

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

"It's beautiful," I said.

"It's positively brilliant!" Garrick's mustache convulsed.

I took the proffered blade and balanced it on my palms. A citrusy fragrance emanated from the warm metal.

"Do you see the man in the blade?" he asked.

"Man?" I felt a subtle pressure against my palms when he touched the *keris*.

"There's the head," he said, indicating a dark metallic pond toward the handle, "and there's the chest, arms, and legs. It's a bloke, and it makes your blade more powerful. Magical. And, I suspect, worth quite a bit of money."

I squinted, but these supposed body parts still looked like random blobs to me. "What about the waves, the *luks*? How many are there?"

"Well, let's see." He traced the length. "Hmm." He started over, his brows bunched together. "Eleven."

"What does that—"

"Or thirteen." He nodded and scowled simultaneously.

"It matters how many, to know what it was made for, right?" Not that I believed in that mumbo-jumbo-gobbledygook stew, but it was interesting. On a hypothetical level.

"Yes, that's part of the equation. I'm sorry to say I can't be sure about it, though it must be an odd number of *luks*."

"Why must it? What if it isn't?"

"It always is, otherwise it would be unlucky."

"Unlucky *luks*. That doesn't sound good." I smiled even as his frown deepened; Garrick took his lore seriously.

"Some *kerises* are luckier than others," he said, "depending on the *pamor* and the shape. Even the blade's length is important. You know," he said in his big-eyed, silky-voiced way, "you can tell a blade's intention by putting it under your pillow. If you have a nightmare, the *keris* is bad."

"I'll keep that in mind," I said, though I had no intention of snuggling up to objects that might lead to my accidental impalement or doing anything—regardless of my skepticism—to court more nightmares. "Let's consider a hypothetical. Say my *keris* had eleven *luks*. What would that mean?"

"I'm afraid I don't know," he said, replacing caps on bottles. "There are about one hundred and fifty shapes and as many as two

dozen patterns possible on a blade. Think of the combinations. It's a real science!"

"So, if I wanted to know more about it . . . ?" I prompted.

"Hmm." He stilled, thoughtful. "I suppose there are books dedicated to the *keris*. Or you might look for an *empu*—though I believe they are exceedingly rare nowadays."

"Oh," I said, as if I'd cracked open a fortune cookie and found it empty. What an unfulfilling *avventura* to be left with so many unanswered questions. Disappointment must've shown on my face.

"Don't be disheartened, my dear. Every *keris* is imbued with magic. Did you know meteoric metals were used to create the *pamor*? *Empus* believed meteors were metal of the gods, coming straight from heaven." I opened my mouth to reply, but he went right on. "It doesn't matter where the magic comes from, I suppose—only that it exists. There are old stories of *kerises* flying from their sheaths to defend their owners, and there are still towns in Malaysia and Java that fear some notorious blades possessed by evil spirits. And there *is* some evidence . . ."

I could just imagine Noel standing beyond his grandfather, the roll of his eyes, the sardonic grin. *Humor him*, he'd mouth.

"It's too bad Noel isn't here to look at your *keris*," Garrick said, like he'd read my thoughts. "He's quite a talent at estimating age and value. Ah, well. He'll return one day."

My toes curled. "Soon, I'm sure, for Christmas."

"I've been kindly asked not to count on it." He said it with a hint of melancholy, but then he looked straight at me and the ends of his mustache tipped toward his nose. "You know how he detests flying. He'll never need to ride another aeroplane again if he stays in Europe. He'll just use the rail!"

I was too numb to smile back at him. Maybe that's why I asked the question so artlessly.

"Did he find her?"

"Who's that, dear?"

"Um . . ." Hadn't Noel told Garrick about the search for his mother, Garrick's daughter? Was it supposed to be some sort of surprise? Garrick seemed oblivious to my confusion, though. His mustache had drooped again. "Ah, well. I get the feeling he's preparing me for something. I fear he may never come home."

