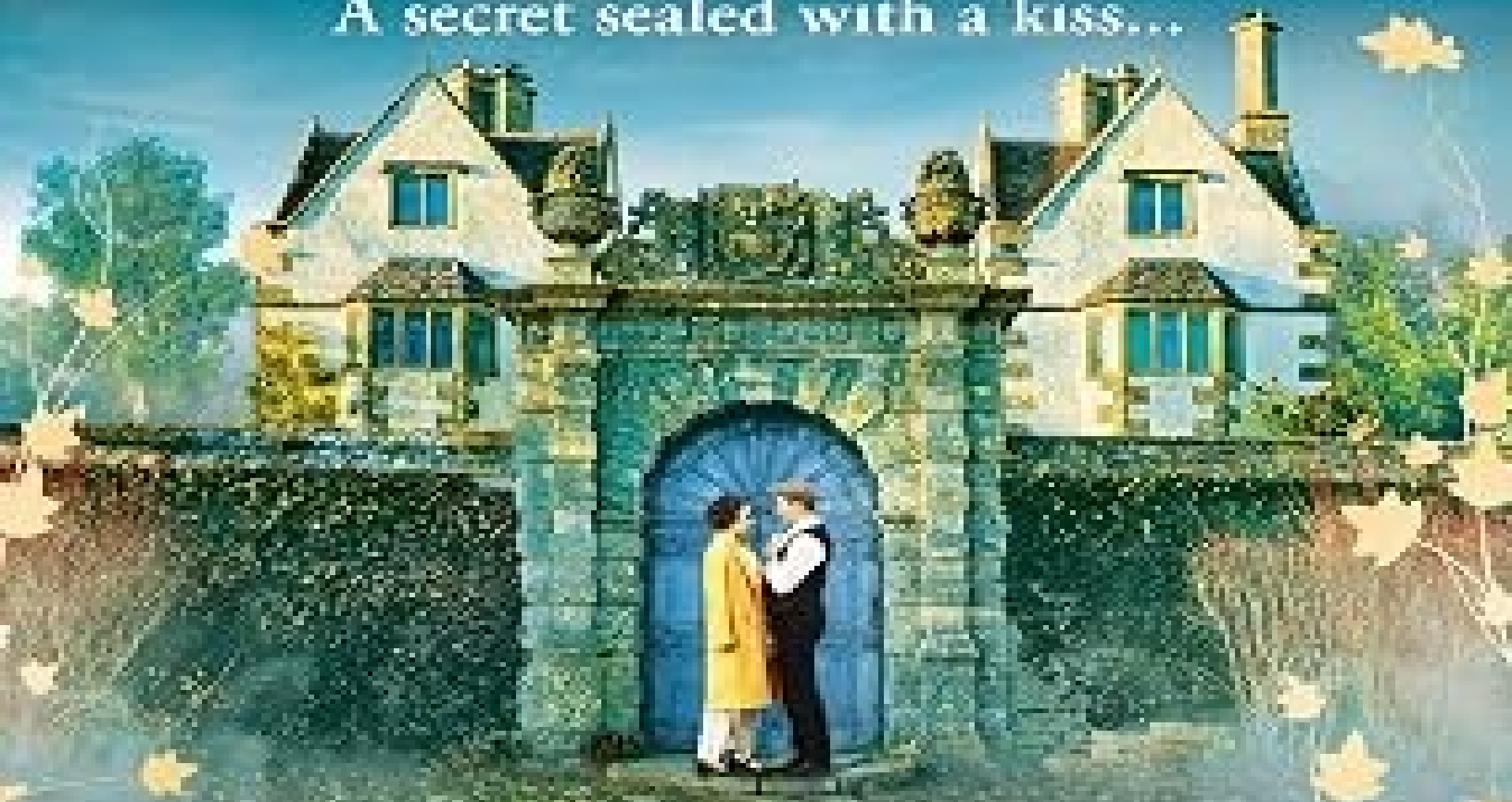
ECHOES FROM THE PAST BOOK 10

The VANISHED

A secret sealed with a kiss...



Irina SHAPIRO

Unforgettable and heart-wrenching historical fiction

THE VANISHED

IRINA SHAPIRO

Storm
PUBLISHING

ALSO BY IRINA SHAPIRO

Echoes from the Past

The Lovers

The Forgotten

The Unforgiven

The Forsaken

The Unseen

The Condemned

The Betrayed

The Broken

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A Tate and Bell Mystery

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The Passage

Wonderland

Sins of Omission

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The Hands of Time

The Hands of Time

A Leap of Faith

A World Apart

A Game of Shadows
Shattered Moments
The Ties that Bind
The Summer Solstice
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The Passage
Prologue
1
Email Signup
Also by Irina Shapiro
A Letter from the Author

PROLOGUE

The sky was strewn with stars, the waning moon shining as brightly as an electric bulb. Golden light spilled from the windows, and the strains of lively music drifted on the chill wind. Someone opened one of the French doors, and a woman's throaty laughter followed a murmured suggestion made by a nameless man. A cork popped and crystal glasses clinked in the crowded room, but outside there was only the thin, metallic scraping of wheels against the icy ground.

As they moved farther from the house, the sounds of gaiety faded, replaced by the crunch of leather soles on crusted snow and the deep stillness of the winter night. The pain had abated, the freezing cold had rendered her bare limbs completely numb, and for a moment she thought she was soaring towards the night sky instead of lying in a rusty wheelbarrow. When the stark branches of the birch trees loomed above her, realization struck, and she crashed back to earth, her heart thudding with animal terror. No one was coming to rescue her, and she did not have the strength to fight.

Was her life truly to end so soon after it had begun? And could the very person she had trusted with her heart really be the instrument of her destruction?

The wheels gave a final squeal and the barrow came to a stop. Her bare calves scraped against the hard metal edge as she was lifted aloft, her silk sheath flapping against her bare thighs. She gazed up at the indifferent stars and the faceless moon, knowing this was the last thing she would ever see.

'Help me, please,' she whispered. But no one heard her desperate plea.

ONE

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

Quinn breathed a sigh of relief when she heard the car doors slam shut and watched the Rover pull out into morning traffic. She loved Gabe and the children to bits, but she also cherished this time of day, when the chaos of the weekday morning was replaced by blessed silence. The four of them could drive the sanest person to utter madness when getting ready for school and work. And no exit was ever final. Someone always came running back to collect a forgotten textbook, their school project or PE kit, or, in Gabe's case, his phone.

