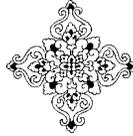


CHAPTER ONE
PRODIGY



lost my twin to a harsh November nine years ago. Ever since, I've felt the span of that month like no other, as if each of the calendar's thirty perfect little squares split in two on the page. I wished they'd just disappear. Bring on winter. I had bags of rock salt, a shovel, and a strong back. I wasn't afraid of ice and snow. November always lingered, though, crackling under the foot of my memory like dead leaves.

It was no wonder then that I gave in to impulse one November evening, left papers piled high on my desk and went to where I'd lost myself in the past with a friend. I thought I might evade memory for a while at the auction house, but I slammed into it anyhow. It was just November's way.

Only this time, November surprised me.

I HAD TO have it.

Just over a foot long, the wavy dagger looked ancient and as though it'd been carved from lava rock. The grooved base was a study in asymmetry, with one end swooping off in a jagged point and the other circling into itself like a tiny, self-protective tail or the

crest of a wave. Gemstones filled a ring that bound metal to a cocked wood handle. Intricate engravings covered the silver sheath. If not for a small hole in the blade's center, it would've been flawless.

I leaned in to touch it but was jarred out of my study by a poke to the thigh. The pocker, a little girl, almost capsized me, and not from the poking, either. I don't believe in ghosts, but if I did I might think I was looking at my sister from years past. My sister, a child. Eyes like the sea. Long, red hair like hers—and mine, before I snuffed out my pyrotechnics with several boxes of Platinum Snow and found a pair of scissors.

My vision grayed a little as I stared at her. She might've been seven or eight—a few years younger than Moira and me when we'd filched a sword like the one I intended to have and lost it in the bay. Well, I'd lost it, pretending to be Alvilda, Pirate Queen.

The girl poked me again.

"Can I help you, little one?" I asked. "Are you lost?"

She didn't answer, just pointed toward the far back of the viewing table. There wasn't much there: a bust of JFK, a pearlized candy jar, and an indigo bottle that might've been Depression-era glass. Noel would've been able to say for sure.

"Do you want that?" I took a guess and pointed at the candy jar. Maybe there was a secret stash of chocolate in there; who knew? But she shook her head. I looked again and saw a small black box slathered with pink roses, the buds as sweet as frosting. Of course. "The box?" She nodded.

I cradled it before her, and she reached out a hand pudgy with youth. "Careful," I said. I looked for parental figures but saw no one exhibiting missing-child panic—or with the right hair color. The girl didn't take the box, just left it in my hands and opened the lid.

Music swam up at me. "The Entertainer." The girl giggled.

"Do you—" My voice turned to rust. "Do you like music?"

"I love dancing to the music." Her voice was sweet, as shy as her smile. She was so much like Moira, but whole, able to run and laugh. I missed my sister's laugh—maybe most of all.

"Do you play any instru—"

"Jillian! There you are!" A woman with dark hair strode toward us, her face a combination of annoyance and relief.

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

“I was looking at the music, Mommy,” the girl said. “See how pretty?”

The mother bent before her daughter. “You scared me. Next time you want to look at something, we’ll go together.”

The girl nodded, serious, just as the lights flickered.

“Let’s find a seat.” The woman pulled her daughter behind her as the girl lifted her hand to me. Good-bye. They disappeared in the crowd.

I shook off my melancholy thoughts and turned back to the blade. My fingers itched to touch it, but just as I reached, an auction attendant pulled it off the table, sheathed it, and placed it in a cardboard box. “Viewing time’s over,” she said.

“But—”

“Fallen in love, have you?”

I’d never seen another blade like the one I’d lost to the sea, and the desire for it tugged at me as if a line were rooted in my mouth. “I have to have it.”

The woman added items to her container: the blue bottle, the candy jar, the music box. “You’d better get out your checkbook, then. Old George thinks that sword will go for hundreds.”

Fine, then. I had a checkbook.

After a few minutes of dodging elbows and purses, I registered as the temporary owner of one beat-up paddle (number 51). Snippets of conversation danced around me as I wedged my way between wide-shouldered men and women.

“John would love that old clock for Christmas.”

“Let’s get through Thanksgiving first.”

“Thanksgiving’s just a day. Christmas is an event. Besides, it’s never too soon to buy for Christmas. Don’t you think he’d love that clock?”

I veered away from them, closer to the stage. That stage and the old floor, pockmarked from where rows of shabby velvet seats used to reside, were all that remained of the theater that had once been a revered landmark in Betheny, New York. At least, that’s what Noel had told me. I’d only been a resident since college.

I’d just reached the front when George Lansing, the owner of Lansing’s Block, appeared center stage. There was a blur of activity—

the sale of someone's stamp collection, a worn set of stools, a mahogany china closet that would break backs. I saw the blue bottle poking out of its container at George's feet and knew the blade lay there as well. The bottle sold, and then George grasped the music box.

"Going once!" he said, after a token amount of haggling with the crowd. A middle-aged woman with a sour expression had raised her marker and placed a bid of \$5.

Where was the girl? Wouldn't her mother buy the box for \$6? I looked around but didn't see her.

"Going twice!"

My arm lifted almost of its own volition. "Ten dollars."

George didn't even look at me, probably just wrote the bidder off as a sucker. There were no further offers.

I didn't need a music box. I didn't want a music box. In fact, I'd hate that music box. But the child who looked so much like my sister should have it. I couldn't seek her out, though, because just then George held the sheathed dagger over his head, and the raucous room grew hushed. I leaned closer; everyone seemed to.

"Now here's something you don't see every day," Lansing said, his voice as gritty as his wares. "This here's a *keris*. It's a little roughed up with a hole through its middle, but not bad shape when you consider it was made somewhere in Indonesia probably two centuries ago."

Somewhere in Indonesia. *Probably* two centuries ago. I smiled. Lansing had never been big on facts—something Noel had taken profitable advantage of in the past.

And then Lansing's pitch rose, and the chant began: "Who'll bid two hundred dollars, two hundred dollars, two hundred dollars?"

It seemed half the room's occupants held their markers high, and the price rose to \$225, \$250, \$275. I gripped my marker with slick palms. Noel had taught me how to bide my time, to don a face as still as the water on a windless bay; the slightest ripple would attract Lansing's attention.

"This blade's worth at least double that last bid, and I won't sell it for anything less than \$350!" He pounded the podium—a technique that probably wasn't in the Christie's handbook, even if it did work. I looked over my shoulder as number 36 grumbled his bid of \$350.

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

How much was I willing to spend in honor of a memory?

“Going once for three hundred and fifty dollars, going twice!”

I raised my marker and hollered, “Four hundred dollars!”

George finally looked at me, and his speck-dark eyes grew wide. “It’s Noel Ryan’s friend, the little albino girl,” he said with a smirk. He eyeballed the room, but Noel wouldn’t be found here tonight. “He send you for this?”

“No,” I said, “he didn’t.”

Little albino girl. Times like this I just wanted to shout out that I, Maeve Leahy, was in fact a professor and connoisseur of more languages than George Lansing could probably name. But I said nothing, just tried to skewer him with my most lethal stare as people turned to look at me and my hueless hair. He smiled as he waved the gilded carrot that was Noel’s impeccable reputation and keen eye before the crowd, and didn’t blink when the false bait drew bites and the bidding resumed.

My Irish kicked in when it was down to me and another persistent soul, someone who pressed on from the back of the room. I had to have the blade, so I would have it. I lifted my marker and tried not to think about the cost.

But the other bidder didn’t relent, either.

“You?” George Lansing said with incredulity the first time number 12’s marker was called out. After, he just glowered at whoever gave my checkbook and me such a run, which was curious in and of itself.