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Never? My fingers curled as tightly as my toes. Too bad I'd forgotten about what lay in my hands. The pain shocked me; I couldn't swallow my gasp. I heard Garrick's voice as if in a tunnel—"What have you done?"—as blood oozed from my sliced palm.

He brought me a damp washcloth and something to kill germs.

"Be careful with the *keris*," he said as I cleaned the cut. "It's a true weapon." He sheathed the blade, but even with my flesh aching, I wanted it back in my hand.

"The metal's so warm," I said. "Why is that? I never found the answer online."

"Warm?" He slid me a knowing look. "A *keris* can do that, you know. Bewitch a person. It has its own will."

Humor him.

"Have a care, dear Maeve. The little man in the blade may have plans for you."

He left the *keris* on the counter when bells announced the arrival of his first customer. I don't know what made me do it. I picked up the blade and spoke directly to the bleary man in the metal. "Don't try to change me."

An unwonted shiver slithered down my spine when the words filled my head: *There will be no going back.*

SLEEP WOULDN'T THROW its prickly comfort over me that night, thanks in part to Fauré's "Sicilienne." Like it had been in the past, music was just *there*, ever present. With one exception. Those old songs had been mine. Not the piano. Not even the sax. Just pure tone. And every major, minor, augmented, diminished sound had given me joy. This music just pissed me off. Mostly because the hammered keys in my forehead resisted the usual shutdown. I had a strong urge to reach below my mattress and dive right in. *If you can't beat 'em . . .* But I knew better than to disturb the boogeyman under my bed.

Instead, I unsheathed the *keris* and touched it, felt energy swim through my fingertips again. I peered through the aperture, hoping for some future glimpse—

—and noticed a trickle of blood on the metal. I knew where that had come from; I looked at my hand.

• *Therese Walsh* •

My efforts at scrubbing out the stain met with failure. The line merely grew long and thin. The sweet scent of citrus disappeared. I called Garrick the following day. He could fix it, he said, and invited me to bring it by when I could.

I should've been reassured, and maybe I would've been if things hadn't seemed so strange lately. If the music stopped, would let me stop it. If Noel would come home. If I could get a decent night's sleep. If the stain didn't look so much like a strand of red hair.

Out of Time

Castine, Maine

NOVEMBER 1995

Moira and Maeve are eleven

“What do you see?”

Moira lay on a golden sea of elm leaves beside her sister. She thought all of the clouds looked like birds today, but she knew Maeve would think that was Pure Boring, so she lied a little. “I see a dragon and a great big ship. I think the dragon’s at war with the people on the ship.”

“What’s the dragon’s name?”

“Alfred.”

“That’s a horrible name!” Maeve grabbed a handful of leaves and tossed it at Moira with a laugh.

“Hey, who’s telling this story?”

Maeve stifled another giggle. “Okay. What’s Alfred doing trying to be fierce, anyway?”

“Maybe he wants to try something new. Would that be bad?”

“Nope. That’s why we’re going to explore the world.”

“What if I don’t want to explore the world?” Moira asked, testing, but Maeve’s face seemed untroubled, her eyes back on the sky.

“Of course you want to,” she said.

“I do most of the time.” But Moira liked the crunch of elm leaves, too. She liked her roses. She liked Castine. She’d miss their family. “What should we name the baby if it’s a boy?”

“Alfred.”

They stopped laughing when Ian Bronya and his friend Michael burst through the clearing.

“Look, it’s the witches,” Ian said with a mocking smile. “Catching frogs for your brew?”

“Maybe we are,” said Moira.

Maeve stood when the boys stopped before them. “Hold still and we’ll cut out your tongues,” she said.

“Try it.” Ian reached into his pocket and pulled out a closed jack-knife. He tossed it toward Maeve, but she didn’t reach for it, so it fell in the grass. He sneered at her. “Which one are you anyway?”

Maeve tilted her head to the side and her face softened, just a little. “Guess.”