Once the car had disappeared around the corner, Quinn walked into the kitchen, filled Rufus's bowl, then popped two slices of bread into the toaster, and was about to make a well-deserved cup of coffee when the doorbell rang. It couldn't be Gabe or the kids, so most likely an Amazon delivery person. Something was always on order, and parcels big and small showed up almost daily. Quinn set the mug on the worktop and went to see who was at the door, the dog trotting at her heels. She was surprised to find Rhys, who carried a cardboard tray that held two coffee cups and a paper bag that gave off a wonderful cinnamony aroma.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything important," he said as he walked into the foyer and set the bag and the tray on the console table. Rufus didn't get excited about Rhys anymore, and returned to his breakfast.

Rhys shrugged off his jacket and tossed it over the banister with a practiced motion. Even though he technically had a home of his own, he routinely turned up at the Russells' house, since he'd long since become one of the family.

"Beware of Greeks bearing gifts," Quinn joked.

"Oh, come on," Rhys said and grinned. "I'm hardly the enemy."

“No, but the only time you show up with pastries is when you have a proposal and don’t want to ring or text me for fear that I will brush you off.”

“Guilty as charged,” Rhys said and carried the offerings through to the kitchen. “Is that plain toast I see? Looks like I’m just in time.”

He set down the coffees, took out two small plates, and set a frosted cinnamon roll on each. “I tried these while in New York, and I swear I will never be the same,” he proclaimed.

He was obsessed with baked goods, but somehow, despite his love of all things sweet and doughy and his Russian-born wife, who made rich, calorie-laden meals that always seemed to involve sour cream, Rhys was as trim as ever and had hardly aged since Quinn had first met him more than a decade ago. He’d recently taken up rowing, but he’d have to row to Norway and back to burn off half the calories he consumed on a daily basis.

Rhys sat down at the kitchen table, took a sip of his coffee, and looked at Quinn, who was leaning against the worktop expectantly. “Aren’t you going to join me? This cinnamon roll is not going to eat itself, you know.”

“I’m not sure,” Quinn demurred. “Are you here to badger me about the Christmas special?”

“Darling, you know perfectly well that it’s too late for that. Even if it was all systems go, we’d never get an episode on air by mid-December, but I must warn you that, if we’re going to resurrect *Echoes from the Past*, it’s now or never.”

Quinn sighed and nodded. She knew precisely what Rhys was referring to and had to acknowledge the truth of his pronouncement. Several months ago, someone had anonymously outed her psychic ability on X. The statement had been taken as gospel and the post had taken on a life of its own. Fans of the program had defended Quinn against allegations of fraud and had argued that her psychic gift combined with her professional experience enhanced her credibility. But there were those who had called her terrible names, demanded that her degree and grants be revoked, and petitioned the BBC to pull past episodes of *Echoes from the Past* from iPlayer.

Quinn had been secretly relieved that the truth was finally out and she no longer had to hide her ability to see into the past, but that didn’t mean the comments hadn’t hurt. She had never expected the degree of vitriol that had been spilled on the internet, and the more people had vented their

outrage the longer Quinngate had continued. Too emotionally overwrought to deal with the fallout, Quinn and Gabe had taken the children on a device-free holiday to get them away from the noise, and then, once the school term ended, they had delivered the children to Quinn's parents in Marbella and had taken off on a month-long archeological dig in Turkey, which had done wonders for Quinn's frayed spirit. The time alone had been like a second honeymoon, and they had come back feeling rejuvenated and reconnected. But now that they were back, Quinn had to either publicly acknowledge her gift or deny her psychic ability and pretend that the post had been nothing but a malicious attempt at character assassination.

"Go on, then. Tell me what you have in mind," she said as she sat across from Rhys and reached for the cinnamon roll. She would hate for it to go to waste.

Rhys grinned as if he had already won, and said, "Do you remember Lynn Michaels?"

"The woman who branded herself as a lifestyle guru?"

"The one and only." He broke off a piece of his own roll, popped it in his mouth, and licked his sticky fingers.

"What about her?"

Quinn had never been a fan and had not given the woman another thought since her program had gone off the air, but her mum used to watch *At Home with Lynn* religiously. The show had enjoyed nine series, during which Lynn Michaels had redecorated historic homes, designed holiday cottages, and prepared scrumptious meals with the help of guest chefs. Every Wednesday Lynn had hosted a popular author, and on Fridays she'd showcased musical guests.

"Lynn rang me this morning."

"And?" Quinn asked, drawing out the question.

"She is not one to let the grass grow under her feet. After her show was canceled, she moved to the Lake District and opened a manor house hotel. The place was perfect for romantic weekends and intimate weddings. It became a popular destination for holiday makers, so she decided to expand. She purchased another property at the start of the pandemic, when the prices on stately homes took a nosedive, and opened the doors of her new hotel just over a year ago. It's a gorgeous property on the shores of the Irish Sea."

Quinn had a pretty good idea where this was heading but did not interrupt. Rhys would get to the point in his own time.

"Not one to allow empty space to go to waste, Lynn decided to build a yoga studio and spa on the grounds of the hotel. When the workers began to clear away the trees and bracken, they came upon a disused well. Of course, they could hardly leave it. Health and safety and all that," Rhys said with a dismissive wave of the hand.

"What did they find?"

"A bog body," he announced triumphantly.

"In a well in the Lake District?"

"Well, it's not a bog in the literal sense, but the water in the well was so peaty, it preserved the remains. Once the police declared it a historic burial and lost interest in the body, Lynn immediately got in touch."

"Because an episode of *Echoes from the Past* set at her hotel wouldn't do her bookings any harm," Quinn concluded.

"No, it wouldn't. And it wouldn't do you any harm either," Rhys reminded her. "How do I put this politely?"

"I'm sure you'll find a way," Quinn said and grinned. She valued Rhys's honesty and never took offense at anything he said.

"Your reputation is in the toilet, and if you hope to regain some measure of credibility, you need to own your gift and show the viewers what you can do. You need to be loud and proud."

"And if I don't want to be either?"

"Then I will accept your decision and never mention *Echoes* again," Rhys solemnly vowed.

"Really? You mean it?"

"Not a word of it, but I thought it sounded good and would make you feel guilty enough to consider a trip to the Lake District."

"What, now? I have to collect the children from school in a few hours."

"No, you don't. I already rang Gabe and asked him to get the children. You're free as a bird."

"You called Gabe before you spoke to me?" Quinn exclaimed, a little annoyed that Gabe hadn't told her. But then Rhys had probably asked him not to say anything before he'd had a chance to explain the situation in person. "And what did he have to say about it?"

"He said it was entirely your decision."

“What did he really say, Rhys?” she demanded.

“He said he was green with envy and wished he had your ability.”

