatural beings dread and dislike iron. The open pair of scissors, however, it should be observed, has double power; for it is not only of the abhorred metal, – it is also in form a cross.

Edgar Shelley Heartland, “The Secrets of Steel”, IRON: AN ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR IRON AND STEEL, PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY JAMES BOUNSALL, AT THE MECHANICS' MAGAZINE OFFICE, 1846.

My feet were sore from pacing. I did not know how long I had been turning and turning in my circular room.

Days had become weeks, and my confinement within the walls of Gethsemane was becoming intolerable. Little differed from day to day: Mr Benjamin had continued being nothing but excessively courteous and abrupt in his conversation; Miss Davenport returned each day to sew and knit with me, with long sighs and tales of her human family, and of course, there was no sign of the Salamander.

The seasons, in so far as they could be understood as such, marched on, and the pendulum sun continued its strange patterns. As the swing of the pendulum decreased, the sun no longer passed overhead. Midday was just a little darker and midnight just a little brighter. The days themselves did not grow shorter, of course, as the length of time it takes for a pendulum to

complete its swing remained constant – that much I remembered from my lessons.

I had slept less and less, however, as questions from the papers, from Mr Benjamin, from my own mind all crowded in on me.

The Reverend's journal had continued to taunt me, and finally, late one night, I had succumbed. I had known I shouldn't have opened it. I had told myself I was merely going to look over the hand to determine if any of the papers I had been studying were written by the Reverend.

I did not entirely believe myself, but it had been enough in the way of self-permission to take out the volume and hold it in my hand.

I spun on my heels, my fingers fisted in the stiff fabric of my skirt. I breathed deep and kept walking, trying in vain to find solace in motion.

As I had turned the journal over and over, it slipped from my hands and fell open:

*The walls, the windows, the walls. None of them make sense.
There is a history here but I cannot read it. A story told by a
madman.*

*Their promises, their oaths, their geas are there to hinder
you, to hobble you, to hide you. They are there to blind you and to
bind you.*

Their truth is not our truth. They wield it only as a weapon.

My eyes had glided over the words and read them before I even realised and my heart sank to my feet.

Of course, the missionary was lost now. There was no reason to think that he might be right in his mad scribbling. There was no reason to think that he might have the right of it.

But they were the words my restless soul most feared, most wanted to

be true.

My fingers smudged over my aching eyes. They stung from how dry they were. My nails dug into my skin and the pinpoints of pain only reminded me how my skin could not contain myself. I wanted to be everywhere at once, anywhere but here.

The seed of doubt had been planted. I should not have read that book. The Reverend's warning was more prophetic than he could know.

There was a knock, and Miss Davenport appeared by the doorway of my room. She was, as always, rosy in cheek and looking slightly breathless, as though she had just come in from a long walk. I knew by now that she looked that way even if she had been stationary for hours.

"I thought you might be up here, Miss Helstone," she said, cheerfully. "The weather is simply divine and I was thinking we should spend the day knitting in the solar. I've almost finished my shawl and I do think I would like your advice on how I should start the socks."

I said nothing for a moment. My hands tumbled over and over one other as I grasped for what to say. I was coming to see her as gaoler, an uncharitable and ultimately unfair assessment, but her seeming freedom only brought me bitterness.

"I need to go outside," I said. "I'm.... I've been in here too long."

"We can take a turn in the garden."

The wall-bordered sky could bring me no reprieve. I shook my head.

"Or a walk on the roof?"

I shook my head again. The distances glimpsed within and beyond the mists would but taunt me in this state.

I turned and looked her in the eye.

For a change, her gaze did not dart away as it so often did. She had a disquieting habit of just looking past me, not quite at me.

“You should try to be still,” she said. “Please, Cathy.”

My name struck me like a slap to the face. There was no shock in her eyes as I recoiled.

“You have no right to address me as such,” I said. “We are not friends.”

“But, Catherine—”

“You tell me nothing. We talk and we talk and yet you forever keep me in ignorance and darkness. You keep saying this castle is built on secrets but we cannot build a friendship on—”

“You need to be still.” She reached a hand towards me. Perhaps she had meant for it to be soothing, but I was no skittish horse to be tricked by a steady voice and calming hand.

I took a step back. “Do not touch me.”

“Come with me.”

“No.”

“Calm down and we will talk. I promise.”

I shook my head. “I need to be elsewhere.”

It was then that I realised in my pacing I had placed myself between her and the door. It was ajar behind me.

So I turned and bolted.

CHAPTER 9

The Dog in the Mist

By and large, the Fair Folk possess all the essentials of humanity. They have in common with us all the elements of body which make up the man. They have two eyes, two ears, two hands and two feet. They appear to laugh when they are pleased, weep when they are grieved; they sleep when weary, eat when hungry; rejoice over their gains, mourn over their losses very much as other men do.

However, those longest associated with them, and most intimately acquainted with their character and habits, never expect one of the Fair Folk to speak the truth when there is a chance for them to tell a lie. Yet they will tell you by their own laws, and by their own lips (usually two), that it is a vile sin to lie and deceive.

William Finkle & Hildegard Vossnaim, THE ARCADIAN VOYAGES,
EMBRACING DIVERSE ACCOUNTS OF FIRST TRAVELLERS, WITH NOTES ON THE
CULTURE AND THE CLIMATE

I was probably lost.

I had but pulled on gloves and marched from the house. I had needed to be outside of its walls.

My heart had been a storm-tossed ship, turning and turning inside me. Every snorting, frustrated breath I took only further agitated the vessel.

I had told myself I was but venturing outside the walls, to prove to myself that I could, that the stone could not hold me. I told myself I just wanted to stand beyond the portcullis and look back at my recent prison. I told myself I merely wanted to be out.

But soon I had wandered much further.

The path from Gethsemane was a fading dirt track but, five paces from the walls I could barely see it under my feet. It wound down from the precipice where the castle stood and my curiosity lured step by step into the roiling mist-sea.

It was chilly but not biting as I walked, adding to the grey mist with warm, white breath of my own.

The mists gathered at my feet and, between my steps, I imagined soft, downy undergrowth. I felt the flutter of foliage against my skirts, trailing their fingerlike fronds against me. They shed dandelion tears as they unfurled like wings.

Airy faces seemed to form from the mist. I found them as I did before, strange elfin faces grinning wider and wider as sinuous features coalesced around them. Strange pinwheel creatures curled around one another, eel-like, suspended in the air around me. Droplets of mist dewed on unearthly branches and rows of moonstone eyes opened, watching and unblinking.

One of the tiny faces smiled at me. It seemed so guileless, childlike in its desire, that I smiled back.

It reached out a spindly, three-fingered hand towards me.

A sound in the distance, like a gunshot.

Startled, the half-formed creature effervesced. A look of sheer terror on its face as it melted away; its milk-pale, moonstone eyes lingering for just a moment after the rest of it vanished.

I staggered back and cast my eyes about the mists.

It was only when a second bark followed that I realised it was the sound of a dog.

The mists twisted around me and the sky darkened. The faces around me opened their pale maws and screamed without sound. Their contorted faces opened more and more to give breath to fear, but there was nothing but

a deafening silence. The feathery mist-ferns became handlike, pulling themselves from the grey earth and snatching and snaring. They gained no purchase on the hems of my skirt but it did not stop them from trying.

A black dog tore through the mists. Its bark was sharp and abrupt, it filled my ears and, unlike the dreamlike softness of the mist creatures, the dog seemed to burn with a hellish intensity. The mist shied away from it; its tendrils turning to wisps of smoke where it touched it.

It had bounded straight out of a fireside story, a spectral hound with eyes of flame. The cook used to scare us with folktales, the Gytrash and the Barghest, all beasts of shadow wandering the endless moors. Some were lost dogs, waiting for their long dead masters, but most were simply out to ambush lonely travellers.

Something darted past me, a black all-too-solid shadow. I heard a low, echoing growl that seemed to surround me. A deep, rumbling sound, it curdled my blood and rippled gooseflesh down my spine.

I spun around, trying to see the source of my terror.

The black dog was behind me; it turned and closed the distance between us in a leap.

Cold fear clutched at my chest. I was struck by how monstrously huge the animal was. It swung its great lion-like head towards me and its ember-like gaze seared my soul. I staggered back and I felt the brittle fingers of the misty undergrowth crumble as they clutched and clawed at me. Bonelike, I could hear them crunch under my feet.

The mist was teeming with squirming creatures, snaking over and over each other, chasing and biting tails, mirroring my tumultuous thoughts. They devoured each other in a coiling mass.

A rider on a vast horse-like creature charged through the knotted smoke. They cut through it like a veil.

I gasped.

Instinct failed me. Too shocked to move, I watched its approach.

The beast reared, leathery wings unfurling as its knife-hooves pawed the air. Its rider toppled from its back. The beast pranced forwards, shaking free its mane.

Hearing a groan of pain from the rider brought me back to my senses. It was a familiar, human sound.

I edged closer.

A glacial calm came over me. I saw my panic as though through a mirror now, separate from my self.

“Are you much hurt?” I said.

The rider tried to force himself onto his feet, but he fell again.

“I could get help. I live quite...” I hesitated. I thought of the shifting mists and my argument with Miss Davenport.