I craned my head to pierce my competitor with dagger eyes, to say, *Back off. This is mine.* But I couldn’t stand tall enough to see a face, just the competing placard and an odd black hat on a short-statured body. I was no fashionista, but the hat looked like a pillbox wrapped in a scarf.

None of it mattered in the end. Once the price teetered up to \$700, not even Lansing could coerce blood from the others’ snapped-shut, firm-tucked, copper-pinching veins. So I won.

The tautness in my chest loosened as I made my way to the pay-and-pickup window. I might’ve forgotten about the music box, but the woman behind the counter quoted me \$710, and handed it over straightaway once I’d written out the check.

“The other—that sword thingy—it’s not here yet,” she said.

I took the music box and returned to the jammed room. I spied the young mother right away, standing in line for hot dogs.

“Excuse me.” I held the box out to her. “Your daughter admired this earlier, and I’d love for her to have it.”

“Oh, no.” The woman’s painted brows knit tight. “We couldn’t possibly. Thank you, but no,” she repeated over my objections. “We can’t accept that, can we, Jillian?”

Her daughter appeared by her side—or maybe she’d been there all along and I hadn’t recognized her. Because her hair, it wasn’t red at all; it was dark like her mother’s.

“It’s pretty,” the girl said with a shrug. “You keep it.”

“You must have another daughter,” I said to the mother. “She’s the one who liked the box.”

The woman’s expression turned wary. “No, I only have one.” And then she laughed. “One’s enough.”

“No,” I muttered. “One’s not nearly enough.” I took a last look at the girl before turning away.

I stood beneath the ratty paper-globe light at the pay-and-pickup window until the blade arrived. I couldn’t wait to touch it, but when I did I felt a startling amount of disappointment. There was no internal tremor, no spark. Instead, my chest clogged with emotion. I held that blade and whispered in every language I knew, “*Bienvenue. Bem-vindo. Bienvenido. Salve. Benvenuto. Bine ai venit. Welcome.*”

THE FIRST THING I noticed when I stepped into my apartment—besides the deafening silence that meant Kit was once again not at home—was the bright green face of my cell phone staring up at me from the entry table. I’d forgotten it again. And I’d missed a message. My thoughts leaped to Noel. I tossed the music box and the blade on the couch beside my sleeping cat, Sam, and checked for voice mail.

“Mayfly.”

Daddy. My heart stuttered.

“We can’t make it for Thanksgiving after all. Sorry, sweetheart. Well,” he said, “wish you were there. Talk soon.”

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

I stood static for a minute, then called Kit. It surprised me when she picked up.

“Miss your daily dose of harassment?”

At least she knew herself. “Yeah, my life’s bland without your trademark aggravation peppered all over it.”

She laughed. “I was just about to call you. I’ll be home later, so don’t freak if you hear the door open.”

“They’re letting you out for good behavior?” I walked to the window to stare out at the night. “Have they strapped one of those detection boxes to your ankle—you know, the kind they give to stay-at-home convicts?”

“Yep. It’s called a pager.” Kit, a first-year resident physician, worked far more hours than the law allowed, though it suited Betheny’s floundering teaching hospital just fine.

I breathed on the glass, then put my finger against the film of condensation and made a tic-tac-toe grid. “My dad called. My parents won’t be here for Thanksgiving after all.”

“So go to them,” she said without missing a beat. “It’s not such a long drive, and you haven’t been to Castine in years.”

“I’ve been busy.” I put an *X* in the center of my grid, then an *O* at the upper right.

“But it could be—”

“No.” I imagined it for a second: seeing my parents and the old room I’d shared with Moira, walking over Maine’s rock beaches and sailing the Penobscot. But as much as I missed the sea, Castine had become like quicksand for me. “No,” I repeated. “I’ll stay here. That means it’s you and me and the cat.”

“So we’ll make our own Thanksgiving. Turkey, all the trimmings.”

“They’ll let you whip up garlic mashed potatoes in the ER?”

“Funny.” She paused. “We still need to schedule your MRI.”

I wished she’d let that go, but I guess it was my fault for making a big deal out of it once when the noises came—scattery disjointed sounds, a little like you’d hear trying to tune in to a distant radio station. We’d been eating one of our rare meals together when I’d covered my ears and growled, “Knock it off!”

She stopped twirling pasta to stare at me. “What the hell?”

“Nothing. Just my personal noise factory.”

“You’re hearing things?” Her cat eyes narrowed on me, and then she’d provided an encyclopedic listing of every freakish thing that could make a person imagine sounds. “I don’t think it’s schizophrenia.”

“Thanks for that.”

“But what about a brain tumor or—” A gasp. “It could be post-traumatic stress disorder! You’re scatterbrained, you sleep for crap, you have zero sex drive—”

“Enough! I haven’t been in a war, Kit.”

“You have, kind of. It could be plain traumatic stress. That’s like PTSD, just not as severe.”

I understood the excitement of untangling a mystery and weaving a theory, but Kit was off the mark; I knew more about the noises than I’d let on. Those little immature sounds that wanted to bust free in my cranium were the remnants of a previous life, the parts that used to make up my sum. I’d moved on, and I wished the remnants would, too.

“Well, if I did have one of those diseases,” I’d said, “could you prescribe something to stop the noises? Does such a drug exist?” Maybe not my best idea, but what good was it to have your best friend become a doctor if she couldn’t whip out her prescription pad once in a while to simplify your life?

She’d just shaken her head and said, “You need to see a neurologist,” which I wasn’t about to do.

I tried harder after that to repress the sounds, though the effort stole my energy, and pretty soon Kit was saying I was too pale and my body temperature too low and that maybe I had chronic fatigue syndrome or a sleep disorder or needed to be tested for lupus and an array of other things. I thought she was the one with the clear diagnosis: medical residentitis.

“Hey, you there?” Kit said in real time. Me, I’d drawn my third tic-tac-toe board, and I hadn’t won a single game.

“Only if you promise not to start in with me.”

“Hallucinations can be serious, Maeve.”

“Random noises don’t count as hallucinations, just corroded brain joints.” God, if I told her about the little girl with the not-red hair she’d have me admitted to the psych ward for sure.

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

“Well, I think you should see someone,” she said.

“I know you do.”

“I love you, you know?”

“I know. I’ll leave a light on for you.”

I shut my cell, then found the Windex. I squirted solution onto the window markings I’d made and cleared them all away—just in case playing tic-tac-toe with yourself could be used as evidence of insanity. And if there were any noises other than that of squeaky-clean glass, I pretended not to hear them.

THAT NIGHT, I had to force myself to read and grade half of the essays left on my desk. If not for Jim Shay’s effort—“*C’è un’orrenda creatura nel mio brood*” (There’s a gruesome creature in my soup)—the process would’ve been entirely unoccupying, which was odd, because I loved to teach, loved my students, loved to keep track of their progress and grade even the most Nytol-ish of papers. And I loved language—all those words with their own spin and dip, requiring their own special curl of the tongue: *ebullición*, *bellissimo*, *kyrielle*, *obcecação*, *labialização*, *babucha*, *l’Absolu*, *d’aria*.

I gave up on my work, sat on the couch, and unsheathed the dagger. My finger traveled the metal. God, it took me back.

Once upon a time, my parents liked to tell bedtime stories. My mother favored the parable of the Five Chinese Brothers, who were as identical as Moira and me, but whose different talents saved them from every imaginable catastrophe. One boy could hold an entire sea in his mouth, while each of the others could either go without air or survive fire unscathed, or had an iron neck or legs that could grow into stiltlike appendages.

But my father liked to tell Alvilda’s tale. She’d escaped a prince who wanted to marry her to become a pirate and ruler of the seas instead. Funny, that very prince bested her in battle later and made her fall in love and settle down. She became the queen of Denmark. A story far more satisfying than your run-of-the-mill Cinderella romance.