Gabe probably had not said that, but he’d expressed his envy of Quinn’s ability on several occasions. As an archeologist, there was no greater gift than to be able to see into the past and view things as they really had been and not as historians imagined them. And to experience the events through someone else’s eyes, and in the case of a nameless victim, to be able to give them their voice back, was an opportunity not to be missed.

“Do we know anything about the deceased?” Quinn asked, her mind already turning to the case.

“We know she was a young woman,” Rhys said. “And she wore a silver ring on the fourth finger of her left hand.”

“How long has the well been sealed?”

“No idea.”

“And I suppose the police have checked missing persons reports going back several decades and no one matched her description? Or is the body older than that?”

“I honestly couldn’t tell you. But I’m sure a postmortem and carbon dating would paint a clearer picture.” Rhys raised one eyebrow. “Does this mean you’re officially back?”

Quinn grinned and felt an answering smile in her heart. “I’m back.”

TWO

While Rhys battled Tuesday morning traffic, Quinn, in the passenger seat, looked up Lynn Michaels's new hotel, Ravenbrook Manor. It was located near Ravenglass, and the photos online were all Instagram-worthy shots of a broody manor house perched on a rise overlooking the Irish Sea. It was the sort of place Quinn and Gabe had liked to stay at before they'd had three children and spontaneous romantic weekends had become a thing of the past. The interior was elegant, romantic, and very upmarket. There were two restaurants, one for casual dining located in the old carriage house, and the other with clear aspirations to a Michelin rating and the prices to match. There was a health club, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, and scenic walking trails that circumnavigated the property. As well, there was a conference room perfect for team-building weekends, and a stunning ballroom for private events.

Quinn and Rhys would have to spend the night, and, even though Lynn had offered them a twenty-percent discount, a one-night stay would still cost as much as an entire weekend at a boutique hotel in Paris, and that was without the meals. Rhys was quick to point out that he would be picking up the tab since this was a research trip and therefore a business-related expense. Quinn had to admit that was a relief. She hadn't worked steadily since the show had wrapped up, and would feel guilty about blowing so much on a hotel stay.

Once they left the city behind and the motorway was no longer choked with traffic, Quinn began to enjoy the drive. Being with Rhys was easy, since over the years he had become one of her closest friends. He understood her better than most, especially when it came to her family, and had been there for the highs of finding her biological parents and siblings, as well as the lows of discovering that they weren't quite who she imagined them to be. He had offered support when most people would have stepped away, and still encouraged her to take risks, even though there were times

she wished he'd simply let her be. But he hadn't, and here they were, on the way to investigating what might prove to be a new case for *Echoes*.

She and Rhys talked about everything and nothing, listened to music, stopped for a relaxed pub lunch, and generally made the most of their impromptu road trip, safe in the knowledge that their spouses would hold the fort. By the time they arrived at the hotel, it was nearly four o'clock. Quinn would have liked to see her room and freshen up, but Lynn met them in the lobby, as if she had been watching for their arrival. Perhaps she had been, since she was clearly invested in turning the gruesome discovery into an added revenue stream.

Lynn Michaels looked much as Quinn remembered her—a few years older and a few pounds heavier, but she was still an attractive woman. Her shiny blond bob was perfectly styled, her make-up was expertly applied, and her bespoke navy pantsuit was flattering without being ostentatious. Several inches taller than Quinn, Lynn bent her head to talk to her, which made Quinn feel as if the woman were speaking down to her despite the saccharine praise.

"I can't tell you how excited I am to meet you, Dr. Allenby," she gushed. "I've seen every episode of *Echoes from the Past*, and each installment just broke my heart." She laid her hand over her heart to illustrate just how touched she had been by the plight of the characters. "But of course, we both know that it's all in the presentation. We must connect with our viewers on an emotional level and draw them into our world. And you certainly did that. You made them feel as if they were part of the story, and we now know that you truly were part of the victims' lives, if only for a short while. And what heart-wrenching tales they were. Such exquisite suffering."

"And such solid ratings," Rhys murmured under his breath.

His comment wasn't meant to be callous, but Quinn still wished he'd try to be more sensitive. The people at the center of each episode weren't figments of a writer's imagination. They had been real, utterly human, and at times fatally flawed individuals, all of them forgotten by a world that had moved on, indifferent to their fate. As Lynn prattled on, Quinn's thoughts turned to the woman in the well. Who was she, and what had happened to her? Rhys had said she had been young, which made her end even more tragic. Had she fallen in by accident, taken her own life, or had someone

thrown her down the disused well in the hope that she would never be found?

Had the woman been missed, searched for, and mourned by those who'd loved her? And what about the ring? Was it a wedding band? Had she left a husband and small children behind? Quinn would find out in time, but before she learned the woman's story, she had to brace herself for their first meeting. To date, all the subjects of her visions had been skeletal remains when she'd first encountered them, buried in unmarked graves, their names forever lost to history. This time, she would see the woman's face, maybe even touch her hand before the body was sent to Colin Scott for a postmortem and an in-depth forensic analysis.

"The area where the workers found the well was completely overgrown," Lynn was saying. "In fact, the entire property had been woefully neglected."

"Did someone live here?" Quinn asked as Lynn led them towards a patch of upturned earth where the builders had begun to clear the area.

Blue-and-white police tape used to cordon off the area fluttered in the breeze, and the well at the center was covered with blue tarpaulin. Several danger signs had been posted to keep the guests away from the opening in case they should wander this far and decide to investigate, but a young couple had climbed beneath the tape, and the man was trying to lift the edge of the tarp. The guests scampered as soon as they saw the trio coming, and hurried towards a copse of birch trees and the beach beyond.

"Yes, the Wilsons lived here," Lynn said. "Dinah Wilson could no longer maintain the property once her husband passed. She's quite elderly."

"Does she not have family?" Rhys asked. "Surely someone might have stepped up, especially when such a lovely house was at stake."

"I honestly don't know," Lynn said. "I was interested in the property, so I wasn't going to try to talk Mrs. Wilson out of selling, was I?"

"No, I suppose not," Rhys agreed. "Is she still in the area?"

"She moved to a retirement village near Ulverston. I expect she's much happier now."

The mention of a retirement village hit Quinn like a punch to the gut. Three years had passed, but she still missed Phoebe, who had died only weeks into the first lockdown. Quinn had loved Gabe's mum, and it continued to pain her that the poor woman had been frightened and alone in her final moments. Gabe rarely spoke of it now, but at the time he had been

tormented by guilt over his inability to help Phoebe when she'd needed him most. He was still grieving, but that grief had distilled into acceptance—much like Quinn's own sorrow over Sylvia.