The mists curled between us, suffocatingly dense around him, but I could just about make out the shape of grey hands closing around the rider. The choking hands tightened in fist after fist.

“Stay where you are.” I sounded far more certain than I was. “I’ll get your horse.”

Fear thundering in my veins, I ran to calm the startled beast. It seemed a panicked flurry of wings and hooves.

Only when my hand touched its soft, scaly nose did I wonder if Faeland beasts were different than ones I was used to.

I had the reins in my hand. Murmuring soothing nonsense under my breath, I smoothed its mane even as it flickered fire under my fingers. The beast danced its hooves, slowly steadying. Its wings flapped once more and folded.

Feathery gills flared under my fingers. I could feel its breathing calm.

I saw my fear as a golden-eyed beast much like the one under my hands, and as I stroked it, over and over, I soothed my own fear. Its golden eyes seemed to soften as it regarded me, and then with an abrupt blink they turned blue.

I led the beast back to the fallen rider.

“Cathy?”

The voice sounded disbelieving. It held a very, very familiar tone.

“No, it can’t be,” he said, fear creeping into his voice. “Of all the days for this to... What are you?”

The mist lingered over the rider, obscuring his features, but I recognised him. The knot of my heart twisted and tightened. I knew that voice, that shift of his shoulders, that turn of head. I hastened. I knew that hand that reached out towards me; I knew it as though it was my own.

“Laon?”

Hearing my voice, he wavered for moment, withdrawing his hand. “What illusion are you?”

“It’s me,” I said. “No illusion.”

“The mists grow more deceitful,” he murmured, more to himself than to me. “If you are trying to seduce me, spirit, I’m afraid I’m quite incapable at the moment.”

“I... I am your Cathy. Your sister.”

He grunted and cursed under his breath. I could hear the pain in his voice now and I could feel it mirrored upon myself. I knew he didn’t believe me. “Doesn’t matter. I’ve things that need—” He winced again, sharply.

“Can you move at all?”

“Probably. But I can’t put weight on my ankle. I’ve fallen on it.” He looked about. “Diogenes? My dog?”

“I don’t know where your dog is.”

Laon whistled, piercingly, and the great black animal came loping back. It circled us, weaving in and out of the mists.

I swallowed, feeling a cold breeze ripple across the back of my neck as the dog disappeared behind me. I could feel it in the shadows, lurking. “But I’ve brought you your... horse.”

“I need help to it.” He regarded my outstretched hand with weary suspicion. “Can I trust you not to melt away? When I lean on you?”

I nodded, though realising he might not be able to see it through the mist, I added, “You can trust me.”

His hand clasped mine, solid, an anchor in the sea of mist. I could feel his warmth, his breath on my skin.

He gritted his teeth as he got to his feet, using me as ballast. It was two false starts before he stood and could move his hand to my shoulder. His breath grew ragged from the exertion.

With him leaning heavily on me, the two of us staggered towards the side of the horse.

“I won’t be able to ride with you,” I said.

“Of course not.”

“Are you headed towards Gethsemane?”

He laughed; I recognised it as humourless. “Aren’t we all?”

“Well, I am.”

Steadying himself on me, he pushed himself onto the saddle of the beast. He hissed in pain as he swung his leg over. “If you are, then I shall see you there.”

“You- you shall.” I wasn’t sure if I should correct. It felt as though the mist was upon him and he would not believe me.

“Thank you, nonetheless.” He sighed and nudged the beast into motion. Its skin rolled as it moved, ropes of muscle shifting like snakes. He whistled

again for the hound. This time it didn't emerge but I could feel the shadows shift in answer to him.

I couldn't help the tears as I watched the mists swallow him. He was very so close. Perhaps it was because of this enveloping mist, obscuring and obfuscating. I was trembling, but it was no longer fear that shook me.

He didn't look back when he said, "Though I would rather you didn't take the shape of my sister to torment me."

The mists, grey-dark and murky, closed around me. They rose and fell like waves; I could hear the echo of the crashing across the valley, above me. The mists swirled like water and huge shadows glided above.

My knees buckled, and as I knelt I cradled my face in my hand. A darkness gathered above me. Glancing up, I saw a strange edifice of mist break in half. Its pieces rained down around me, insubstantial as all the other phantoms of this place. I tried to stem my tears. My eyes stung from the wool of my gloves, my tears soaking into them, warm at first and then cold.

As I took off my gloves, I saw the valley around me littered with sunken shadow ships. Despite the mist, I could see very far and the plains of torn sails, shattered hulls and bent masts seemed without end. Serpentine smoke-beasts circled them, over and over, threading themselves around the white husks of the ships. Tear-shaped fish streamed down from the distant surface and fish-tailed merfolk tore at their own hair as they danced, half-mad among the ruins.

It was some time before I could walk back to the mission.

CHAPTER 10

The Brother in the Hall

The feeling of discomfort which insensibly creeps over one upon entering a fae dwelling is produced neither by the rudeness nor the scantiness of the furniture, nor by the difference in external appearance from that which one has been accustomed to.

It is the result, rather, of the instinctive feeling that there is still something absent, without which even regal splendour would fail to satisfy. There is wanting that which is the charm of every home, whose influence can invest even poverty in the raiment of beauty and joyousness, and which, even amid much that is depressing, can fill the house with perpetual gladness; and that is, the spirit of love.

The absence of that mysterious bond of loving oneness, which links together indissolubly the hearts of Christian homes, is distressingly apparent in almost every heathen family that one visits. There is a dreariness, and want of that earnest mutual sympathy which is the very foundation of domestic happiness, which is apt to bring back to one's mind home-scenes in England, and to give one a more thorough appreciation of the blessings of Christianity.

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When I finally returned to Gethsemane, the castle was ablaze with light. It was a beacon above the mists, and I saw it far, far before I reached its

gatehouse. The mist creatures swarmed around the light, as though fascinated by their lurid glow. It was then I noticed that most of them cast no shadows. They seemed faint and unearthly against the stone of the castle.

The portcullis raised at my approach. I heard hurried footsteps, but saw no one.

Gate followed gate, cobbles hard against my sore feet. I longed to take off my boots. At the far end of the courtyard were the stone arches that led into the keep. For a moment, the steps seemed impossibly tall and I climbed them wearily.

The painted wooden pendants that hung from the arches seemed sharper and all the more like teeth as I leaned into the ironbound door to open it, using my shoulder for strength. It was very heavy. Its creaking filled my ears.

As I stepped inside, the door whined shut, a sound that echoed far too loudly despite the myriad tapestries and carpets that clothed the foyer.

The lofty, elegant ribs of the ceiling no longer seemed distant and beautiful. I had once thought them like a birdcage, but now I could only think of the heaving ribcage of a great beast that had swallowed me whole. Wind rushed through the foyer, howling as it reached the corridors above. The grey curtains and tapestries fluttered and then stilled. For three quick heartbeats, it had stopped.

I had already crumpled in the mists and those tears had barely dried. I told myself I would not cry again.

And then it started again, heaving another breath. Air flowed through the hall. I heard the rattling of shutters and there was a low groan from the wooden parts of the ceiling. The whole foyer seemed to shudder before it ceased again.

Irregular footsteps. A slammed door.

“What are you doing here?”

I looked up to see my brother in one of the balconies, framed by an ornate arch. He was leaning heavily on a walking stick. Stone feathers cast irregular shadows on his face, but I did not need to see it to know he was enraged.

Taken aback, I could but stare at him. I had thought that once we were out of the mists he would recognise me.

His dog, jet black and decidedly more mundane in this light, bounded over to me. It wagged its tail with seeming delight and gave a resounding bark.

“Begone, spirit!” he said, limping towards me, circling from one end of the long balcony to the other. The uneven rhythm of his gait, unfamiliar to me, unsettled and worried me. Each of the clawed arches cast a darker shadow on his face. He limped down the stairs that spilt into the foyer, its carpet a scarlet tongue against the darker colours. “Why do you plague me so? Does it please you to see me like this? Have you not tortured me enough?”

He was tall, taller than I remembered him being. Perhaps it was simply the shadows and the stairs, but Laon towered above me.

“I am your sister,” I said, straightening. “Laon, brother—”

“Do not call me by that name! You have no right, spirit. Do not pretend to be flesh and illuse upon my hound! Is it not enough that—”

“No, you have no right.” Anger flared within me. I met his gaze, my hands fisting tightly, and spat back his venom. The dog slunk off, cowering from my outburst. “I have written countless begging letters to be here, to stand in front of you, to help you. And I did not do all that grovelling to be berated and belittled by you. I have not come so far to be mistaken for some half-witted spirit. I expect my brother to know me and my face.” I was

shaking; I could feel myself unsteady on my feet. My eyes threatened to water as I stubbornly refused to blink. My nostrils were flaring. “Or am I mistaken in who I love?”

Thunderstruck, he stared at me, the clear blue of his eyes almost disarming. He was without words. I could see I had hurt him and though I meant to soften my words, they did not quite come out that way.

“Or if nothing else, be able to ask me some question, some secret that we shared. If indeed Arcadia is so treacherous,” I said. I attempted a smile but I knew it was more of a grimace. I had waited so long to see him, endured the confinement of his home, and here he was, denying me even my own self. “Is it so impossible that I am indeed your sister? Can you not believe that I could and would follow you? Can you not believe that I have the strength and the love to come? Can you not believe that I would care—”

“Catherine!”