At the fearsome and fearless age of ten, I decided to become the next Alvilda. All I needed was a boat, a sword, and the sea. I had

plenty of boats at my command, since my father made them for a living, and there was sea all over the place in Castine. That left the sword. So one day, I put on my best Alvilda clothes—a red coat, black boots, and an eye patch fashioned out of black construction paper and a shoelace—and sketched a plan for pinching the wavy blade from the artifacts cabinet. There were all sorts of things in that cabinet that my grandfather, an anthropologist, had brought to us from all over the world. But the wavy dagger was my favorite and would make the perfect accessory for my adventure.

Moira was nervous—

“We’ll get in trouble!”

“Shush, Moira, ’cause if Daddy comes now I’ll tell him it was your idea.”

—but she went along in the end. I found the key, opened the cabinet, grabbed the blade, and bolted with my reluctant shadow. We didn’t stop until we reached the docks, and I barely waited for Moira to hop in before I started the motorboat.

We went pretty far out for us, and then I stood on a seat near the prow and acted my part as the mighty Alvilda.

“Bring it on, matey!” I crowed, waving the blade around until Moira squealed—

“Shark, shark!”

There weren’t many words that could snuff out my bravado, but *shark* did it when we were in a tiny boat and far from Daddy’s help. The blade and its sheath were lost in the water. I don’t know if I dropped them in or if they slid from a precarious perch as I hovered over my twin. Regardless, by the time I realized the fin belonged to a whale—who lifted his harmless black head just once—they were gone.

My gut had ached more than my thwacked backside, knowing that beautiful blade lay at the bottom of the ocean, gone forever, thanks to me. But now I had one again.

Shadows drifted over the ceiling like sorcerer’s fingers, until my eyelids grew heavy and I gave in.

With sleep, though, came the nightmare.

Water seeped beneath the closed door as it always did. *Open the door!* the voice commanded as a growing stream drenched my shoes, socks, and skin. The pounding began. *Open the door!*

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

Then, something different: Tinny music, “The Entertainer,” began to play on the other side of the wood.

I broke from the dream. My skin prickled with the icy-wash feeling I loathed, and my heartbeat thundered in my throat. The music box lay open on the floor, combing through its circular song with its many pins and pegs. I must’ve kicked it off the couch in my sleep. I shut the lid and “The Entertainer” stopped. But sound remained, intensified, then mutated.

My mind filled with its own music: Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody no. 12, each hammered string tinkling through my memory like water torture. All in my head, yes, but far from a hallucination.

I tapped into an old skill and pressed back the sound until song became broken notes, and notes became a weak scatter of between-station noise. Why was it that whenever it snuck in, it was piano, like a knife scraping at the last of my nerves?

An owl hooted outside my window, and I thought with a mix of exhaustion and irony that perhaps I’d just been answered, but in a language I would never understand.

Out of Time

Castine, Maine

JULY 1995

Moira and Maeve are ten

Sounds eddied around her—of voices and her twin sister’s music—but still Moira kept her feet planted on the hot stone walk between her home and the house that had been her grandparents’ all her life. Her gaze caught on the yellow moving truck in the drive. Everything had changed. First Grandpa had died, then Grandma three months later. Daddy sold their house. Little by little, her grandparents’ furniture and clothes were taken away, until a single solid item remained: the piano.

She had to have it.

“Huh, she’s good,” said the bushy-haired woman who was their new neighbor.

Moira’s sister, Maeve, had just finished a busy phrase on her saxophone. Moira could picture the lost butterfly of the song, its journey through a wild storm before finding right-sided stability and sunlight again.

“She is good,” Mama responded, full of pride. “I taught her the basics, but within a few months she was beyond my ability to teach. She’s studying with Ben Freeman now.”

“Never heard of him.”

“He’s a pro just north of here,” Mama said. “But Maeve’s real talent is writing her own songs.”

“That one there was putting puzzles together upside down when she was three,” the other woman said, motioning toward an elm tree. A girl with two short blonde pigtails sat there, her hands busy trying to clothe a fat gray cat in a doll’s dress. Moira hadn’t even noticed her. “Smarter than me already. Mark my words, she’ll get a scholarship and go to college and make something of herself. Ian, my older one, he’s clever enough, but he’ll stay and be a lobsterman like his daddy. Ain’t no shame in that. Come here, Kit,” she called.

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

The girl uncrumpled herself and walked toward them. She stood as tall as Moira and Maeve, maybe even a little taller, and her eyes were like Daddy's—blue with a dash of algae, as Mama sometimes joked. The cat, half-clothed, followed the girl.

“We saw a show about a boy like your daughter, Mrs. Leahy—”

“Call me Abby.”

“—but he played the violin. What did they call him, Kit?”

“A prodigy,” the girl said.

“Prodigy, that’s right. Four years old, he was, if you can believe. How a boy like that can play a violin when he can’t probably even tie his shoes is beyond me.” The neighbor woman snorted, then eyed Moira. “That one play, too?”

Mama smiled. “Moira plays the piano.” She shouted for Maeve just as she started a new piece. “Come and be sociable.”

Maeve’s expression fell flat as she laid her sax in the grass. “But I’m making a song about seals, Mama. You can hear the Bagaduce in it.”

“And the waves,” added Moira.

“And the birds—”

“You can smell the fish in it!”

“Like the time we—”

“That’s rude,” Mama said as Maeve stepped up beside them. “You know no one but you two can understand when you do that.” She stared until Moira stopped smiling. “This is Mrs. Bronya and her daughter, Kit. You girls are all in the same grade.”

“You play real good,” Mrs. Bronya told Maeve. She turned to Moira. “You make your own songs, too?”

“I’ll teach her how,” Maeve said.

“She’ll teach me,” Moira said. They both nodded.

The woman looked between them. “How do you know who’s who?”

Mama laughed. “It’s easy once you know them.”

“I’ve never met twins before,” the girl, Kit, said.

“I’m older by six minutes.” Maeve’s red hair blew into her mouth as a gust of wind drew up. “Mama says I was harder to push out and I’ve been harder ever since, but she’s just teasing, because me and Moira are exactly identical.”

“Ayuh!” Moira gave her ponytail a twist.

“You should’ve seen the twin convention in New York City a few years ago,” Maeve said. “Twins everywhere! Some like us with their own language when they were little—”

“Your own language?” Kit asked.

Moira giggled. “It’s called cryptophasia.”

“I always called it *Trying Twin*,” said Mama with a smile.

“Lots of twins have it,” said Maeve. “But it’s not the same for anyone but those two people before they forget it. I wish we remembered ours, because then me and Moira could say secret things at school and everybody would think we’re aliens!”

“That’s weird,” Kit said.

“Nah, what’s weird was that at the convention there was a pair of twins hooked together by their butts,” said Maeve. “Mama said it was freakish, so we left after that.”

“Maeve, that’s not what I said.” Mama’s cheeks flushed.

“There were twins with polka-dot dresses and a bunch with jeans and yellow T-shirts and even some dressed in matching suits, but Mama made Moira wear a skirt and I wore shorts, and we don’t even have two of the same shirt”—Maeve pulled at her stained Smurfs shirt while Moira touched the sunflower on hers—“but Daddy said people would know we were twins anyway.”

Mama sighed, but Kit laughed.

“One twin’s brother died,” Maeve said solemnly, and Kit leaned closer. “His wife said he felt it when it happened.”

Moira remembered the man—how he’d rubbed his hand against his cheek and said he needed to sit, his eyes stumbling around. Moira thought he was looking for his brother, that he couldn’t help it, even though his own twin boys swung from his arms.

“I’ve heard of that sort of thing, but I thought it was bunk,” said Mrs. Bronya. “You girls read each other’s minds?”