Her birth mother had been another casualty of the pandemic. Quinn hadn't known it then, but Sylvia had suffered from an autoimmune disease, and her compromised immune system had been no match for the first strain of the virus. Her son Logan had been with her when she'd passed, but Quinn had been denied the chance to say a proper goodbye or to work through the complicated emotions her mother had evoked. She did not miss Sylvia with the same visceral ache that Gabe felt for his mum, but she had mourned Sylvia in her own way and often wished they'd had more time together.

Quinn dragged her mind back to the present when Rhys nudged her gently. "Quinn, do you have any other questions for Lynn before we head back?"

"Erm, yes." Quinn turned to Lynn, who was looking at her expectantly. "Did Mrs. Wilson have any idea who the woman might be?"

Lynn shrugged. "I don't believe anyone asked her, since the body appeared to predate her tenure at the house. And the woman's description did not trip any missing persons reports."

"And the body?" Rhys asked.

"Removed by the coroner and stored at a local mortuary," Lynn replied.

As a rule, in the case of historic burials the remains were left in situ, but, since the woman had been floating in a well, they could hardly leave her where they'd found her, especially when the property had been zoned for commercial use. The remains would have to be cremated or buried once the examination was complete. Quinn hoped, by the time the deceased was finally laid to rest, there would be a name to put on her gravestone.

"And she was wearing a ring?"

"Yes, a silver wedding ring, by the looks of it."

This was a fascinating detail, but Lynn didn't seem to know anything more about the remains.

"Can I take a closer look at the well?" Quinn asked.

"As long as you're careful. One body is quite enough for me," Lynn quipped, but the joke fell flat.

The well looked ancient, its crumbling walls rising barely a few inches above the ground. Once they'd pulled off the tarp, a putrid smell wafted upwards, and the water was so murky it was impossible to see past the surface. The water level must have been higher while the body had been submerged, but now it barely reached halfway up the shaft, which glistened with brownish-green slime.

"Her hair was floating at the top," Lynn explained as she peered down, her face pinched with distaste. "The lad who found her thought it was just twigs and grass, until he tried to clear them out. The foreman had the idea that the well could be restored and turned into a birdbath or a fountain."

"What will happen to it now?" Rhys asked.

"I instructed the crew to drain the water and fill in the hole," Lynn said. "I don't want any reminders of the poor creature."

Lynn made the dead woman sound like some mythical being who dwelled in the deep, but Quinn supposed it was natural to distance herself from the reality of the discovery. It was difficult to acknowledge that the deceased had once been a living, breathing person with feelings, dreams, and people who might have cared for her. To humanize her was to confront the truth that everyone dies—and that their remains are no less frightening once time has had its way with them. Lynn was far too vain to admit that death ravaged even the most beautiful face or claimed someone who'd achieved international acclaim.

"I'd like to speak to the former owner," Rhys said. "Maybe we can include her testimonial in the episode."

"Assuming she has something to add," Lynn scoffed.

"Did anyone dredge the well?" Quinn asked. "Maybe something fell to the bottom."

"Like what, photo ID? The coroner thought the woman had been in there for decades."

"It's still worth checking," Quinn insisted.

"I'll get someone onto that," Rhys replied. "We might discover something valuable."

"Anything found on my property belongs to me," Lynn reminded him.

"I meant valuable in terms of information," Rhys replied. He turned to Lynn, his lip curling with distaste. "Remember our deal, Lynn," he said softly.

Lynn nodded. “I will be as accommodating as possible, as long as you mention the hotel and allow me to promote during the show.”

“We’ll see,” Rhys replied noncommittally. “First, we must determine if there’s a story to tell.”

“How could there not be?” Lynn exclaimed. “Even if the girl was some teenager who fell in the well, surely you can embellish the narrative. Make it compelling.”

“I don’t work like that,” Quinn said. “I will either tell her story as it happened or not at all.”

Lynn looked like she might be sorry she’d offered them a discount, but it was too late to go back on her word.

“I will see you both later,” she said. “I have the dinner service to supervise.”

“God, I thought she’d never leave,” Rhys said after Lynn was finally out of earshot. “Would you like a moment alone to see if you might sense anything?”

“No. I’m done here,” Quinn said and helped Rhys replace and fasten the tarp.

All she felt was infinite sadness, but it had nothing to do with her psychic ability and everything to do with untimely death and the reminders of the people she had loved and lost. As an archaeologist, she was acutely aware of the brevity of life and the ravages of time, but the events of the past few years had made those truths painfully personal, and there was no unlearning the hard lessons she had been forced to learn about love, trust, and the inability to prevent tragedy. Perhaps it would have been a more useful gift to be able to see into the future.

“What’s the plan?” Rhys asked as they walked back to the hotel.

“Tomorrow, I would like to view the body and examine anything found on the corpse. And then, I will begin.”

THREE

Quinn had been in her room less than ten minutes when Rhys knocked on her door.

"Let's have a drink at the bar before dinner," he suggested as he surveyed the accommodation from the doorway and nodded in approval.

She would have preferred an hour to herself. The room was an oasis of comfort and luxury, and the en suite bathroom was like something out of *House & Garden*. A fluffy white robe embroidered with the hotel crest and matching slippers had been left on the padded bench at the foot of the four-poster bed, and Quinn could hear the siren call of the deep clawfoot tub and the basket of bath gels and lotions. But as much as she would have enjoyed a hot bath with no one yelling at her through the door or rushing her to get out, she was only there for one night, and it was always a good idea to mix with the locals. One never knew what one could learn.

"I'm just going to change. I'll see you downstairs in ten minutes," she told Rhys.

She could hardly go downstairs in faded jeans and the comfortable hoodie she'd worn on the drive up.

"I hope you brought something smart," he said, his gaze raking over her outfit. Rhys was dressed in a crisp blue shirt, black skinny jeans, and trendy suede shoes. No doubt all chosen by Katya, who no longer allowed him to dress himself.

Quinn mock-scoffed and shut the door in his face. Rhys could be so high-handed sometimes. Of course she had brought something smart. She wasn't a complete novice. She changed into a black cocktail dress and pushed her feet into a pair of strappy heels. Just right for a drink at the bar followed by a fancy dinner.

By the time Quinn arrived downstairs and slid onto a stool next to Rhys, he had already ordered them drinks. Whisky on the rocks for him, and a glass of wine for her.

“Malbec OK?” he asked solicitously. He knew what she liked, and Quinn was sure he’d insisted on a fine vintage.

“Yes, thank you.”

“I got the contact information for the former owner. And the mortuary is on the way to the retirement village,” Rhys said rather loudly. Quinn knew precisely what he was up to, and his bad manners immediately paid off.

“Oh, are you here about the body in the well?” the bartender exclaimed.

He was young and good-looking, and had a friendly smile. His skin was a warm brown against the crisp collar of his white shirt, and his nametag identified him as Terry.