His walking stick clattered to the floor.

Strong arms enfolded me and cut me off; I recognised his smell instantly and melted into his hug. It was more instinct than anything else. I breathed him in, all fear and anger and exertion. I could not remember the last time we were this close.

“Laon...”

He was leaning heavily on me, very heavily. I remembered his injury.

“Your ankle—” I started.

He was laughing, face buried in my shoulder. I realised how precariously he was balanced, though it was really too late. His arms tightened around me and we toppled to the hard floor. I squealed, but we didn’t part.

My petticoats cushioned our fall. We clung to each other, shaking as we laughed and rolled.

It was a moment suspended in time. I dared not look at him, face him, and I wondered if he felt the same. His face in my shoulder, muffling his voice. It had been a long few years and we had both changed. Yet, for this one moment, I felt like a child again, rolling down the moors as we chased one another through the heather.

“You’re surprisingly heavy,” I muttered.

Still, there was a solidness to him, and I trusted him to anchor me. I closed my eyes. It was almost easy to forget where we were and imagine again the endless sky of the moors above us.

“Reverend Helstone?” came the voice of Mr Benjamin.

We sprang apart. A flush of guilt racing across my skin, white hot and branding. Once on my feet, I smoothed my skirts, watching as Laon struggled to his. I offered my hand but he refused, using instead his walking stick.

“Your room is ready for you. And where would you like to take supper tonight? Do you know if your sister has returned from—” The gnome wandered into the hall, cheerful as ever. “Ah! Miss Helstone! Delighted that you have survived your jaunt.”

I nodded an acknowledgement to the gnome’s greeting. He adjusted his wire-framed spectacles and beamed at the two of us with surprisingly paternal warmth.

“Will you be dining with Miss Helstone, Reverend? I can arrange for it without disturbing...” Mr Benjamin paused, clucking his tongue against his lips for a moment as doubt crossed his eyes. “You know, the Salamander.”

Laon frowned, brows furrowing as he stared at me. “Your face looks different.”

“I’ve not changed.” I held my chin a little higher.

Taking a step back, my brother continued to stare. I challenged his gaze with my own and that was when I, too, began to notice the differences. He

looked older, more tired. Dark hair framed his face, paler than I remembered from our days under the overcast, Yorkshire skies. I noticed the fine lines at the corner of his eyes that stayed even when he wasn't smiling.

Laon really wasn't smiling now.

"Why *are* you here?" he demanded.

"The London Missionary Society," I said, prickling again at his tone. "I have a letter."

"What? From Reverend Joseph Hale himself?" He was scoffing, even as he winced and leaned all the more heavily on his cane. "You shouldn't be here, Cathy. It's not good to be here. This is... this is a terrible place."

At the corner of my vision, I could see Miss Davenport appearing at the top of the stairs. She was different than usual; a scarlet ribbon wound through her hair. I tried desperately to banish the memory of the dream from my mind.

"Why did you even come? This is no place for you. I told you not to come, not to follow me. I told you I was fine. I'm alive, I'm doing my work. Good or not, I am doing my duty to the Throne in Heaven and what more can they ask of me? I need access to the cities, I need to escape this space, I need—"

"You didn't write," I said, weakly.

"I wrote. I wrote until my fingers bled..."

"Not to me, then."

"They must know. The Society. They can't—"

"For months, Laon. No news."

"This isn't a game, Catherine."

"I know, Laon. It's why I came."

"You should go back to England, to Yorkshire. This is not the place for you to be. It's not safe here."

“I’m staying,” I told him.

“How can you even—” he faltered in his rant. “No, that doesn’t matter. What matters is you are going. You can tell the Reverend that I’m perfectly healthy and in perfect command of all my senses. He doesn’t need to send nursemaids after me.”

“You need me here,” I said. “And I’m safe.”

“Nothing is safe here.”

“Miss Davenport said that the geas that protects you will protect me. Blood binds blood. You don’t have to worry.” My voice was rising. Laon had always been prone to erratic shifts of mood, but now it seemed all the more pronounced. The knot in my chest was tightening and I could hear it in my voice, that tension, weak as it was.

His hair fell over his eyes and he pushed it from his face. The hard line of his jaw mirrored mine. “Two weeks. You leave after two weeks.”

“No, I’m staying.”

“You can’t stay, Cathy. I don’t have time for this argument. Everything is about to happen and there is more at stake here than—”

“Perhaps we should retire to the drawing room?” said Miss Davenport, clearing her throat. We both turned to her, Laon obviously surprised to see her. She was affectionately scratching the dog whose tail was obviously thumping the ground. She wore her usual effervescent smile, without a trace of awkwardness at the argument she had just witnessed.

“I thought you had left, Ariel,” he said.

“Not at all. I’ve been keeping your sister company since her arrival.” She fluttered a hand to her long, white neck and smiled all the more sweetly. “Come, I’ve tea waiting for us. And your sister and I do so want to hear about your journey. Do we not, Catherine?”

I made a vague noise of assent, my own name in her mouth sounding

more like an insult than endearment.

“And, Laon, you simply must be tired after it all.”

“Not so much tired as injured,” he said, dryly. “I was in a hurry.”

She laughed, the same piercing, delightful, grating sound. “Whatever for, my dear? Tea’s not that awful at court, is it?”

“I had to ride on ahead to make preparations. Queen Mab is coming.”

Miss Davenport faltered. Something brittle in her eyes shifted and she swallowed visibly before taking Laon’s hand. He did not snatch it back. “To the drawing room,” she resolved. “We shall need some tea either way.”

Tucking my brother’s arm around hers, Miss Davenport led the way to the drawing room. My brother was leaning on his walking stick, trying not to put too much weight on Miss Davenport. I wavered, uncertain if I should follow.

“Mab?” asked Miss Davenport’s voice. She forced a tinkling laugh, trying to sound merely curious.

“And her court, of course. One wouldn’t expect The Pale Queen to travel alone. We need to tell the Salamander,” he said.

“Of- of course.”

My brother’s dog gave me a long lingering look before following them.

As they were about to disappear down the corridor, I heard Miss Davenport’s voice: “You are coming with us, aren’t you, Catherine?”

I did not go to tea with them.

It still seemed strange to me to term an afternoon meal of scones and sandwiches “tea”, however fashionable it may be in London. Though that was not the reason I withdrew myself from their company.

I knew I needed time alone to compose myself. Unbidden, images from that infernal dream crept into the edges of my thoughts and wound around them like a scarlet ribbon. I remembered how she had protested at the thought

of being his *companion* and how intimately she spoke of him. It had also not escaped my notice that he was calling Miss Davenport by her name.

Distantly, I heard my brother make arrangements about the arrival of the mysterious Queen and her court. I wondered which of the Paracelsian elements she was aligned to.

I did not want to return to my strange round room, full of its own secrets. The Roche journal awaited me, a temptation that I had not only already succumbed to but which had brought me far more trouble than I had thought possible.

Their promises, their oaths, their geas are there to hinder you, to hobble you, to hide you. They are there to blind you and to bind you.

Their truth is not our truth. They wield it only as a weapon.

But I still had very few answers and I wanted desperately to open again that forbidden book. My sojourn into the mists had taught me the consequences of discovery and I knew I should not.

There was no reason to believe that a now-dead Reverend wrote truth. And Miss Davenport had told me that Roche had all but caused his own death.

Somehow.

I passed from the ancient, pockmarked stone corridors into the modern wing with its grandiose plasterwork and flocked wallpaper.

There were days when I would try to imagine those who used to live in this castle, populate it with the toy soldiers and dolls that Laon and I used to share. There were days when I would peer under each dust sheet and marvel at the beauty of the ancient furniture. I would guess at past inhabitants, squinting at the worn names under the parade of portraits.

Today was not that day.

I wandered listless until I reached the leaf-curtained door of the garden.

Given Miss Davenport's current preoccupation, it seemed an opportunity to study the other chapel. I wondered if the scene of interrupted communion was still present there and if I would ever find an answer as to who was meant to find it.

"Hello."

My hand froze on the latch; I did not recognise the voice.

I turned to see a bald woman with an ash-white complexion. She clutched a long black shawl around her old-fashioned gown.

"You're the Salamander, aren't you?" I said.

I was staring.

She watched me with her slitted eyes. Lifting her skirt, I glimpsed a coiling white tail and she slithered towards me in a smooth, undulating motion.

"I- I know we have not been introduced," I ventured. "But thank you for taking care of me. The food and castle... and the lantern that night. Thank you."

She smiled a flame-red, lipless smile and her features lit up. For a moment she had eyebrows and hair of fire before it rippled down her being, from her bald head to her coiled tail. Her skin blackened under the flames before being scabbed over again by her white scales. "We indeed have not met formally."

"Then we should remedy that." I knew she was distracting me from something, but this was a trade. She was offering herself in return for me not seeing whatever was in the garden. "My name is Catherine Helstone. I am the missionary's sister."

Her smile widened to show the coal-black inside of her mouth. "You may call me the Salamander."

"Why do you hide, Salamander?"

“I am not hiding.”

“Then why have I never seen you before?” I needed answers.