Moira felt her sister’s wish to fool Ian and decided to go along with it. They’d tried this game a few times before. Two years ago, Moira had pretended to be her sister for an entire day at school, but when Miss Haskell had teased her about being in control of herself for once, Moira had felt oddly dispirited. She didn’t mind fooling Ian, though. She leaned back and twirled hair around her finger, knowing it would look like her sister’s today—unbound and littered with sticks and leaves. As an added touch, she sharpened her eyes on Ian and didn’t blink when he looked hard at her. It made her a little nervous, that looking.

Finally, Ian turned to Maeve and said, “You’re Moira, but you’re not usually such a bitch.”

Michael laughed.

“You have a nasty mouth, Ian Bronya,” Moira said, then looked at her sister. Maeve didn’t speak, but her eyes had taken on their usual edge, and Moira felt her anger along with a surprising amount of hurt.

Ian scrunched up his face and looked at them both again. “Which witch is which?” He took a step nearer, and Maeve met it until their noses all but collided.

“I once saw a horse’s behind that looked a lot like you,” she said. “Smelled better, though.”

He laughed. “I was wrong. This one’s Maeve.”

“Who cares about them?” Michael said. “C’mon. Let’s move.”

“Where’re you two going?” Maeve asked.

“Come find out.” Ian picked up his jackknife, then started with Michael out of the clearing. He turned and walked backward—*toe to heel*—a few steps, long enough to taunt, “Unless you don’t have the balls.”

“Let them go. They’re jerks!” Moira said. But Maeve shook her head and followed without her.

That afternoon, as Moira trimmed back her roses for winter, she

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felt Maeve's curiosity and fascination. She became curious herself when she heard the screen door slam and saw her sister leap off the back porch in a cloud of dirt.

"Follow me," Maeve said in a hushed voice.

Moira brushed off her hands, then followed her sister across the yard and into their small shed. Maeve closed the door behind them.

"Give me your finger," Maeve said, Daddy's best jackknife slipping out of her long sleeve to land in her palm.

Moira hid her hands behind her back. "Why?"

"Ian and Michael went to Hearse House and made each other blood brothers. Everyone in their club's done it as a sign of bravery and allegiance. They said we wouldn't have the guts—well, balls—to do it, but I told him we would, so let's."

"But we're already blood *sisters*." Moira stared disbelievingly at her twin, who opened the knife with little regard for its sharpened edge. "What if you cut your fingers off? What if you cut mine off and I can't play piano anymore?"

Maeve sighed. "Do you have a scab?" she asked, opening the jackknife.

"I have scabs from working with the roses, but Maeve . . ."

Moira watched, fascinated, as Maeve pushed the tip of the knife into the fleshy part of her finger, until a small crimson bead appeared.

Maeve looked up at her. "It's okay, Moira. Just scratch a scab off. That'll be good enough."

Moira ran a finger over a rough bump near her wrist. Maybe it was the story of Fierce Alfred and the dragons or the fact that she hadn't blinked at Ian earlier, but she didn't want to settle for *good enough*. She held out her finger. "Here. Just be careful." She closed her eyes.

It happened quickly: some pressure, a quick sting. When she looked again, her finger bore a deep red bead, just like Maeve's. "It looks like a ladybug." Moira giggled, excited and a little troubled at what they'd done.

Maeve let the knife fall where they stood. "Now we'll always be joined, no matter what," she said, and pressed the twin incisions together—lifeblood mating with lifeblood.

"We're sisters, gooseball, of course we'll always be joined!" Moira tried to retrieve her hand, but Maeve held tight.

• *Therese Walsh* •

“Wait, we have to say the words.”

“What? Till death do us part? This is silly!”

“No, it’s not good enough.” Maeve gnawed her lower lip for a moment, then gripped Moira’s hand with fresh enthusiasm. “I know! ‘Even if I die, I’ll be with you for always.’ Say it.” She ground their fingers closer.

A little shiver ran through Moira as she said the words: “Even if I die, I’ll be with you for always.”