“We are,” Rhys said. “Were you there when it was discovered?”

“I don’t start till six, but my cousin was there. He’s on the building crew. He said it was like something straight out of a horror film. This withered brown thing floating in the well, her hair rippling like seaweed. He thought it was Amelia Goff,” Terry added in a quieter voice.

“Who’s Amelia Goff?” Quinn asked.

Terry’s gaze turned melancholy, and the corners of his mouth drooped. “Amelia disappeared almost ten years ago. We were all at school together, and I still remember the cops coming to talk to us and asking everyone to join the search party. She was never found.”

“How old was Amelia when she disappeared?” Rhys inquired.

“Sixteen. She’d been seeing this older guy, so at first everyone thought she’d gone off somewhere with him, but he had an alibi for the night she went missing. He said he was with his wife,” Terry said bitterly. “I never bought it. I think she lied for him.”

“The coroner was of the opinion that this body is much older,” Rhys said, and took a sip of his whisky. “Several decades at least.”

“Maybe it’s the Runaway Bride,” the bartender said with a chuckle.

“Who was that, then?”

“Just one of those stories you hear. An urban legend, except this place is hardly urban and it’s not much of a legend. Some girl ran off the day before her wedding, never to be seen again. But that was the sixties. I reckon she realized the bloke she was about to marry was a complete tosser and took off. No big mystery there.”

“Are there any other unsolved mysteries?” Rhys asked.

Terry looked around to make sure no one was waiting for service, then turned back. “It was a while back. I’m really not sure of the year. A French couple on their honeymoon was staying in the village. They went hiking one day and never came back.”

“What do you think happened to them?”

“Search me,” Terry said. “Maybe they just skipped out on the bill. And a girl who lived in this house ran off with her lover. My gran told me about it. It was quite the scandal at the time.”

“Can we speak to your gran?” Rhys asked.

“She passed two years ago. She was ninety-eight. Anyway, I must get back to work. Give me a shout if you want another round.”

The young man moved on, and Rhys gave Quinn a loaded look.

“If the girl who ran off was the daughter of this house, the former owner might know who she was,” Rhys suggested.

“Wouldn’t she have said something when the body was found?”

“Maybe she didn’t make the connection.”

“And now she will?”

“She might,” Rhys countered.

“It all depends on how old the body is and if the timeline fits.”

“Lynn said the woman is quite elderly. Maybe she knew the victim.”

“I think you’re grasping at straws,” Quinn replied.

“The deceased was wearing a wedding ring on her left hand,” Rhys said. “That’s modern.”

Quinn shook her head. “Wearing wedding bands on the left hand goes back to Ancient Egypt. And it was formalized in England during the reign of Edward VI. Besides, it was a silver ring,” she reminded him.

“So?”

Quinn looked around, her gaze sweeping over the elegant room, the polished wood bar and brass fittings that glowed in the mellow light of the Tiffany lamps, and the art deco motif that was probably original to the house.

“If the deceased did come from this house, she was most likely a maidservant. I can’t imagine that a member of the family wouldn’t be missed, and her disappearance immediately reported and thoroughly investigated.”

“A married maidservant,” Rhys reminded her. “So, what happened to the husband? And why did *he* not report her missing?”

Quinn sighed. “If he was the one to toss her down that well, I doubt he would have hung around for very long or gone to the police.”

“Maybe we should speak to the local police,” Rhys suggested. “Surely Amelia Goff wasn’t the only young woman to go missing. There may not be a missing persons report, but there’s word of mouth. Nothing beats local gossip, and Terry here is just the start.”

“Why don’t we let Colin date the body first,” Quinn said. “There’s no point chasing local gossip when we don’t know when this woman lived. The well looks medieval, but it might be even older than that. This area was occupied by the Romans for hundreds of years. They even had a garrison nearby.”

“You think the body could date to Roman times?” Rhys asked, his eyes sparkling with excitement. “That would be quite something.”

“The well probably hasn’t been in use since the house was fitted with a water pump, which would be in the 1800s at the earliest, but if the water in the well was brackish, it’s possible that it was abandoned long before. The woman could conceivably have been in there for centuries.”

“Surely the remains would have skeletonized by now,” Rhys argued.

“Not necessarily. The are a number of bog bodies that have been preserved for millennia, some even longer. The cold, peaty water and the lack of oxygen prevent soft tissue from decomposing. The well was sealed, and the lack of fresh air probably created ideal conditions for preservation.”

“In other words, our girl could have lived at any time during the last two thousand years,” Rhys concluded.

Quinn nodded. “Precisely.”

She pitied the poor forgotten woman, but she would be lying if she said that she wasn’t getting excited at the prospect of meeting her and learning her story. If the body was ancient, the victim would finally receive a proper burial. And if the woman had lived recently, then perhaps some bereaved family would finally attain closure and get to bring her home.

Either way, it was time to give the woman in the well her name back.

FOUR

Despite Rhys's best efforts, they weren't able to learn anything more from the hotel staff. The two employees besides Terry who were local were too young to recall any incidents of young women going missing, and none of the others were overly interested in regional history. Lynn Michaels stopped by their table to exalt the talents of her French chef, but she had nothing more to add regarding the case and soon left them to their dinner.

Back in her room, Quinn enjoyed a long soak, then got into bed and rang Gabe. She filled him in on the details of the case, and they theorized for a few minutes, but with such scant information there wasn't much to work with, and they eventually said good night. The bed was cozy, the sheets soft, and the mattress firm. A pleasant breeze from the open window carried with it the scent of freshly cut grass and the tang of the sea. But Quinn couldn't rest. She spent a restless night filled with dark, menacing dreams, and was relieved when the sky began to lighten and she could finally get up. She called down for a pot of coffee, then settled in a comfortable wingchair by the window, folded her legs beneath her, and watched the sun rise over a restless sea as she enjoyed her drink.

Once Rhys was ready, they grabbed a light breakfast in the dining room, thanked Lynn and promised to keep her up to date on their findings, then checked out and headed into Ravenglass. It was a lovely autumn day. The sun shimmered through a gossamer haze that hovered in the air and blurred the sharp edges of the manor house and the outbuildings as they faded from view. The road was devoid of traffic, and only birdsong filled the air, but despite the beauty of the morning, neither Quinn nor Rhys was in a very talkative mood, and they made the drive to the mortuary in near silence.

As she looked out over the landscape that had hardly changed over the centuries, Quinn could almost imagine a group of Roman soldiers coming over the rise, their horses snorting and their breastplates and helmets glinting in the light of the morning sun as their standards snapped in the

breeze. She knew she was being fanciful and that generations of Britons had walked upon this land since the Roman occupation, but she thought it would be fascinating to look through the eyes of a person who'd lived back then. But she wouldn't know for certain when the woman had lived until Colin had run a battery of tests to date the remains. And until Quinn was in possession of the ring.