Just that morning, Mama had warned them about this stuff: *I want you to have friends, but it’ll be hard unless you stop playing games. People don’t understand you—not even me sometimes. There are five known senses, girls. Remember that.*

“We have the best card tricks,” Maeve said. “I can be in a different room and still know what Moira’s holding.”

“Is that so?” Mrs. Bronya’s eyes were as wide as Maeve’s.

The Last Will of Moira Leahy

Moira tried not to look at Mama.

“And I swear I felt it on my big toe the time Moira stepped on a bee, even though I was with Daddy on—”

“Look, the piano!” said Mama in a loud voice.

They all turned to see Daddy walk out of the house backward, one end of the instrument in his grasp. His face, ruddy by nature, bloomed like a beet. He faltered a little on the walk, repositioned a squat cart of wood and wheels, and said, “Aright, one more push!”

The other end appeared with a man in tow—tall, plump, and bald but for some fringe around his ears. A blond-haired boy followed in their wake.

“Help your dad, Ian,” said Mrs. Bronya. The boy scrunched a cheek up at her. He was tall like his father, but thin, and Moira thought he must be going into sixth grade at least. He stopped beside his sister, and they all watched as the men rolled the instrument across the walk, to the other door. And then—after another lift and shove, and a few more grunts—the piano disappeared inside the house.

“Is it your piano?” asked Mrs. Bronya, and Moira realized she’d let loose a gusty sigh.

“It was my grandma’s.” Moira looked at the yellow roses growing up the side of the old house and remembered soft, paper-thin-skin hands. “She wanted us to have it after she—”

“Did she die in our house?” the boy asked.

“Ian’s afraid of ghosts,” Kit said with a smile.

“Shut it, guano breath,” he said. “What do you know?”

“More than you.” Kit lifted the cat and stroked its head; its back legs were still stuck in the dress.

Mama used her patient voice. “She died in the hospital.”

Moira remembered those last days, the liquid sound of every breath her grandmother took. Dying seemed a painful thing.

Ian kicked a rock in his sister’s general direction before looking at his mother. “When are we going to eat? I’m starved.”

“Let me make sandwiches for you.” Mama ignored Mrs. Bronya’s objections. “No, no, I insist.” She shot a quick warning glance at Maeve and Moira, then strode into the house.

“That one’s a fancy musician,” Mrs. Bronya told Ian, jerking her head at Maeve. “At least I think it’s that one.”

“Oh yeah?” he said. “A strung-up lobster pot would sound better than that old piano.”

“It just needs tuning,” Maeve said. “Then Moira will be playing perfect piano and I’ll be playing on my sax, and we can have duets like we had in Grandma’s house. Grandma said we’d be famous someday and travel the world and play our music, so that’s what we’ll do.” She nodded and patted Moira’s shoulder.

Ian huffed. Moira thought he sounded like a horse. “Haven’t you heard?” he said. “Nobody born in Maine ever leaves Maine.”

“It’s easier to leave Castine than come in new,” Maeve said. “You’re from away now, and you always will be.”

“We’re from flipping Bucksport. Throw a stone!”

“Watch that lip, boy,” said Mrs. Bronya.

“Our grandparents came from Cape Breton when my daddy was just a baby and everyone here still says we’re from away,” said Maeve. “Course it didn’t help that they spoke French or that we do.”

“Sure you speak French,” Ian said, and Kit giggled.

“Do too, best of all, and some Italian and Spanish, because my poppy’s an anthropologist and he knows about different cultures. He’s even eaten monkey brains before!”

“What a little liar you are.”

“Am not.”

“Prove it then, unless you don’t have the balls,” Ian said.

“Third strike,” said his mother. “I’m telling your—”

“*Tu peux me passer les dés s’il te plaît?*” said Maeve. The Bronyas stared. Kit stopped laughing. “*C’est mon tour.*”

“What did you say?” Ian asked, his voiced edged with surprise and annoyance.

“I said, ‘I do have the balls,’ in French.” Maeve squared her shoulders. “And then I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ in Spanish and ‘Cat got your tongue?’ in Italian.”

Kit’s face scrunched up, and Moira tried not to laugh. Maeve had asked Ian—entirely in French—if he would pass the dice because it was her turn to play. They’d played dice a lot with Grandma Leahy.

“Well, huh,” said Mrs. Bronya. “A whiz at music and language both? What weird kids you are.”

Ian snickered. “More like witches with your freaky hair and fat eyes.”

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Moira frowned as Mrs. Bronya thwacked Ian's arm. Daddy said their eyes looked big and beautiful: Maeve's like the sky before the rain, Moira's like the sea. They were the same shade, really, but Daddy swore he could tell them apart by their eyes.

"Ayuh, maybe we are witches," Maeve said, her mouth pressed in a line. "Better watch out or we'll cast a spell."

That's when Mama came out with a tray of sandwiches. Even Maeve knew to stop talking after that.

"I DON'T LIKE that boy," Moira said later that night. She and Maeve sat on the living-room floor together, hunched over *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

"But that Kit with the cat seemed okay," said Maeve.

"There." Moira pointed to an entry. "Is that it?"

prod|i·gy 1 [Rare] an extraordinary happening, thought to presage good or evil fortune 2 a person, thing, or act so extraordinary as to inspire wonder; specif., a child of highly unusual talent or genius

"Crap on a cracker," Maeve said. "Now we'll have to look up 'presage.'"

"No, it's number two: 'a child of highly unusual talent.'" Moira pursed her lips.

"Well, if I'm a prodigy, you're a prodigy," Maeve said.

Moira rose, then lay a hand on her grandmother's piano and ran a finger over the sharp edge of a chipped ivory key. "How do you make your music? Can you really teach me?"

Maeve looked through the opening to the kitchen, then moved beside her sister and sat on the piano bench. Moira sat as well. "I've told you, you have to be open to the sounds," Maeve said in a low voice. "The notes are in the air."

Moira closed her eyes tight and tried to hear the notes.

"It's like when I know things sometimes," Maeve said.

"But I can't do that."

"You could if you tried hard enough." Maeve sighed. "It's like when we come back to each other after we block—that feeling of

shutting everything up and going inside yourself. It's like that, but . . . more like going out."

Moira hated blocking, being separated from the pulse of her sister's energy and emotions. She thought again of the lost twin at the conference, his despair at being only one, and felt grateful she and Maeve never blocked for long—and only when one of them was sick or hurt.

Moira opened her eyes. "Okay, I'll practice."

"You can do it. I know you can." She paused. "Want to go build a ship out of that big box in the basement?"

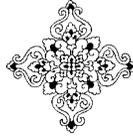
"No, you go ahead."

Moira stayed at the keyboard for hours, her right hand splayed over the keys, her left clasped to the wooden seat. She tried to open herself to notes in the air but heard only the Bronya's noisy truck, their dog barking, and a motorboat. And she couldn't help but think about Grandma's roses. Maybe Moira would snip some, the way Grandma sometimes had when she'd seen pretty flowers in the neighborhood.

A little love is all you need, she'd said, to make the flowers your own.

Maybe it'd be that way with music, too. Moira just had to love it more, want it more. The notes were there, waiting for her, if only she tried hard enough to reach them.

CHAPTER TWO
UNDERSENSE



missed my alarm the next morning, tired from battling back Liszt all night, and had to scramble or risk major lateness: shower, shove wet hair behind ears, forget the makeup, throw on something clean, stuff all papers into battered briefcase for later speed grading, tear in two the business card of one Dr. Stephen Flett, neurologist, that Kit had left on the kitchen counter at some point in the wee hours, feed Sam, and drive without coffee—which was never a good idea, but you did what you had to do to make it to Spanish Dialects on time.