“I do not need to be seen to tend to you,” she said, scales glinting. “I have had quite enough of the Pale Queen’s orders, quite enough of her court. I do what I must, what I owe her, but that is all.”

“Were you here in Roche’s day? The other missionary.”

“I remember the original.”

“How did he die?”

“I cannot tell you that.”

“He had a plan. He wanted to do something, to learn something. What was it? What did he find out? What’s Enochian?”

She shook her head.

“I can still go into the garden,” I reminded her, reaching for the door.
“And I know you do not want me to.”

“Roche had ambitions. He thought this a mirror, and he was right, in a way. He thought this a garden, and he was right, in a different way. But he also thought this a parable.”

“Was he wrong?”

“No. But he wanted knowledge and he wanted to prove what should not be proven.”

“What did he want to know?”

“Do not ask me further.” Droplets of flame trickled down her face from her black eyes. “My tongue is even less free than my hands.”

“Why?”

“You are not the only one bound. I have made many oaths and I bear many curses, the one of dust and crawling may be the first but it is not the last.” She paused, cocking her head to one side. “You may open it now.”

At that, I seized and twisted the handle and flung open the door. It was

empty, of course, and the Salamander had disappeared by the time I turned back.

I knew the bargain I had made, but even as I wandered through the unremarkable garden, I wondered if it was the right choice. Puzzles published in periodicals were best solved by first examining the known unknowns, that much I knew. One always began with the familiar and worked outwards.

But was that truly a strategy I should be applying to my interrogation of Arcadia?

CHAPTER 11

The Willow in the Portrait

Tineola arcanofera (Semiotic Moth) 2"-2" 7"

This rare stripe-winged moth is snowy white, with gold costae and fringes, and an interrupted marginal band of pale yellow.

Native to Arcadia and sometimes found in earthly libraries, this pest is often said to feed off the written word. It allegedly consumes secrets and digests them into less informative fragmentary whispers.

However, the truth of the matter is far more mundane. The semiotic moth simply is attracted to the scent of the iron gall ink that the old manuscripts are written in and the decay of the documents is due to the slightly acidic nature of the ink corroding the parchment over time. The "dust" of the moth's wings possesses hallucinogenic properties when breathed into human lungs, explaining the whispering heard amid the clouds of moths and dust in old libraries.

Larvae undescribed.

Henry Doubleday, "Appendix IV: Invasive Species from the Faelands",

A NATURAL HISTORY OF BRITISH MOTHS

It was shortly after I had returned to my room in that tower, when I had in my hand the Reverend Roche's journal, that Mr Benjamin knocked on my door to inform me of dinner.

Reluctantly, I put down the volume of secrets. I had wanted to compare what the Salamander had told me with Roche's own account. Her cryptic

words were almost no knowledge at all, but I had thought they might still spark something. Why would Roche think of this place as a parable?

Mr Benjamin seemed at first no different than usual, his languid movements as meditated as always but his mannerisms were muted. He stood stooped low, a dejected weight hung about his shoulders.

“Your brother and the changeling await you at dinner, Miss Helstone,” he said. “At your pleasure, of course.”

“Thank you for informing me, Mr Benjamin,” I replied in my most courteous tones, hoping to put the agitated gnome at ease. The pupils of his eyes darted rapidly from corner to corner. “And I would love to join them.”

“If you would follow me, Miss Helstone. They are dining in the great hall tonight, which I do not believe you have seen.” He gave a low, shaky bow.

He led the way down the spiral staircase from my room and along a gallery of ethereal landscapes. Even as we walked, the scenes caught my eye, a disquieting mix of familiar hills and trees and rivers with strange skies and stranger hues.

“Are all these places in Arcadia, Mr Benjamin?” I asked, slowing before a series of mountains that clutched at the ground like the knuckles of a six-fingered fist.

“Yes,” said Mr Benjamin. He frowned, eyes darting again. “And no.”

“Some are real and others not?”

“No.” He licked his lips with a black tongue and swallowed uncomfortably. “But also yes.”

“I’m afraid that isn’t much of an answer, Mr Benjamin.”

“Realness is a strange, strange thing in these parts, Miss Helstone.”

I stopped, lighthearted curiosity fleeing as I saw the final painting in the long gallery. My mouth dried at the sight of the landscape before me: it was a

riverbound glade, dripping with willow trees. An impossible river curled itself around the wooded island in a tight, protective spiral. It seemed achingly familiar.

The willow trees leaned lovingly over the encircling river and caressed the water with its whispering leaves. I thought of uttered secrets, and an odd shiver crawled up my spine.

“Miss Helstone?”

I heard the gnome’s footsteps as he walked back to me, having continued with the confidence that I was following. I did not take my eyes off the circle of willow trees.

“Is this a real place?” I heard myself ask, but my voice sounded distant to my own ears.

“Real and not real.”

“Is it possible, then, for me to go there?”

“At a price.” He gave a shrug, but his heart wasn’t really in it.

I breathed a deep sigh, setting aside the memories that knotted painfully in my chest. I forced myself to look at my gnome companion. “You are being unduly cryptic again, Mr Benjamin.”

“I do apologise. That is most rude of me.” He was articulating even more than usual, his mouth exaggerating the motions in a parody of the Oxford Voice. He looked behind himself again, with all the air of a child about to thief from the pantry.

“Are you quite alright, Mr Benjamin?”

“No, no, not really. No.” One more furtive glance behind and the gnome took off his spectacles. He cleaned them on his ragged waistcoat. “I am quite afraid of the Pale Queen.”

“Mab?”

He cringed. “Best nae say ’er name, Miss ’elstone.”

I couldn't place the accent that came over his gravelly voice, but as he furrowed his brow and met my gaze, all comparisons to a child's nervousness fled. There was true terror in his eyes.

"Is there a reason why?"

He shook his head. He lowered his clouded eyes and re-affixed his spectacles to his face with shaking hands. His accent returned, but there lingered an earthiness. He somehow seemed more real. "There are some things you learn not to risk in these parts."

"Risk?"

"There is a sort of old power to names, Miss Helstone. I would take heed of it."

"I- I will." I gave him what I hoped to be a brave, cheering smile.

"They say the Howling Duke and the Chief of Winds are more cruel. They say He Who Commands Fear is stronger, more powerful. The Keeper of the Markets is more calculating. The Colourful King, She Who Sleeps For The Mountains and the Lost Emperors are more unpredictable, more changeable... This is all true, you have to understand." He swallowed, visibly. "But I daresay I fear the Pale Queen the most."

"Why?"

Mr Benjamin grinned at my question, his lips stretching tight over his blunt, brown teeth. There was no humour in it. "Because she is most human."

The great hall was at the heart of what I had thought of as the oldest part of the castle, with stone arches etched with geometric patterns and enormous, empty fireplaces. The dog lounged, a spill of black ink on the sheepskins. A minstrel's gallery peered down at us.

Laon sat by himself at the head of a long, long chair-lined table. He had draped himself across the gilded throne and cradled in his hand a squat glass of wine. His eyes were just a little too distant. He did not look at me when I

entered.

A place had been set out opposite him at the bottom of the table. Mr Benjamin herded me into it.

A tureen shaped like a crouching rabbit waited for me. It was made of porcelain, with its long, sleeked back ears forming a handle along its back.

“We should start. Ariel isn’t joining us,” said Laon.

Again, her name.

They must have grown close when he first arrived and she was a friendly, near-human face among the fae. She must have been a welcome reminder of humanity, a haven.

“I see,” I mumbled. I was grateful for her absence and I had no urge to ask the reason. “Is she well?”

“Quite. She’s simply spoilt her appetite on cucumber sandwiches and biscuits.”

“I didn’t know she was so fond of taking tea.” I uncovered the sweet carrot soup. It was purple, dark and bruise-like, with shades of beetroot red clinging to the spoon when I stirred it.

“Don’t forget the salt,” said Laon.

“I know,” I said, scattering salt onto the soup. “I’ve been here for quite a while. Waiting for you.”

My brother made no reply, and we ate in silence.

Despite its disconcerting colour, the soup was rich and sweet in its flavour. There was a gamey note to it that made me wonder if there was rabbit in the stock.

“Where have you been, Laon?” I asked.

“I... I’ve...” he hesitated. He brought his wineglass to his lips but did not drink.

“You can tell me.”

“The letters.” The glass clinked gently as he put it down again. “They didn’t reach me. Distances are unreliable in Arcadia.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“They sometimes like to pretend it can be measured in miles or hours travelled, but it’s far less predictable than that. I’ve had distances given to me in numbers of daydreams and revelations, as though I’d only arrive somewhere after I’ve had an epiphany or—”

“No,” I interjected. “Laon, I’ve asked Miss Davenport and Mr Benjamin but I’ve not gotten a straight answer. I was worried about you.”

“I was at the court of the Pale Queen.”

“Mab?”

He nodded. “I was petitioning The Pale Queen for access into the lands under her control, that is to say – I’m not sure if there is a correct term yet – inner Arcadia. To make true progress here, I need to head inland, beyond the ports that trade with humanity and beyond the puppetry of the fae. They put us here, apart from their towns and cities, purposefully isolated so we cannot do our holy work. It is why for all his time here, Roche only converted one—”

“Mr Benjamin.” In the corner of my eye, I could see the gnome giving me a brief wave. I returned it.