Once they reached Ravenglass, Rhys drove along the main street until they spotted the mortuary—a squat whitewashed building just down the road from the parish hall. The frosted windows ensured that no passersby could glimpse what lay within. Rhys pulled over, and they stepped inside. The reception area smelled sharply of carbolic and seemed to echo with the accumulated misery that had seeped into the very walls. No one came to a mortuary willingly—sometimes not even the staff.

The man who emerged to greet them was tall, Black, and impressively fit. Intricate tattoos wound across his forearms, and a gold hoop glinted in his left ear. He wore a printed cap over his curly hair, and a surgical mask hung loosely around his neck.

"Good morning. I'm Jared Harrison," he said and extended his hand to Quinn before offering Rhys a firm handshake. "Ms. Michaels phoned to tell me you were on your way."

"Good morning, Dr. Harrison," Quinn said. "We were hoping to see the body from the well."

"Of course. I trust you intend to make arrangements for the removal of the remains? No postmortem was ordered by the police, so there's no reason to hold on to the body. We're a small outfit and don't have the space to store unclaimed remains for years," he explained with an apologetic smile.

"The body will be shipped to a forensic pathologist in London at our expense," Rhys replied.

Dr. Harrison smiled, clearly relieved to have that sorted. "You will need to fill out a few forms before the body can be released, but it's all fairly straightforward."

Rhys nodded, but it was obvious to Quinn that his attention wasn't on the bureaucratic aspect of the case. He'd fill out the forms in due course, but first he needed to see the star of his next episode. He was probably already framing the first shot in his mind, the moment the viewers would see "The Lady of the Well."

“If you would step this way,” Dr. Harrison said, and led them to a windowless room at the end of the corridor. It was small and equipped only with a gurney and a narrow cabinet filled with metal implements and several vials. The counter was bare, except for a thin file folder. The body on the gurney was zipped into a black bag, a string attached to a yellow tag looped through the pull.

The pathologist did not ask them to put on gowns or offer gloves or masks. The deceased was not the subject of an ongoing police inquiry, so there was no fear of cross-contamination of evidence.

“I thought it best to leave her inside the bag,” Dr. Harrison said. “Since the body had not been exposed to air since the well was sealed, coming in contact with oxygen would accelerate decomposition, and I assume you will be ordering a postmortem and tests to date the remains.”

“Were you the one to examine the body when it was first brought in?” Quinn asked.

“I was, yes,” Dr. Harrison confirmed.

“And what were your findings?”

“I did not locate any fatal wounds or defensive injuries, but without opening her up I can’t speculate as to the cause of death.”

“How long do you think she was down there?” Rhys asked.

“I really couldn’t say with any certainty and would prefer not to guess.”

“But the coroner ruled this a historic burial, if you could call it that,” Rhys reminded him. “So he must have based his decision on something.”

“*She* called in a forensic expert, who was of the opinion that the well had been sealed for decades, if not centuries, which means that the body was in there prior to that event. But given the absence of context, it’s impossible to date the remains just by looking at them.”

Dr. Harrison clearly preferred not to commit himself, perhaps because he realized that anything he said might be quoted on television and possibly disputed. “Are you ready to meet the deceased?” he asked as he approached the gurney.

“Yes,” Quinn croaked.

She was suddenly nervous, her mouth going dry and her heartrate accelerating at the prospect of seeing the deceased. The woman’s face would haunt her visions for the foreseeable future, and she would once again be plunged into someone else’s tragedy. She had willingly agreed to

this, but now that the moment was upon her she wasn't sure she was ready. Rhys seemed to sense her anxiety and draped an arm over her shoulder, pulling her close. Dr. Harrison's eyebrows lifted at the intimacy of the gesture, since he knew them to be coworkers, but Quinn welcomed Rhys's support. It calmed her, and she nodded to the pathologist, ready at last.

He did not unzip the bag all the way but just enough to reveal the face. The three of them stood in silence as they gazed upon the features of the dead woman.

"Blimey," Rhys said. "She looks like she's sleeping. I was expecting something a lot more unpleasant."

"It really is quite amazing, isn't it?" Dr. Harrison agreed. "I'm not an expert on bogs, but I read up on the phenomenon after the body was discovered."

"I doubt anyone would dig a well in a bog, so the well must have contained fresh water at one time," Rhys said.

"Yes, it would have, but as the surrounding ground shifted, the water would have become increasingly peaty. Runoff from the moorland would filter through pockets of sphagnum and blanket bog before reaching the well, carrying with it humic acids and organic particles that would darken the water and cover the stones in a reddish-brown film. Apparently, this was typical of upland wells, especially those below long, wet slopes. Eventually, the water would no longer be fit for human consumption, and the well would either be filled in or sealed up."

Quinn hardly heard another word the two men exchanged. All her attention was fixed on the deceased. It was difficult to determine the woman's age, but if pressed Quinn would have guessed anywhere between fifteen and twenty-five. The skin had taken on a waxy texture and a nut-brown hue. In life her complexion would have been lighter, but the brownish water had tinted it over time. Her eyes were closed, but her lips were parted slightly, revealing strong, even teeth. The enamel appeared stained, the discoloration likely also the result of long immersion. Short dark hair framed an oval face, and the woman's neck was long and graceful.

"Was she wearing anything?" Quinn asked.

"Yes. She was wearing a sheath dress. I did not remove it. No shoes," Dr. Harrison added. "But they may have come off."

"Can we see the rest?" Rhys asked, and when Quinn didn't protest, the pathologist unzipped the bag all the way to reveal a firm, slender body

dressed in a mud-colored slip.

"She really is a beauty," Rhys said, his voice tinged with awe. "We will need to get some footage of the body before Colin slices into her."

Quinn wasn't ready to focus on viewers or ratings. She wanted only to find out who this woman was and what had happened to her. She didn't appear to be the victim of a violent crime. Perhaps she had committed suicide by drowning herself in the well. That may have been the reason the well had been sealed up. Perhaps someone who'd loved her had decided to preserve her final resting place without admitting that she had taken her own life. Suicide wasn't considered a shameful act these days, but in years past it had been a cardinal sin, and the deceased as well as their family would have been shown little compassion or respect.

"I think I've seen enough," Quinn told Rhys. "Dr. Harrison, if you would get the ring the woman was found wearing?"

"The ring is still on her finger."

"Did anyone examine it?" Rhys asked.

"It's covered in slime."