I got my first real break just before noon and headed to my office, weighing the likelihood of being able to sleep there and the reaction my coworkers and students might have if they caught me. It'd make the *Campus Times* for sure. *Dr. Leahy was discovered last week, snoring and drooling over a stack of ungraded essays. Clearly, she needs naptime built into her day, as might be expected for someone her age.* No, I'd never live it down. Unless I locked my door . . .

On said door, though, an interoffice envelope hung from a nail like a dictum. Papers and a half-eaten granola bar spilled from my briefcase when I dropped it to wiggle free the nail, open the envelope. Huh. A pocket-sized book on weaponry lay in my hand. I

turned to a page bookmarked with a red scrap of silk, scanned, and found something interesting.

The *keris* is another Javanese weapon made only after a great deal of preparation. First, the *empu* decides what he will craft. A *keris* may be made to protect against evil, preserve dignity or secure wealth, for example. The *empu* fasts, prays and makes ceremonial offerings sometimes days before crafting begins. Iron, nickel, steel and meteoric metals are heated. The *empu* layers and forges them together to form the *pamor* (design) of the *keris*. He then smiths the *dapur* (shape) by straightening the *keris* or creating an odd number of *luks* (curves) as desired. Finally, he chisels the base to form its many intricate details. A completed *keris* is filled with purpose. Some believe that humans easily succumb to its suggestive powers as inhibitions are stripped away.

A *keris*. That's what Lansing had called my new purchase, wasn't it? As a child, I'd never known the name of the wavy blade I loved. I flipped through the rest of the book but saw no other passages related to the *keris*.

I called Heather in the library to inquire about the book, but she said no such title existed within the university system. I checked the inner pages for stamp marks, any evidence that the volume had belonged to another institution or a particular individual. Nothing. The new interoffice envelope, barely creased and with nary a pen mark, was also devoid of clues.

I reached for the phone again, let my fingers dance over memorized digits.

"Time After Time. How may I help you?"

I smiled into the receiver. "I wondered if you have any of that amazing hot chocolate in your kitchen cupboard. You know, the stuff from Venezuela."

"My dear girl!" sang the lilting voice of Garrick Wareham, the owner of the antiques shop Time After Time—not to mention Noel's grandfather and my favorite Brit. "I've missed you!"

"I've missed you, too," I said, then added just as honestly, "And Noel. I've even been scoping Lansing's Block without him. How's that for crazy?"

Garrick laughed. "Have you made any buys he'd approve?"

"Good question," I said. Noel, whose business was finding valuable antiques in auction houses and estate sales throughout the

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country for Time After Time, would've taken the trouble to inspect the *keris* before leaping into a bidding war over it. Truth was, with Lansing's weak provenance for the blade and a hole going straight through the metal, Noel might not have approved of my purchase at all. "I bought something, but it was mostly for sentimental reasons," I said.

I told Garrick about the *keris*, and answered his questions about why I'd purchase such a thing—even if it embarrassed me to admit aloud that I'd once wanted to be a pirate queen. He took everything in stride and suggested I bring the blade by the shop for an appraisal. I thought about my packed schedule, my commitments with the university. No trip to Time After Time was ever brief.

"How 'bout I visit over Thanksgiving break?" I asked.

"Splendid! When does that begin?"

"Two days and four-and-a-half hours. Not that I'm counting." The break was a glorified long weekend, but it would be enough. I checked the clock, knew I'd be late for my intermediate Italian class, but had to ask, "Will Noel be home?"

"I'm afraid not," Garrick said just as the sound of the shop's entry bells drifted over the line. "Good God, my grandson must've shipped over half of Europe this week! I'll have to sign for all of this, my dear, but you're welcome to come by whenever you'd like. I have some Chuao cocoa on hand."

A NIGGLING SENSE of disquiet stalked me that night, as I drafted two tests, graded papers, then worked up a plan for helping a student on the edge of pass-fail. *Marilyn*, I wrote at the top of a note. Sighed, crumpled it up, tried again. *Marion*.

Kit might chide me about needing an MRI, but having a book anonymously nailed to your office door had a way of messing with your concentration. I couldn't deny wanting to learn more about the *keris*, and I knew Garrick would gladly pull up a chair with me tonight if I appeared at his door. Thanksgiving break was just two days out, though, and if I didn't focus, I'd never jump through all the university hoops. I could wait to learn about the blade—and my displaced friend.

• *Therese Walsh* •

Noel, my companion and ally since I'd arrived in Betheny eight years ago, had been in Europe for months, not just searching for antiques but for his only living parent: his mother. He hadn't seen her since she'd crushed his little-boy heart by leaving him with her father, Garrick, and disappearing from their lives. The only time he'd really talked about her, he'd said they thought she lived in Europe now and good riddance. But a few months ago, on a sweltering August day, he'd changed his mind, said he had to search.

How will you do it? You don't even know where to look.

I have some ideas, he'd said, evasive.

I didn't understand his sudden need, but I respected it, envied it even. At least some who were lost could be found.

It always made my day to receive one of his postcards, picturing cobbled streets, majestic castles, white-capped mountains or balconies of cut stone. I imagined the rest—the people and language, even the music. Nearly a month had passed since I'd heard from him, and the silence was wearing on me. I had no way of contacting him at all; Noel didn't have a cell phone or an e-mail account, hated computers. In fact, he didn't like anything that verified he lived in the twenty-first century.

Is it me, Maeve? Or is it . . . just?

Just. Just.

Tension sprouted between us before he'd left. I'd pretended not to understand its root and then made a concerted effort not to think of it at all. I needed to do that again. Not think. Not miss him. Just wait. The Fifth Chinese Brother could hold his breath eternally, after all—though I wondered if his ribs ever cracked, if he ever longed to steal just a little air.

I pulled the book from my briefcase and touched the red silk marker, lifted it and breathed a spicy, exotic fragrance, the scent of a foreign land. It lingered with me for days.

I STOOD IN a park filled with decaying greenery. A hundred cranes flew overhead, but still I stared at the stone monument of a woman. Something seemed wrong with her, but I couldn't say what. Then she turned her head to stare at me, water trickling and words rumbling from her ancient mouth.

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Nascer, nascer! she said. Rise. Get up.

I startled awake and rose, stumbled to my cell. The dream-world message continued to punch at me as I made the call.

Nascer, nascer, nascer!

Six rings, seven. I looked at the clock; God, only 5:10.

“Lo?” my father said in his sleep-scarred voice.

“Dad, sorry it’s so early.” I didn’t sound much better than he did. I cleared my throat.

“Maeve? You okay?”

“I just wondered . . . Is everything all right?”

“Ayuh,” he said, “same, you know.” I let loose my breath. “Got the first snow last night. Wind’s up. Your mother—she’s not here or I’d put her on. Left for the day, I think.”

Of course, at 5:10, she’d be off. Resentment pulsed in me, plain and ugly, though I wouldn’t let it leak into my voice. Then I realized. “Dad, it’s Thanksgiving.”

“So it is. Forgot, just about.” An uncomfortable moment passed. “Sorry we couldn’t make it there, Mayfly. Sorry about all of it.”

“I know. Me, too.” The act seemed simple enough—visit me, share the holiday. But nothing was simple with my mother.

“You know,” he said, “if you left now—”

“No, Dad.” I tried to look forward. “At least there’s Christmas, right? You’ll come then.”

Silence. My stomach sank.

“Your mother, she was going to call. She just doesn’t want to travel right now, and—”

“But it’s not right now! It’s a month from now!”

“We hoped you’d come here for Christmas this year. Come home. We’d love to see you.”