“Yes, him.”

“And she is resistant?”

“To say the least.”

“Are there not others you can petition? After all, Arcadia is not a singular land with a single monarch.”

“The Pale Queen is already, by far, the most approachable and sympathetic to the human cause. She wears a face, after all.”

“Is that good?”

Laon sighed, long and despondent. “The treaties that granted the

Society the right to be here are badly drawn. Or rather, they do not grant us any advantage. We are merely an afterthought in that process. To the merchants with their weights, to the politicians with their lies and to the cartographers with their lines.” He held up his glass as though in a toast and drank deeply. His sarcasm was palpable. “There would be no new countries without their greed.”

“I was given books to teach the local children with,” I said, sipping the spiced ginger tea. “Maps and... fairy tales. Seems strange to think I ever thought those might be useful.”

“The Society thinks many things,” he said. “But the truth is, I am left to simply beg for a chance to attempt my duty. For all my months here, I cannot tell you what fae society is like beyond the frivolities of court life and the controlled bartering that happens in their markets. I have no parishioners, no populace to tend to. It has been impossible to even approach them about faith.”

The next course was fish, heavily spiced with mint and fennel. Though the slight flickering of the candlelight and the wide leaves of the mint masked it, the fish was subtly luminous.

“I am a missionary in name alone,” said Laon. “We are surrounded by empty, formless mists not for our own protection.”

“Perhaps they fear us.”

He shrugged. “Perhaps.”

“I had read that fae are elemental in nature. Paracelsus, I believe, proposed it?” I said. Salt seemed to dim the fish and it appeared more grey than silver when my knife glided into it. “Could that not be used to predict their temperaments? We could appeal to their elemental impulses when speaking of the divine.”

He swirled the wine in his glass, avoiding my gaze. I could tell he was

being careful with his words. Gone was that intimate carelessness that we shared, where we simply spoke our thoughts. There was a time when we would lie under the apple tree and we could not tell what words were uttered and what words were thought; they were all intertwined and interwoven as we were.

“So,” my brother began. “I would talk to the undines of how the Lord Above is the Fountain of Living Waters and how He is the one who divided the Red Sea?”

“Yes, and to the gnomes, you could speak of how He is the Rock of Our Salvation. The sylphs, perhaps, could be swayed by the thought of his command over the heavens.”

“It has a certain rhetorical simplicity, but I confess I am not convinced by the Paracelsian argument about the nature of fae.”

“I see...” I hesitated, taken aback. “Is there a reason?”

“The model is practically medieval, more shaped by superstition than reason,” he said. “And it is more than just various groupings of fae can be understood through their elements. It is an understanding of Arcadia as much as its inhabitants. And underpinning it all is the idea that Arcadia is constantly separating its elements, that they are unbalanced here, that as we push to the edges of our known map the cohesion of the world is collapsing.”

“And as certain elements come to the fore, this affects the climate and temperaments of Arcadia?”

“If we start arguing such, we have to accept that Saharan deserts and the monsoons of India are not only equal in their elemental composition – whatever that may mean – but also that they are somehow better mixed than here.”

“But Arcadia is different. All this,” I flung a gesticulating arm around us, causing Diogenes to let out a whine. “This is not Yorkshire, not home.”

“It’s different, it’s not the alchemical composition of the world that makes it so. Mr Benjamin is not more closely aligned to earth than you or me.”

“This place isn’t just strange because of it having strange people,” I snapped, frustrated with his explanations. “There is something deeper.”

“That doesn’t make Paracelsus right.”

“I’m not saying the theory is right. I’m saying you’re not trying to understand.”

“But even in its broader, more populist strokes the theory is wrong,” he continued. “Whilst some individual or even types of fae seem to follow the broad thematic impulses of the elements, they are no more governed by them than you or I. It is an illusion of a pattern. Akin to saying that the Scottish are of fire and that the Welsh are of earth.”

“I cannot know that. You cannot limit my knowledge and then reprimand me for ignorance.” A warmth flushed to my cheeks, though I did not know if it was anger or shame. My eyes dropped to the silver fish. I was breathing heavily, pulse rushing. Laon had always shared his books with me, taught me his lessons and smuggled me his notes; for all that our educations treated us differently, I had thought there was an unspoken pact between us. I had thought we were alike. “I can’t know what you know. I have not been allowed to—”

“And yet I found you wandering in the mists.” He was scoffing.

“It’s been weeks. I’ve waited for you, for weeks.” I was pleading, pathetic. My voice was a whine, a whimper. I hated myself. “I needed—”

“No, you came here. You demanded. You threw your temper at Ariel—”

“I did. But—”

“You left the castle walls.” He would not meet my eye, but I could see it now, the rage simmering in his averted gaze.

It was then, too, I realised my own rage. I had been gripping the table, and I had half thought it was to steady myself, but I knew then I was willing myself not to stand and march over to slap him.

“It is very dangerous out there, Cathy. In the mists. Anything... I cannot—”

“What cannot you do, Laon?” I could feel my fingers growing numb. “Have you not done it all? Have you not gone to university? Have you not left England? Have you not made yourself a grand explorer, triumphant conqueror and—”

It stung. I knew it stung.

“Do not blame your confinement on me.” His voice was very cold, very slow. “I am not your gaoler.”

“Do not shame me for knowledge that has been denied me. Do not patronise me over the position to which I have been born.” I saw him flinch, but I continued. “I had thought the respect you had for me was mine by right, as your sister and equal. Not granted to me on your whim. To be begged and earned, however tenderly.”

“Cathy, I didn’t mean—”

“You may not be my gaoler, Laon, but you are as good as.”

“You have to understand, I am as much a prisoner as you.”

“Your cage is larger, then.”

“Still a cage.”

“But you would have me beg for you to share it. That I need to earn my place beside you. That it is contingent on your love.” I took a deep breath. “I am not here to beg, Laon.”

He said nothing at that and Mr Benjamin slipped in to serve the last course.

The rest of the meal passed in silence, punctuated only by the chiming

of the cutlery against our plates. My anger dissipated as quickly as it had flared, but my brother remained rigid in his demeanour. Still, he would not look at me. Our argument, however impetuous, had not been the balm of Gilead that I had fleetingly hoped it would be.

CHAPTER 12

The Secrets of the Past

Every Missionary Society should have prepared, and be able to put into the hands of every new Missionary, a brief Manual of the language, customs, notions, and religious ideas of the province or country to which he is going; including a few rules or hints respecting climate, dress, health, food, etc.

This the Missionary should learn by heart, and know thoroughly by the time he reaches his station.

With such an efficient preparation, let every missionary, on his arrival at his sphere of labour, strive to enter as much as possible among the people. That he may learn the language thoroughly, let him devote a considerable time each day to its acquisition. Let him walk abroad, and though he cannot speak much, let him see much, and familiarise himself with all the outer manifestations of native life. For the first year or two, his principal attention should be given to the language and to books about the natives.

Gregory Day, "Good Practises," THE RELIGIOUS INTELLIGENCER,
FOR THE YEAR ENDING MAY 1834

I read Roche's journal that night.

My hands danced coyly on the spine and over the leather cover with its strange half-moon scorch marks. I remembered the warnings of Reverend Hale, his restrained insulations far more effective at stoking my fear than hyperbole.

Noticing my hesitation, I counted ten heartbeats, braced myself and

opened the book.

Nothing happened: no lightning struck; no stray breeze brought cold fingers down my spine; no invisible hands snatched the journal from mine. It simply lay open, ready for my eyes to harvest its secrets.

The first pages were mundane enough, mostly an account of his journey to Arcadia. I swallowed, still unable to rid myself of the lump of fear in my throat, and kept reading.

October 21, 1839. – I intended to leave Plymouth, in the company of Captain Peter Kensington and his family, sailing south; but I am infected by a shivering fever – I had taken more than eighty grains of mercury and a great quantity of opium, to be delivered from it.

October 29. – I left the family of Captain Peter Kensington; and began my sea-voyage to Arcadia, sometimes called Elphane. Its secrets are within reach.

November 1. – I find the seas disagreeable to my constitution. Captain Samson Furneaux assures me that his navigator is truly terrible and it would be no time before we are sufficiently lost as to be within sight of the Faelands.

December 13. – I arrived at Port Maskelyne, where I was very kindly and hospitably received by Colonel Stanners, the Honourable South Sea Company's Political Agent, and the rest of the British residents. I am told that from here, the journey to Elphane should be swift.

There were three hands at work in the journal: The first was, of course,

the Reverend himself. He had a wide, straight way of writing that undoubtedly came from years of careful discipline. I smiled at the memory of my brother struggling with his letters. We used to write miniature journals and newspapers for our toy soldiers and he was never quite able to make his as neat and as tiny as mine.

The origin of the other two hands within Roche's journal I could not guess at, but one was crowded and curled tight; the other was sloping and flat with its author's rapidity. The former wrote a smattering of entries, but the latter seemed primarily confined to marginalia.