Quinn helped herself to a pair of latex gloves from a box on the counter and pushed aside the vinyl of the body bag to reveal the woman's left hand. Bog bodies didn't swell like the remains of drowning victims, so she had no difficulty sliding the ring off the finger. Quinn noted that the woman's nails were also stained dark brown, which wasn't unexpected since the nailbed was porous. She checked the other hand. None of the nails were broken, so, if the deceased had been murdered, she didn't appear to have fought for her life. Quinn pulled off her left glove and used it to wrap the ring before putting it in her bag. She would clean it once she got home. She pulled off the other glove and tossed it in the rubbish bin.

Dr. Harrison zipped up the bag and led them to the reception area, where he handed Rhys several forms to fill out.

"Shall we ring Dinah Wilson and ask if we can come round?" Rhys asked once they finally stepped outside.

"Let's leave it for now," Quinn said, and climbed into the car. "I'd like to hear what Colin has to say first. There's no sense upsetting an elderly woman if this has nothing to do with her."

"Point taken," Rhys agreed, and got behind the wheel. "Let's go home."

FIVE

Quinn got back just as the kids came home from school, so closeting herself with the ring was out of the question. The children wanted to know where she'd been and talked over each other as they told her about their own days and argued about what they wanted for dinner. Rufus barked excitedly, as he always did when the children got home, and Gabe wasn't able to put in a word edgewise, so he took the dog for a walk instead.

"Tell me," Gabe invited her once he had come back, the children had gone upstairs to do their homework, and he and Quinn were left alone in the kitchen. He'd made tea, and they settled companionably at the kitchen table with their mugs.

"It was strange," Quinn admitted. "I've unearthed countless remains over the years, but they had all been skeletonized, and I felt no connection to them until I saw them in my visions and learned something about their lives. This was different." She paused as she recalled what she had experienced at the mortuary and tried to put it into words. "I got to see this woman's face. Up close. And it stayed with me all the way home. She was so young, and lovely. And my heart broke for her," she said, her voice quavering.

There had been a time when any archaeological discovery had felt like a triumph—a small victory against the relentless march of time and an opportunity to learn, to teach, and to add a paragraph to the ongoing story of mankind. But she had been young then, and naïve. Now she was a mother, and every missing child on the news, every story of neglect or cruelty, struck her to the core.

When she had looked at the young woman in the mortuary, she hadn't only mourned the life that had been lost and all the experiences that would never come to pass. She had thought of the parents who might have spent years searching for their daughter, and of the man who had slipped a ring onto her finger. This woman was not merely a fascinating find; she had been loved, had lived a life, albeit a short one, and must have left behind a

terrible void. And Quinn was the only one who might be able to give her identity back to her.

"Was Dr. Harrison willing to speculate on the cause of death?" Gabe asked.

"Not without performing a postmortem. But he did not discover any wounds that might have been fatal."

"There are other ways a person could be murdered. Or maybe she killed herself," Gabe offered.

"Maybe, but I have never heard of anyone throwing themselves down a well. The house overlooks the Irish Sea. Surely if she'd wanted to drown herself, she could have walked into the sea." *Which would have given her the option to change her mind*, Quinn thought. The woman would not have been able to climb out of the well. But perhaps that had been the point, whether it had been suicide or murder.

"No sense speculating until we know how she died."

Quinn nodded. "We'll have to wait until Colin examines the remains."

"You will be able to see how she died," Gabe reminded her gently.

"Yes, but I still need the scientific data to back up my findings. Viewers will be expecting that, now more than ever."

"Because you will need to win their trust back," Gabe finished for her.

"Yes. If I tell them the woman's story, there will be those who will say that I made it all up. I must offer them irrefutable proof."

"And you will. Colin will provide you with the forensic evidence needed to convince even the most implacable naysayers."

"That's what I'm hoping for. I don't have the emotional bandwidth to deal with any more vicious attacks on my character. But I know it will never be smooth sailing, no matter how much evidence I provide."

"You know better than most what people are like. There will always be those who refuse to accept proof and will choose to believe they're getting duped. It comes with the territory."

"I know," Quinn said. "I must have been mad to agree to this."

Gabe smiled at her, and his gaze was warm with affection but also alight with wonder. "Would you like to spend some time with the ring?"

She nodded. "I really would."

"I'll make dinner," Gabe offered. "I can be trusted to boil spaghetti. And there's a container of bolognese sauce in the fridge."

“Thank you,” Quinn said and wrapped her arms around him when they both stood.

She pressed her cheek to his chest and was reassured by the steady beating of his heart. Sometimes she still couldn’t believe she’d got so lucky, and hoped Gabe knew how much she loved and appreciated him.

“Go on,” he whispered into her hair. “I got this.”

Quinn grabbed a zip-top bag from the cupboard, then took the folded glove out of her satchel and hurried upstairs. In the bathroom, she took a pair of tweezers out of the medicine cabinet and found a new toothbrush. She used the tweezers to hold the silver band under a stream of warm water and used the brush to carefully scrub away the slime and the dirt that coated the surface. As the slime dissolved, a pattern began to emerge. The metal wasn’t solid but exquisitely filigreed, and it wasn’t just any band. It was a claddagh ring, hands holding a crowned heart forming the focal point of the design. As the last of the grime melted away, the band shone in the light from the overhead fixture. It didn’t appear to have any scratches or nicks, but a stamp was clearly visible on the inside of the band. This didn’t date the ring, since silversmiths had been stamping their creations since the 1300s, but it was still a clue. Quinn was now certain that the body did not date to the Roman occupation or any time before the fourteenth century.

She turned off the water and dropped the ring into the plastic bag before disposing of the filthy toothbrush and returning the tweezers to the cabinet. Once in the bedroom, she kicked off her shoes, reclined against the pillows, and held up the bag. The silver glowed in the mellow light of the autumn afternoon, the tiny heart at the center making her own heart ache with sadness. The claddagh ring was an age-old symbol of love, given as an engagement or wedding band since the medieval period. What had happened to the man who’d given his heart to the deceased? Had he searched for her, or had he known she was dead? Or might he have been the one to kill her? It was a brutal and heartbreaking fact of life that, when a woman went missing or was murdered, statistically it was most often her domestic partner who was responsible. The investigation into her disappearance and the consequences for those responsible would largely depend on when the woman had lived and the laws of the land at the time. Perhaps there was a record of the case, but in order to find it Quinn would need a name and the year she’d vanished.

As she prepared to touch the ring, she reflected that there was one commonality to all her previous cases. Each foray into the past had taken her to the most significant time in the victim's life and focused on the period leading up to their death. So as soon as Quinn made contact with the metal, she would learn several basic facts that would enable her to conduct her own research. She took out the ring and shut her eyes, emotionally prepared at last to see the deceased as she had been in life, but nothing happened. Quinn kept her eyes closed for several more seconds, but all remained silent and dark. At first she wondered if she was experiencing this vacuity due to the deceased's dulled faculties, but she soon realized that wasn't the case. There was no connection at all.