“Dad, you haven’t been here since graduation, and Mom’s never been to Betheny at all!” I’d never forget the look on President Stephenson’s face when he’d asked to meet my mother at graduation and I’d told him she couldn’t make it. His expression had transformed from respect into something I detested. *Her twenty-two-year-old daughter finishes a PhD program in record time, graduates with honors, is offered a position with the university, and she doesn’t show up?* He pitied me. And it made me work that much harder—even now, nearly three years later.

• *Therese Walsh* •

I knew it was no use arguing or even pleading with my father. She would never come to me.

“If you don’t want to drive, we can buy you a plane ticket,” he said. “It’ll cut your time in half.”

“It’s not that, Dad.”

“Then drive, daughter. Get in the car and be with us. If not today, then for Christmas. Come home.”

I shook my head, thinking of cranes and outstretched necks and chopped ones and Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner all at once, my mind a cornucopia of disjointed imagery. “I can’t,” I said.

He seemed to be similarly incapable of carrying on. “Well. We’ll miss you, Mayfly. Good talking. I’ll tell your mother”

I knew sleep wouldn’t come again, but I stayed beneath my blankets for an hour anyway. I studied my room: the folded clothes, books stacked on my dresser, organized alphabetically. Neglect showed only in the slender mirror on the back of the door, dust-coated where there weren’t course curricula taped to the glass. I rose and approached it as one might a sleeping giant, then lifted a single sheet and looked beneath. Wary eyes regarded me before I let the paper drop.

In the kitchen, I started coffee and pulled a carton of eggs from my refrigerator, along with some vegetables. I cross-sectioned a zucchini, then began slicing. Half-moon wedges puddled before me, as the noises started again.

“Leave me the hell alone,” I said to my own head. Like a crazy person after all.

I SPENT THE day babying a small turkey and half a dozen side dishes. Finally, Kit called.

“It’s a rarity,” she said. “There’s a pregnant woman here with two uteruses. Surgery’s soon. I have to stay.”

“Are you kidding? Where will you eat? The cafeteria?”

“It’s not so bad, really. You could always . . .”

She let the thought trail off, as if realizing how dismal it was to eat Thanksgiving dinner—by choice—in a hospital.

“I’ll bring a plate for you,” I said.

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“Aww, thanks. But I don’t know how long this will go, and—”

“They’re taking advantage of you. You work too hard.”

“Pot calling kettle! Come in, kettle!”

“Whatever. Eat when you get home, all right?”

I hung up and poured myself a full glass of wine, sat by Sam on the couch. “Just you and me, bud.” I took a gulp and stroked his fur. “Merry Thanksgiving.” He snored faintly. “Sure, but you’ll be wide awake when the turkey’s finished.”

I looked at the paperwork on my desk. I needed to plan the international outreach course I’d test online next summer. That’s what I should do. But my eyes turned back, snagged on the *keris* I’d left abandoned on the table. I could still conjure the scent from that red scrap of silk, even over that of a roasted holiday. I touched the sheath and felt a tickle of heat. Maybe it was warm because of the meteoric metals I’d read about. Was that plausible? There had to be more to the *keris* than what I’d learned in that book.

I thought of Noel, touring European castles and museums, searching for dusty treasures and digging into a more personal kind of ancient history.

It’d been a long time since I’d had any sort of adventure.

Avventura.

How easily that word had rolled off my poppy’s tongue, become the mantra for his life. I knew what he’d do with a mystery, no matter the size. Research. Dig. Figure it out.

Why not shun work tonight? It was a holiday, after all.

I turned on the computer and Googled, “What is a *keris*?” And when the screen lit with knowledge, I leaned in, took another swallow of wine, and gave thanks to technology.

Out of Time

Castine, Maine

OCTOBER 1995

Moira and Maeve are eleven

“No humming at the table, Maeve,” Mama said as they sat down to Moira’s favorite meal of crab salad and corn on the cob and mashed potatoes and salad with ranch dressing.

“It’s a new song about a hungry fox,” Maeve said as she reached for the corn.

Moira grabbed an ear, too. “It’s sad, though.”

“Yeah,” said Maeve. “The fox is trying to get—”

“This had better not be about the baby again.” Mama clutched her small round belly and made her neck tall and taut.

“No, it’s about geese,” Maeve said. “The fox thinks they’re tasty, so he’s trying to get them all.” She bit into her corn. Butter dripped down her chin.

“Geese.” Mama shook her head. “I’m sorry for being so jumpy, Maeve. It’s my hormones.”

Daddy smiled but said nothing. Gorp, not as wise, barked. “Quiet, dog,” he said, but Gorp kept howling and then ran out. Daddy stood, followed the dog. Maeve followed Daddy, the corn still in her hand.

Noise erupted—Gorp barking; the front door opening; Mama’s chair scraping against the wood floor; Maeve whooping; Daddy saying, “John, what a surprise,” as Mama exclaimed, “Dad! Why didn’t you tell us—?”

Moira rounded the corner and landed beside her sister in their grandfather’s open arms, his coat sleeves scented with the unfamiliar.

“Has my daughter been feeding you two magic growing beans again?” Poppy squeezed them, and they giggled and squeezed back.

“You’ve burned yourself.” Mama touched his pink face. “Where did you come from?”

“Oh, just Cairo. I don’t suppose anyone would be interested in

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having some real, ancient Egyptian papyrus?” He shrugged out of his coat, smiling, as Maeve and Moira squealed.

“You’ve made it in time for supper,” Mama said. “I’ll fix you a plate.”

“I’ll get your bags,” Daddy told Poppy.

“Mama’s having a baby. Just one this time,” Moira said, when she and Maeve were alone with their grandfather.

“Yes, I’ve heard!” Poppy ruffled her hair with his big hands. “Are you excited?”

“Wicked excited!”

“And do you want a brother or a sister, Moira?”

“A sister.”

“And you, Maeve? What would you like?”

“I don’t know,” Maeve said. “I think something’s wrong with the baby.”

Poppy’s smile drooped. “Wrong? Abby didn’t say—”

“Shh!” Moira poked her sister with her elbow, and Maeve’s corn dropped to the ground. Gorp was out the door with it within seconds.

“Thanks a lot, Moira. That was good corn.”

“Sorry, but you know Mom doesn’t want you talking about your funny feelings anymore.”

Poppy bent close to them and whispered, “Lucky for us those funny feelings don’t always pan out. Last year, you thought something might be wrong with me!”

Maeve smiled. “I’m glad I was wrong about that.”

THAT NIGHT, POPPY told stories of lost cities and found pyramids. He showed them photographs of rediscovered passageways and dark-skinned people and old paintings. Maeve asked a relentless stream of questions: “What did you eat? Did the natives dance and make sacrifices? Were there poisonous spiders? Snakes?” Poppy answered between frequent outbursts of laughter.

After dinner, while everyone recovered from big pieces of blueberry pie, Maeve played her saxophone. Moira closed her eyes and saw Egypt, felt it: the dance of a cobra in a minor-key melody; the

whip of sand in a brief ascension; the persistent hot sun in a wavering high note; the tension of a dig and maybe a fall in a quick-drop scale.

Poppy applauded when she finished. "You never sounded like that, Abby." He winked at his daughter.

"No, all my squeaking probably sounded more like . . ."

"Gooses?" Maeve set down the instrument.

"Yes, Maeve," Mama said with a smile. "Geese."

Poppy leaned back in his chair. "I've missed the Atlantic," he said.

"I hear you girls can handle the sails yourselves now."

They nodded in unison, said, "Yes, Poppy."

"Shall we go sailing tomorrow, bright and early?"

"Ayuh!" Maeve said without even asking Daddy. "We'll take you to a new spot on the island that has the best jasper ever!"

Moira stayed in Maeve's room that night, as she always did when Poppy came to visit. They cleared the floor of books and clothes and tapes, and made room for Moira's sleeping bag.