The first few months were prosaic enough. Roche arrived in Arcadia and was met with a number of fae, many of whom had extravagant titles such as the Astrologer of Blood and the Duchess of Time. He described the various misfortunes involved in hiring a housekeeper, though none of the applicants sounded like the elusive Salamander. Once given the castle, Roche was not permitted to leave it, but fae regularly called on the castle to talk with him. They engaged him in a series of debates about theology that frustrated the missionary for he was convinced that he won each and every one with rhetoric and logic, yet turned no souls to Christ.

May 23 1840. – It is the strength of all infidels, to begin their arguments with the question, Why? And the question shows at once that they know nothing, with all their learning and wisdom; for if they knew anything, they would not begin to state their argument with the question, Why? For Why? indicates that we do not know the reason for a thing – that we are ignorant; and ignorance proves nothing – it proves only that you are ignorant.

The sloping hand in the margins mocked him. I suspected that it was added much later, without the Reverend's knowledge, but I could not say for

certain.

Among his visitors I did recognise a description of Mr Benjamin in a group of self-described miners who were despondent at a lack of work. Though none of them converted, Roche had hired a few of them to keep tidy the grounds. One by one, they left until only Mr Benjamin remained.

As his stay in the Faelands lengthened, Roche's hand grew more erratic. His tone took on a paranoid air, worried that someone was reading his journal. He mentioned repeatedly the mistakes in his choice of staff. Given the two other hands present, perhaps his fears were not completely unfounded. He began abbreviating his words and little glyphs crept in, the beginnings of a code. There was even an entry written in mirror writing.

My breath unfurled before me, like the winding mists of the moors around the castle. Feeling the cold, I pulled my shawl tighter around my shoulders.

Details grew sparse, but I gathered he had festering in his mind some sort of plan. His efforts in proselytising were likely stymied for the same reasons my brother's were, namely his lack of access to "inner" Arcadia. He feared his plan, afraid of the costs, the sacrifices. He wrote as a man haunted, counting the worth of his own soul.

Perhaps no man could seem brave in such moments.

I turned the page and it crumbled before my eyes, fluttering to a delicate confetti. The paper was thin, beyond fragile. I squinted at it and could see that somehow the ink had corroded through the paper, leaving behind a very literal word-shaped lacuna.

The journal resumed some months later and Roche was in England again. He had married after much dithering over a bride and was resolved to return to Arcadia. He wrote little of his new wife, not even her Christian name. He referred to her only as Miss Clay and then Mrs Roche. I could only

guess at the missing pages, but I assumed they described his fears culminating in his return and a change of heart after marriage. Perhaps his bride inspired in him some latent fervour or simply that she was reason enough for him to desire to depart English soil.

From the margins, the sloping hand called him names. It decried his fears as foolish and claimed his words were false. Beyond a periodic scrawl of *Liar! Coward! False-hearted!*, it offered no counterpoint nor argument.

Over and over Roche stated his desire to return to Arcadia, to pledge his one brief life to the great work in a land of darkness. It seemed a mantra, as though he was trying to convince himself, to purge himself of doubt. He was willing himself to believe. Unlike the earlier passages, it was not a fear that characterised his writing, but a profound delusion.

Folded among these pages were letters. It rounded out the portrait of an uncertain man, grasping for reassurance.

Another lacuna.

The tightly curled hand began to write, though I could not make sense of its entries. All opaque allusions to poison and fears and pain. It wrote of grandiose ideas, confronting fears and uncomfortable truths. It invoked the trials of Job and the sufferings of Jonah.

And then, nothing. The final pages had been torn out.

I did not remember falling asleep, but when I opened my eyes I had a shawl draped over my shoulders and a heap of books were on my table. As I handled them each in turn I recognised the handwriting in the margins and I knew them to be my brother's. They also reeked of wine.

There were accounts of Cook's voyage to Arcadia, a general missionary's handbook, and a series of published debates on the theological and biological nature of fae. For all that I had thought I was well read on the subject, most of it was unfamiliar.

A slender quotation-riddled volume argued that fae were a lost tribe of Israel and that Arcadia was the desert to which they were cursed. A rebuttal to Paracelsus argued that Arcadia was the land of wandering east of Eden to which Cain was banished and his children by his sister were the fae, forever cursed for having been born of that sinful union. A screed denounced the mission to Arcadia as futile as the fae, as fallen angels, were soulless.

A tract by Dr Immanuel Campbell to the Edinburgh Society for the Study of the Fae discussed the work of Mr Hobbs of Malmsbury and purported that his work should be read as description of the fae rather than of natural instincts of Man.

The beasts of infinite viciousness who cruelly exploit and savage one another from a bottomless well of pure spite are not Men in a state of nature before the civilising influence of Society. The image of the Leviathan is not a representation of an earthly sovereign as Mr Hobbs supposedly propounds. The gigantic beast formed of a multitude is no metaphor. The potency and loyalty it commands do not concern the abstract qualities of a mundane political society. The dire warnings of chaos, bloodshed and doom are carefully contextualised into a Treatise on the proper organisation of a Body Politic.

I read of Cesare, a medieval priest who was accused of being a changeling. It was unclear if Cesare was a true person, but it sparked a great fear that wandering priests were secretly soulless changelings who were tricking villagers into a parody of the rite that bound them to Arcadia.

In the wake of such paranoia sprang the theology that it was the rite and receiver that mattered, not the priest who performed it. The rite itself was sacred. Thus false priests gave true communion.

After all, when Jesus first enacted the rite Himself to Judas at the Last Supper did the Adversary enter the fallen disciple. He harboured treason in his heart and that, argued the forefathers of the Church, had corrupted the rite.

It all seemed hopelessly superstitious, but it did make me wonder of fae and their souls. It had been an unspoken assumption that they did have souls in a way that mirrored humanity's but each theory about their true nature flirted with that question.

I wondered if such thoughts plagued Roche too. He wrote so often of the missionaries who set sail and then spent years petitioning the Pope to sanctify the journey they had already undertaken. He envied that certainty; he craved it.

CHAPTER 13

The Queen in the Castle

*Behold the chariot of the Fairy Queen!
Celestial coursers paw the unyielding air;
Their filmy pennons at her word they furl,
And stop obedient to the reins of light:
These the Queen of Spells drew in,
She spread a charm around the spot,
And leaning graceful from the ethereal car,
Long did she gaze, and silently,
Upon the slumbering maid.*

*Oh! not the visioned poet in his dreams,
When silvery clouds float through the wildered brain,
When every sight of lovely, wild, and grand,
Astonishes, enraptures, elevates,
When fancy, at a glance, combines
The wondrous and the beautiful,—
So bright, so fair, so wild a shape
Hath ever yet beheld,
As that which reined the coursers of the air,
And poured the magic of her gaze
Upon the maiden's sleep.*

Percy Shelley, QUEEN MAB

The sky seemed on fire when I woke up again.

I scrambled out of bed and pulled open the curtains to look outside, heart pounding. I saw that the lands that surrounded the castle were ablaze.

The mists had been burnt away. Each slivered pane of glass shattered the image of the endless fire into a broken sea. Livid, vivid red, like the stained glass images of Risen Christ and His blood-red robes.

Clutching a shawl to myself, I ran down the stairs. I remembered that the great hall overlooked the outside. My feet were still bare as I found myself pulling open the long curtains, coughing at the dust.

It was still too far to make out, so I padded through the winding corridors and up through the trap door that led to the attic and the roof beyond.

I saw it then, the floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire, seething stench and smoke. It burned on and on, yet I recalled nothing on those plains for the fire to devour. There had been nothing but mists and constructs of mists there when I had wandered through. What could be feeding those towering columns of fire?

The flames painted the sky in the lurid colours of dawn and dusk, colours that were alien to this particular canvas. The pendulum sun never gave it such shades.

It was then that Laon happened upon me, brow furrowed at the horror of the flames. Diogenes followed him, a slinking, black shadow of a hound at his feet.

“What’s happening out there?” I asked, breaking the horrid silence between us. I barely glanced at him. The argument from the night before lay between us, but for now, we were able to ignore its carcass. “Laon?”

“The moors are being cleared,” he said. “By the Salamander. I spoke to her this morning. It’s for the Pale Queen’s visit.”

“Moors?”

“The emptiness out there.” There was a coldness to his voice. Though my eyes were on the fire, his were on me. I could feel his gaze on my skin

and I ached to touch him again. “You didn’t think it was that way naturally, did you?”

“I don’t know what is natural here,” I said.

“The fae like to keep the land out there.... Uncultivated. Formless.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s overgrown, so they’re burning everything back, returning it to mist.”

“But what is out there when- when it’s not mist?”

“Dreams. Thoughts. Things our minds give shape to,” he said with a soft, long-fingered gesture. “The mists are very malleable and it is for that reason they desire to keep it that way. I suppose it’s a resource of sorts, harvested periodically. They probably sell it at the Goblin Market or something. But our minds are here so it means it all grows faster; they need to clear it more often.”

“So human minds do things to the mists?”

“It shapes them, somehow.”

“I- I think I understand,” I said. The wind was twisting the black smoke away from Gethsemane, but I could still taste an acrid, sulphurous edge in the air. “Like the real moors? They choose for it to be empty.”

He nodded and turned to look out of the window with me. The once mist-covered moors seemed a great furnace, yet from those flames there was no light, only a dense, swallowing darkness. My eyes were aching from the sight of it all and I imagined a figure of flame dancing through it, trailing liquid sparks with every step.