"You sure you don't want to stay up here with me?" Maeve peered over the side of her creaky bed to look at her twin.

"No, your bed's broke."

"Just broken in, like a baseball glove."

"Because you jump on it too much. I'll sleep here."

"Okay, but you're missing a good bed."

Moira read *Jane Eyre* by moonlight until her eyes hurt, then fell into a fitful sleep as dream pythons squeezed her middle. She woke to her sister's moan.

"You're sick," Moira whispered. "You shouldn't have had two pieces of pie."

Maeve groaned again, clasped her stomach.

"Should I get Mama?"

"No, if she finds out, she won't let me have pie tomorrow. You go back to sleep. I'll block."

"Don't block. It's not that bad." Worse than pain's shadowpart would be feeling cut off from her sister. The effort of blocking would make Maeve extra tired, too.

Moira curled beside her twin, and slept until she felt a tap on her shoulder. Mama, rimmed in faint yellow, stood over them with a question in her eyes. Moira looked at Maeve, whose cheeks were two red splotches in a pale face. She no longer felt an undercurrent

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of pain but knew from the tight, hollow feeling in her chest that Maeve had blocked after all. It felt, almost, like hunger. “Maeve’s sick,” she explained.

Mama touched Maeve’s forehead, frowned. “Go on down and have some eggs,” she said. “Daddy has to work on Dan Brooks’s windjammer today, but you and Pops go have fun on the boat.” She left, taking wide steps to avoid shuffled piles of room rubble and muttering something about the thermometer.

“Feel better,” Moira whispered, and kissed her sister on the head.

THE SUN HADN’T yet cleared the mist when Moira and Poppy set sail twenty minutes later. Moira’s anxiety over Maeve lingered as well, though it unfurled some when the first gust of crisp, salted wind filled their sails. Poppy managed the mainsail and tiller, while Moira kept her hand on the small jib sheet and monitored the wind vane Daddy had put on top of the mast. *Always know where the wind is coming from*, he’d said. *It’s the first lesson for sailors and the most important one.* Moira watched the wind vane.

“What did the Atlantic Ocean say to the Indian Ocean?” Poppy asked once they’d been sailing awhile.

“What?”

“Can you be more Pacific?”

Moira giggled.

“Do you know what the Indian Ocean said in response?”

“No.”

“Nothing, he just waved.”

She had another fit of laughter and he chuckled along with her, as they adjusted their sails at a change in the wind.

“So tell me how school has been. Do you like your teacher?”

“She’s very nice.” Moira chatted about Mrs. Keeler and her classmates for a while, then adjusted the jib again and stopped to listen to the irregular cadence of rippling sails.

The wind had picked up as they’d sailed farther into the heart of the bay and closer to the mouth of the open sea. Waves had grown larger and the fog thicker, like a blanket over the whole of the sky, a clot over the sun. Moira shivered. She could see no landmarks. Hear no other sailors.

“Poppy, should we should go back? Maybe a storm’s coming.”

Poppy didn’t answer. His face looked funny, like it was coated in chalk. Moira watched, horrified, as he slumped against the side of the boat, then fell, headfirst, into the sea. The boat lurched on a splash.

“Poppy!” she screamed, as his body bobbed to the surface, his face framed in the sun-faded life preserver she’d teased him into wearing. His eyes were closed. He didn’t speak, didn’t move except with the waves. Moira’s mind felt suspended, too, as she drifted away from him.

She had to turn, or Poppy would be lost to fog and sea.

Her hands had just begun to follow her brain’s orders when a strong gust hit. The boom moved, the boat leaned, her hair flew into her eyes. She grabbed the jib sheet, uncleated it. It luffed, blaring in the wind, but the boat stabilized.

“Poppy! Wake up!” His shape grew smaller behind her as panic beat hard and painful in her chest.

She lunged for the tiller. This had never been her job, but she’d seen it done, knew the steps: *Haul in the jib, cleat it tight, push the tiller, haul in on the mainsheet.* The boat began to turn and tip slightly. She muttered steps—“turn into the current, adjust the mainsheet”—and tried to keep her eyes on the wind vane and Poppy both.

He lay far to the left of her. She couldn’t get to him in a straight line; she’d pull closer in one direction and move farther away in another as minutes lapsed. She battled frustration as she worked. *Imagine the line between you, pull as close as you can this way, uncleat the jib.* It seemed to take forever, and when she thought she was close, she braced herself to come about. *Push the tiller away*—she ducked under the boom—*trim the main sheet, move the jib, cleat it.* The boat turned for the last time.

Poppy floated in front of her now, and the boat moved forward, closer . . . closer. A wave covered her gloved fingers as she leaned, reached beyond the boat—

“Poppy!” She grabbed his life jacket, but it caught halfway down his arms, the straps unfastened. She made fists in his shirt and hair instead, and pulled his body against the boat. With a glance back at the wind vane, she maneuvered them enough to point the boat into the wind. The sails stalled. The jib flapped deafeningly as it lost air. The liberated lines jumped and pinged against the mast, and the boat stilled.

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Moira hugged Poppy's body and sobbed. His chest moved—he breathed—but his skin felt like ice and his lips were blue. She knew she had to get him out of the water, but his heavy body, covered in layers of soaked clothes, lifted only a little when she tucked her arms under his and pulled. The boat leaned when she tried again, straining as hard as she could, but he barely moved with her efforts. She stopped, panting, and the boat settled back into the sea.

"Help! Can anyone hear me?" she shouted. "Is anyone there?" Only the wind shrieked in response, and the boat pitched dangerously with the hard gust. Moira reached a hand toward the sail but wasn't fast enough. The vessel tipped.

Her lungs seemed to deflate as she hit the frigid water. She gasped in shallow breaths, coughed, kicked. Somehow her hands found what they needed: her grandfather, the boat. Her fingers slid on the slimy underside of the craft as she tried to right it. Failed. She grabbed some floating line, managed to wrap it around Poppy and her own wrist to make a clumsy knot.

"Help! Please, someone, help us!" Her voice jangled like bones in their sockets as the sea slapped and sucked against the inside of the boat. She'd never felt more alone.

Time slurred until she heard a noise that was not the sea. *Help*. She could not holler or even raise her arm to wave. She tried to pinpoint the source and couldn't. She no longer felt the cold; her body no longer shivered. She tried to open her eyes, but they felt heavy with the sting of salt as she drifted in the dark space behind her eyelids.

SHE WOKE IN an unfamiliar bed, covered in blankets.

"Can you hear me, sweetie?"

Was that Mama? Moira fell back asleep.

She woke briefly to the sound of her parents' voices: *incapacitated, therapy, recovery*. The words were indecipherable to her. Again, she slept.

At some point she became aware of a thin tube along her arm. Her eyelids felt like anchors as she pulled them partway up. Darkness filled the room.

"Poppy?"

The word came from her raw throat as a rasp. Glass pressed

against her lips. She sipped water, then sunk back into the dark, still feeling the greedy surge of the sea in every breath.

Then it was day once more. Moira noticed white walls, a green curtain over a wide window, a machine with red lights. Maeve sat beside her, the pale skin beneath her eyes lined in shadow. Moira didn't need to ask the question.

"I felt it somehow," Maeve said, "even with the block. It was terrible, cold, the worst feeling ever. Mama said it was the sickness, but I knew it wasn't, so I ran and found Daddy getting ready to leave, and he believed me and we found you."

Moira learned more later—about Maeve pointing the way as unerringly as a wind vane through chowder-thick fog until they were found, floating in the sea like fishing buoys.

"Poppy had a heart attack in his brain. He's going to live with us now," Maeve said. "I think this is what I felt last year about him. What if I'm right about the baby, too, and—"

"Stop it!" Mama stood in the doorway, looking furious and wild, like a stranger. She rushed at Maeve and, for the first time, slapped her across the face. The sting of her assault spread through Moira's flesh as well.

Daddy seemed to come from nowhere, and pressed his hand over Mama's mouth. He pulled her away, his lips pale and flat. "I'm sorry, sweetheart," he muttered, and Moira didn't know to whom he spoke, since he looked at all of them in turn.

Mama never mentioned the incident after that. She all but lived at the hospital until Poppy's release three weeks later, then made a place for her father in their home and spent most of her time caring for his needs.

"You saved my life," Moira said one night, lying beside her twin. She didn't mind about the droopy bed now.

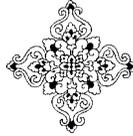
"No," Maeve insisted, "you saved your own. You're like a goose on the water."

"Goose brain."

"Goose butt."

They slept together after that like goslings—huddled for warmth and hoping the foxes stayed away.

CHAPTER THREE
CRIMSON STAIN



The day after Thanksgiving, I finally made my way to Betheny's biggest and best antiques shop, Time After Time. Like most retailers across the country, it would be a huge sale day for Garrick, so I arrived before the shop officially opened for business. Excitement hit as I pulled into the empty lot. I'd missed this sight. Three stories tall, perfectly white, with a peaked tower and twin chimneys, the old Victorian looked like something out of a Norman Rockwell Christmas village.

I strode across the stone walk with the *keris* in hand, and was greeted with the rich scents of cinnamon and pine when I opened the heavy wooden door. As always, my eyes couldn't pick a focus in this place that seemed like Oz to me, like Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. Every nook and cranny beckoned with some new treasure—*come, look, touch, buy*. There were Japanese woodblock prints, stained-glass lamps, ornately carved pieces of furniture, African masks and Indian headdresses my poppy would've loved. A huge blue spruce stood in the center of the room, bedecked with multicolored glass ornaments, miniature lamps, real tin tinsel, and a crystal star.

Scads of fascinating old books lay everywhere, including one I'd been tempted to buy after a particularly bad run of nightmares: *Old*

• *Therese Walsh* •

Gypsy Madge's Fortune Teller and the Witches Key to Lucky Dreams. Inside were instructions for making talismans against love, enemies, war, and trouble in general. TO BE WORN AROUND THE NECK, it read. Turned out I wasn't that desperate.

Artwork decorated every wall, including one area near the front that was dedicated to Noel's paintings. His specialty: irony. True love between a fly and a cow's tail. A pregnant old man. A squirrel chasing a dog up a tree.

Come on, Maeve, pose for me. Just once.

Don't be stupid, I'm no model, are you blind?

Who's being stupid? And who's looking at you? Let me.

Sorry, too shy, I'd lied with a saucy grin. Truth was, I'd never be able to sit for that long with Noel staring at me, even if he did have a pencil or brush in his hand.

A proper English accent sated my hungry ears—"My dear girl, it's wonderful to see you!"—and there before me stood Garrick Wareham, dressed for tea in a green shirt, striped wool vest, and gray trousers. He looked like a Hobbit: short in stature (we are actually the same height—5'3"), with a mop of curly white hair and a pair of blue eyes that sparked with intellect and steadfast good humor. A Hobbit, except for that snowy white mustache of his, tipped up at the ends.

I hugged him. He smelled of lemon drops.

He led me down a familiar hall off the main room—the one that also led to Noel's studio. *How's Noel? Where is he? When will he be back? Did he find his mother? Has he asked about me?*

These questions stalled on my tongue as we turned into the weapons room—a formidable place lined with locked glass cabinets full of machetes and bayonets and spearheads and other things I couldn't name but wouldn't want to meet up against in a dark alley. Various showcase pedestals dotted the floor, including one that displayed a pyramid of musket balls and another that featured the navy cap of a Civil War officer.

"Now," Garrick said, stopping at a workstation, "let's have a look at that *keris*." I handed it over, and then he unsheathed it and whistled long and low. "Fly me over the moon. It's perfect."

"Well, not quite. There's a hole."

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“That’s not a flaw.” He turned the *keris*, brought it close to his face. “You’re supposed to be able to see the future through those. It’s good luck.”

I wasn’t surprised I hadn’t read about good-luck holes during my Internet search; Garrick prided himself on obscure information. While he might call his knowledge factual, though, Noel probably would’ve said otherwise.

“Let’s see what we have after I give it a bath.” He unlocked an opaque cabinet, and pulled down half a dozen bottles covered in warning labels. Toxic cleansers. “Make yourself at home, Maeve. There’s cocoa in the kitchen if you’d like.”

“You’re too good to me,” I said, though my taste buds didn’t jolt as they should have. I loitered. Strolled the room. Watched Garrick. Finally, I stepped before a pedestal displaying a Revolutionary War bugle, and my thoughts drifted to Castine’s own legendary Revolutionary War musician.

According to the story, Castine’s drummer-boy ghost died during a skirmish in my hometown. He’d haunted the battlefield for a while, then moved into a tiny nearby dungeon. I’d always wondered why. Maybe he’d grown tired of the field. Or maybe he’d wanted to escape the memory of trumpet call. I could relate to that. Mozart’s Piano Concerto no. 20 in D Minor had been with me since the previous night, as ceaseless as a haunted music box.

“How’s the music?”

I nearly knocked the bugle over. “What?”

“Is it too loud, not loud enough? I swear, my hearing . . .”

I became aware of Bing Crosby’s crooning for a white Christmas coming in through the shop’s speakers. “Oh, it’s perfect.” I needed to hold it together.

“There’s a resting snake in the last case on the left if you’d like to look,” Garrick said, still scrubbing at the blade.

“Snake?”

“A straight *keris* is sometimes called a resting snake, and a wavy blade is active. It comes from *naga*, a mythical reptile. Do you know Sanskrit?”

“No,” I admitted, walking toward the back. “But I did find out that the word *keris* comes from the Javanese *ngeris*, which means ‘to

pierce.' I did a little research last night." Eating cold turkey with my fingers and fighting the effects of tryptophan for as long as I could.

"Did you? And what did you learn?"

"That I shouldn't believe half of what I read."

He chuckled. "Well, what did you read?"

"That some *kerises* bring good luck and some bad."

"Yours will certainly bring good. What else?"

"They come in different wave lengths and patterns. Let's see if I can remember the names—they were in the book, too." I stopped before the last case. "The number of waves are called the *luks* and the pattern is called the *pamor*."

"Very good. Look at the *pamor* on that one," he said, and I swiveled around to face the glass. I recognized the *keris* right away by the unique cut of the metal near the handle—an area I now knew bore a long list of specific features, like *ganja* and *tang*. In fact, the *keris* had more labeled parts than most unassembled toys imported from China. Otherwise, there was little resemblance between this particular *keris* and mine.

"It's very nice," I said, noting the scattering of bold ovals along its straight length. No need to tell Garrick that *that* blade wouldn't have caught my attention at Lansing's Block.

"*Kerises* may well be manufactured by machine nowadays," Garrick said wistfully, "but it used to be that *empus* made them, layering metals to create perfect patterns by following something like a blueprint. Each design was supposed to bring the owner a specific gift—like wealth or inner strength.

"But sometimes the *empu* would allow the blade to be made however it wanted to be made. When that happened, it was said the gods had a hand in crafting the *keris* because they had plans for it. Your *keris*," he said, "is fated."

"Hmm." Another hole in my education.

"The details in your blade's *pamor* have darkened over time, but I believe they're clearer than they were. Come and see."

I stepped up. Though still near black with age, the *keris* now shimmered bronze and silver, like the skin of a serpent in intense sunlight. Thin veins ran from one end to the other, swirling harmonically in some places and eddying off in others. No intentional design. Fated—or fluked—into being.

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"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.”