The blaze on my face reminded me of the first time I saw the moors of Yorkshire be set aflame. Terrified, I had clung to Laon. Tessie’s words echoed in my mind: *It is how things are done. The moors need to stay the moors. It’s just like cutting your fingernails.*

Until then, I had always believed the moors this wild, inhuman landscape, where endless sky wrapped its heathen arms around an untamed, primal earth. And yet there it was before me, nature being brought to heel. Like any wide-eyed fool, I had mistaken a broken animal of the circus for a wild one.

“The books...” I began. I was glad to have them but after our argument, I didn’t want to thank him. “Were they you?”

“I owe you them,” he said. “I promised.”

The ground shook and broke open. The leaping flames were crushed under the weight of churned soil. An enormous creature thrust its nose from the ground, crested like a wave and then dove back into the grey-black dirt. As it wheeled, I saw its huge snout, its wide fins and finally, its great tail curving from the ground.

“What is that?” I breathed. “That isn’t—”

“It’s a whale.”

“A whale?”

“Yes, it’s called a sea whale.”

“Which I have obviously seen before...” I glanced at him and our eyes met. He gave a half smile that brushed against the welkin blue of his eyes. I was reminded of all the times in our childhood when we would pretend at knowledge, nodding along to what the other said, no matter how ludicrous, desperate not to be the more ignorant sibling. “I’ve read about them and they’re called that not because... they live in the sea but because they... *eat* it?”

“Close.”

“What do you mean, close?”

“They’re full of saltwater and sand,” he said. “I’m told fish live inside them.”

“Oh,” I muttered, the sound of surprise escaping my lips.

Another of the vast creatures leapt from the ground. It was closer, so I could make out its skin, seemingly this thick carpet of bracken and wicker. The scattering dirt and dripping flame clung to it, blackening but not burning the sea whale. Unthinking blue eyes stared out from under a vortex of crackling twigs. Its tail fanned out, and I saw the woven pattern of its substance against the bright flames.

A spurt of water spewed from the back of one of these creatures. The droplets melted into the flames, and though the wind was blowing the black away from the castle walls, there was salt on the breeze.

“That’s the sea,” I said in wonder. Rich and foul, it was unmistakable. I thought immediately of my days on the deck of *The Quiet* and the endless calls of gulls at port. “I know this is Arcadia, but how?”

He gave a half-hearted shrug. “I assume they heard about conch shells and got carried away.”

“That you can hear the sound of the sea in them?”

“That they have in them, captive, an oceanic fragment.”

I heard it first in my bones. Low and mournful, it reverberated through the ground like a bell. A long, inhuman moan, more like the conch shell murmurs or the howling of wind through the caves we used to play in than any sound from a creature’s throat.

Startled, I took a step towards Laon. He caught my hand and we laced our fingers together, like we used to when we were little.

“It’s just the whales,” he said. “The fire calls them. They rise to the surface like earthworms in rain.”

“How do they not catch fire?”

“The sea inside them, I assume.”

“Is it possible to... to see inside one? What sorts of fish would live

inside a whale?”

“I- I don’t know.”

“We should find out.”

“I don’t think it’s in Father’s encyclopaedia,” he said, a wry smile twisting his lips. “But then, not many things are.”

“It might be,” I retorted sharply, retreading the paths of our old argument. Wonderfully familiar, I leaned towards him, relishing that elusive closeness between us. “But we’re missing half the volumes. For all we know, they might be in the fabled *W*.”

“Don’t be silly, it would be under *S* for sea whale and we have that one.”

“It can’t be. It doesn’t tend to do individual entries for animals.”

“But it’s not an animal, it’s a place. Like a desert or—”

The eerie sound of the whales struck up again, interrupting him. Louder than the first cry, it seemed a reply. It echoed through my bones and teeth.

Abruptly, Laon let go of my hand and turned from me.

“None of those books are here now. We are very far from any of that,” he said, walking away. “Breakfast is getting cold.”

The chimes and bells rippled through Gethsemane, seeming to my ears louder than usual.

Laon, Miss Davenport and I stood in the courtyard waiting for the Queen. Diogenes, Laon’s dog, had been reduced to a quietly whimpering heap. The Salamander was absent as ever and Mr Benjamin had excused himself to tend to the raising of the portcullis and the opening of the gate.

Everything was as ready as we could make it. I had been pulling dust sheets from the furnishings and folding them with Laon. I piled vases high with flowers as Miss Davenport chattered, hanging up bright curtains. We even dragged out some of the rugs and beat them in the courtyard. I even

heard Mr Benjamin muttering to the garden's plants, telling them of the Queen's arrival. The castle shone with scoured resplendence, the banisters and the steps polished to the brightness of glass, all presumably the work of the elusive Salamander.

Mab was to arrive when the clocks struck noon.

At the fading of the last chime, men of sand-brown skin stepped out from the shadows. Before I could bring myself to be surprised, they announced her arrival in gravelly voices. They bowed low to me as they spoke, dripping grit upon the ground with every motion. It trickled off their skin like the sand in an hourglass, steadily and smoothly.

Laon assured the men of sand that we were ready for her arrival, and they nodded mutely.

Then suddenly, the Queen's retinue were pouring through the far gates. They moved in absolute silence, neither their clothes nor their shoes making a single sound.

I was reminded again of the limits of my own petty imagination as the Pale Queen's retinue bore little resemblance to the processions I had conjured up in the mists but for the fact that both were utterly silent. But this was no polite parade of lords and ladies with streaming banners and rigidly prancing horses.

Black-cloaked beings shambled in and squatted by the path. Little protruded from the darkness of their cloaks except for long, gnarled fingers made for strangling. Ladies in feather gowns flounced about in fluidly boneless movements, each carrying a pair of long, bloody shears and a threaded needle. They wore necklaces of still tongues that lolled black blood onto their white gowns. Others seemed almost human, but the shadows that stretched out from their feet were not those of their own human-seeming shape but those of restless, leaping horses.

A carriage of horn and ivory rolled into the courtyard. It was pulled by creatures of leftover parts. Each was a chimera in the classical sense, obviously composed of different animals: a tiger's striped leg ended in the hooves of an ox; an elephant's trunk reached out from the face of a lion; a knot of snakes reared out from the haunches of a goat.

A man of sand reached into her carriage and drew her out by her shining white hand. She unfurled from it like the sticky fronds of the sundew, like an octopus blossoming from a dark corner of a rock pool, like the slices on a peeled orange.

It was *her*.

The woman from my dream.

She had the same snow-pale skin and round, amber eyes. I could still see my brother's long, beautiful fingers on that skin, stroking her cheek and following the curve of her chin. Each shadow that brushed against her reminded me of the dappling from the willow trees.

Her brown hair had the same white-gold streak in it that stretched from the peak in the middle of her forehead. No red ribbon had been braided into it but I still saw it tangling in Laon's hand as he combed it through her hair.

My mouth was as dry as if I had swallowed sand and my blood was running cold.

She looked straight at me, and again I saw myself reflected in her yellow eyes. Small and pathetic I still was, though this time I did not see myself as a moth to her butterfly. Her flat, wide nose and heart-shaped face put me in mind of an owl.

I was grateful when she looked away.

"My!" She spoke and her voice was at once a whisper and long, piercing avian screech. It defied human throats and human ears. "How this place hasn't changed."

Laon bowed, and I mirrored his actions instinctively before fumbling towards a brisk bob of a curtsy.

“This cannot be your entire household, Laon?” said Mab. Winglike sleeves draped from the shoulder of her dress and dragged along the floor. Her skirts flowed from her waist in feathery layers of white and brown. “Though I see your hound is faithful to the last.”

“Benjamin Goodfellow was tending to your arrival. He is in the gatehouse. The Salamander is—”

“Here.” A drop of fire streaked across the courtyard, trailing black soot and smoke. It flared like a splash of whisky over a fire and coalesced into a humanoid shape that ended in a single, serpentine tail. She seemed at first a black wick within the flames, but as the fire dimmed her skin turned ash-white. “I am here.”

“It has been a long time, my child,” said the Pale Queen.

The Salamander bowed deep, her wet-seeming scales glistening. “It has been as long as it takes to tell a tale, neither long nor short.”

“Time is as I count it,” said the Pale Queen. “And changeling?”

“Yes, majesty.” Miss Davenport did not curtsy, merely granting her a deep nod.

“I trust you have been carrying out your duties.”

“Yes, majesty.”

“Excellent,” she said. Mab then cast another surveying look about the courtyard. “But where is the last human?”

“There is no one else,” said Laon, his brows furrowing. “It’s just my sister and myself.”

“Oh, the sister?” Mab turned her attention to me.

Nervously, I curtsied again. “I am Catherine Helstone, your majesty.”

“So I see,” she said, appraising me up and down.

I tried to meet her eyes, to stand straighter, to hold high my chin in defiance. But I could not. I withered under her gaze and that knot of pain in my chest grew heavier and tighter.

She smiled, and I could see again those lips brushing against my brother's ears. She pursed her lips in a beaklike expression and said, "As expected."

"Expected?" said my brother, a restrained suspicion crossing his tone.

"You speak of her, and as such, I must have expectations."

"Rarely."

"You should know by now I hear more than just your spoken words."

Her courtiers were speaking silently among themselves. Even though I could not hear their voices, I could see their lips, crooked like the beaks of owls, snapping and spitting. They turned their heads in sharp movements, looking and leering.

"I have been waiting to meet you, Catherine Helstone. I am glad you are lost so that we might find you," said the Pale Queen. Her eyes glinted with predatory menace. "But I wonder why."

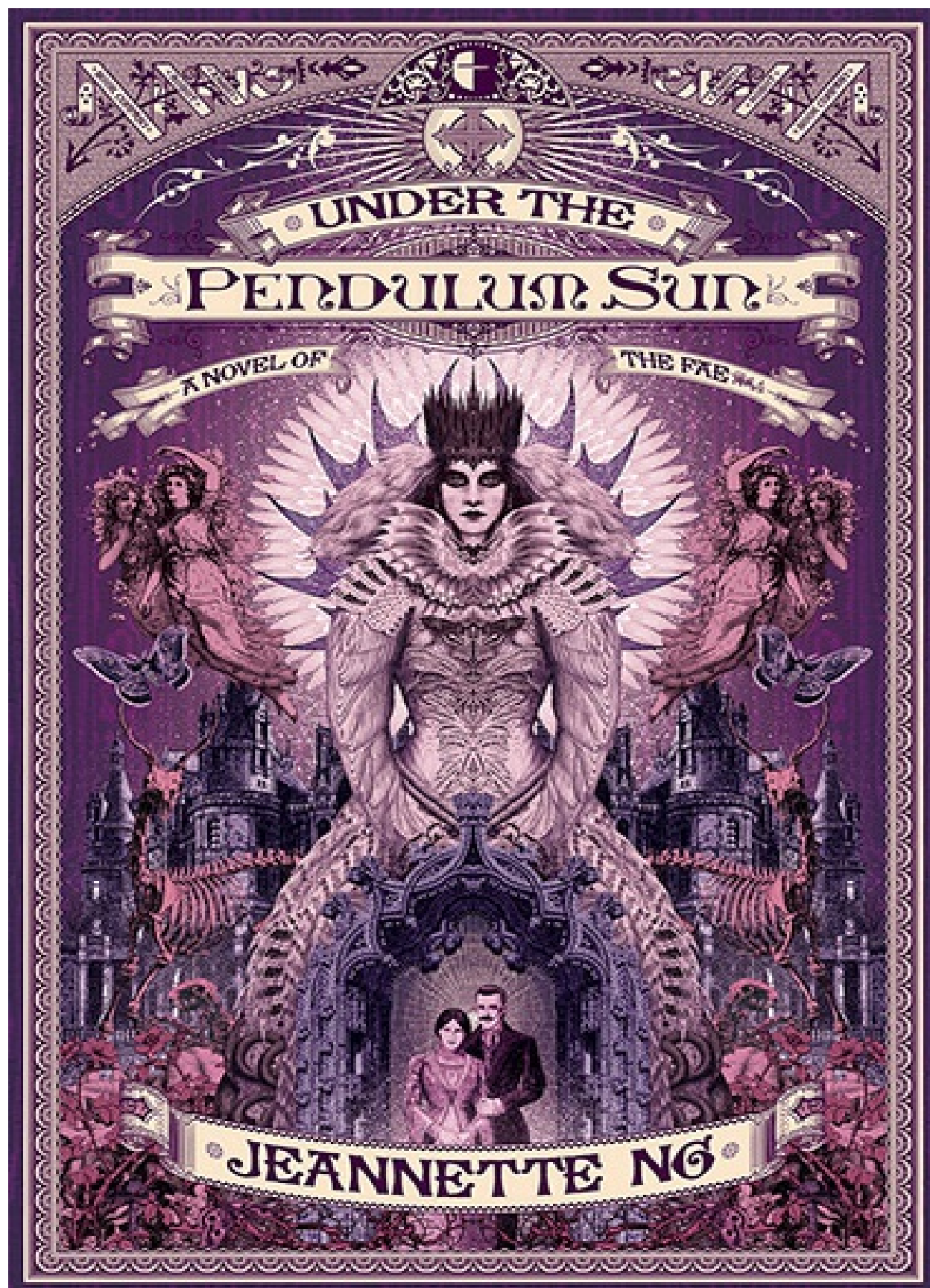
"I come to take care of my brother."

"It is rather plain that he is very dear to you." Her smile seemed sharper. "I trust you will prove a Balm of Gilead to your brother's wounds."

UNDER THE PENDULUM SUN

Jeannette Ng

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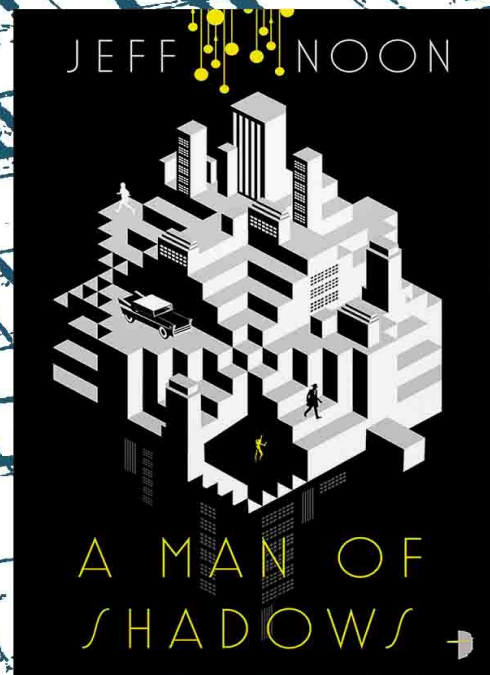
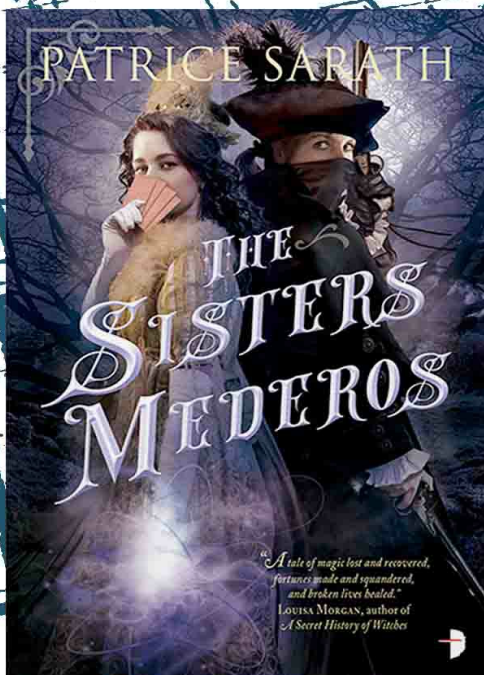
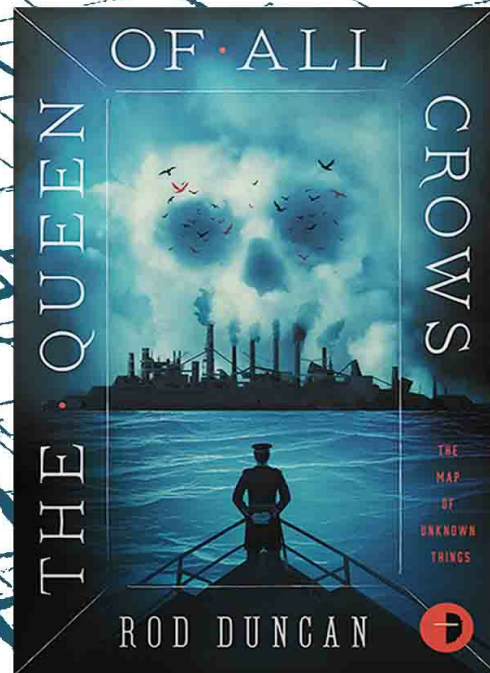
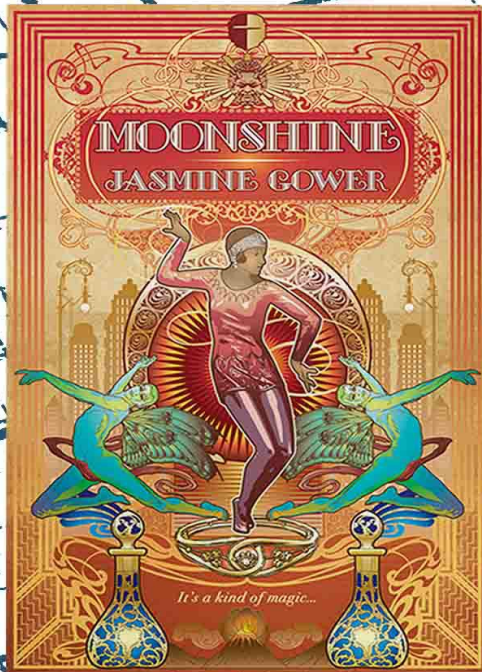
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Jeannette Ng is originally from Hong Kong but now lives in Durham, UK. Her MA in Medieval and Renaissance Studies fed into an interest in medieval and missionary theology, which in turn spawned her love for writing gothic fantasy with a theological twist. She runs live roleplay games and is active within the costuming community, running a popular blog.

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