She opened her eyes and turned the ring over in her fingers. The only times she'd felt this type of void had been either when the owner had still been alive or when the item had been brand-new and had yet to be imprinted with the memories of its owner. The ring had come from the well, and she had taken it off the dead woman's hand herself. The only possibility that remained was that the band had been new at the time of death. Which would mean that she must have died minutes after she'd become engaged or been married. Quinn set the ring aside, now even more determined to get to the truth.

With this new discovery, the mystery had just deepened.

SIX

Colin promised to get in touch in a few days, so there was nothing to do but wait. Quinn did her best to keep busy and try to avoid Rhys, who couldn't accept that the ring was useless and kept insisting she try again. If she couldn't discover what had happened to the nameless woman, he would have to rely solely on the science, which would be a huge disappointment to those who would be tuning in to see Quinn at work, or find another subject for the show's comeback. Quinn ordered him to stop pestering her and promised that she'd get back to him when she had something to tell. Little good it did her, but she did try.

While she waited for Colin to complete the postmortem, Quinn finished writing the article she'd been working on for *Archeology Today* that detailed the dig she and Gabe had attended in the summer. They had been encamped on the shore of Lake Iznik in Bursa, Turkey, where the remains of a 1,600-year-old basilica that may have been the setting of the First Council of Nicaea had been discovered in 2014. The purpose of the dig had been to collect artifacts from the same period that would help them to map out the area that had become submerged as a result of the earthquake that had destroyed the basilica. But as Quinn worked on the article and went about her days, her thoughts kept straying to the dead woman. Endless questions swirled in her mind, and, although she hadn't admitted as much to Rhys, she had tried holding the ring several more times in the hope that something might come through. But the result had been the same every time. The ring held no imprinted memories and wasn't going to tell her anything about the deceased.

Frustrated by the lack of progress, Quinn decided she needed a fun night in and invited her brother Logan and his son Max to join them for dinner and a film that Friday, something she made sure to do at least once a month. Logan's partner, Rafe, had walked out on Logan days after the first lockdown had been lifted, having realized that he wasn't emotionally equipped for either monogamy or parenthood. Logan hadn't dated anyone

seriously since then, and, although he adored Max, he was at times quite lonely, especially since their brother Jude was still stationed in Germany. Jude was married now and had two little girls. The family lived on base and had come to visit only once since the children were born, at Christmas last year.

As soon as dinner was done, Gabe excused himself and headed upstairs to finish some paperwork, and the children migrated to the lounge to watch the movie. Not interested in the film, Logan invited Quinn to join him in the garden, where he questioned her about the case. He had been a little put out to learn about his sister's secret ability on X, but once he'd got past his annoyance, he'd been surprisingly interested and wanted to hear about Quinn's Trinidadian ancestor to whom Quinn could trace her gift. Perhaps it was because Logan was a member of the medical community that he needed to understand the logistics, and make sense of the visions Quinn experienced. If she hadn't been having them since childhood, he might have suggested she see a neurologist, in case the mind trips were the result of a tumor.

"Too bad you can't see into the future," Logan said. "I'd love to know what the world will be like in fifty, one hundred, even a thousand years."

"I'm not sure I want to know," Quinn replied as she looked up at the darkening sky.

People had always looked to the stars for answers, and she was happy to do the same. And dream rather than fear what was to come.

"Why not?"

"Because I would be tempted to see my own future. And I'd rather not know the date of my death, or learn of the losses I am destined to bear."

"But maybe if you knew, you could change your future," Logan suggested practically.

"Maybe. But different decisions could lead to different outcomes, some of them even more terrible."

Logan sighed. "I wish I could have seen my future."

"Was there something you would have changed?" Quinn asked.

Her brother nodded. "Perhaps I would allow things to happen in their own time."

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"It's just that I always rush things. I want what I want right now," Logan complained.

“Nothing wrong with that. Instant gratification.”

“Sometimes instant gratification leads to heartache down the road.”

“Are you referring to something specific?”

“Nah, I’m just talking,” Logan said and grinned. “I’m getting maudlin in my old age.”

“Don’t talk to me about age,” Quinn grumbled. “When my mum was my age, I thought she was ancient.”

“You’re only as old as you feel,” he said. Quinn rolled her eyes at that, and Logan laughed softly. “Sounds like you need another drink.”

“Bring it on,” Quinn said and gazed at the sky until Logan returned with a glass of wine.

They talked easily for another hour until the film ended and it was time for Logan to take his sleepy five-year-old home. Quinn saw them to the car and kissed Max before Logan settled him in his child seat.

“I love you,” Quinn said.

“Love you, Aunt Quinn,” Max murmured.

“Love you, Aunt Quinn,” Logan said and gave her one of his bear hugs. “Next time at mine.”

Quinn nodded, waved to Max, and went back inside.

SEVEN

On Tuesday morning, Quinn was on her way out to meet her friend Nicole Rayburn, a writer of historical mysteries, when Colin finally rang. Nicole was a devoted fan of *Echoes from the Past,* and so she wasn't terribly upset when Quinn canceled their plans on such short notice. They'd meet up next week, and Quinn would fill her in on all the details. Nicole and her husband, Kyle, were part of the tight circle of family and friends who had been aware of Quinn's gift before the ill-fated tweet went live on X, and Quinn knew that she could openly discuss her visions with her friend without the added worry of being publicly talked about or labeled a New Age freak.

As she hurried towards the tube station, Quinn could hardly wait to hear what Colin had discovered. He was top of his field in forensic pathology and had recently left his position at the hospital and opened his own lab in Hammersmith. He now worked with the Home Office and employed several pathologists and forensic experts, who helped to autopsy victims of violent crime and used their expertise to assist Scene of Crime officers dispatched by the Met.

Quinn hadn't seen Colin in person since before the pandemic, but they had kept in contact by text and through social media, though Colin wasn't one to post anything personal. And these days, neither was Quinn. She'd had enough of social media for the moment. Perhaps once she felt less exposed that might change. Colin buzzed Quinn in when she arrived and enveloped her in a warm hug the moment she walked through the door.

"You look well," he said as he let her go. "Really well."

"So do you. And this…" Quinn said, making a gesture that encompassed the new offices. "Very impressive." Several people were going about their work, but Quinn didn't recognize any of them.

"I'm very happy in my professional life," Colin said and smiled contentedly.

"And how is your partner?"

Colin had kept a photo of himself and Adam on his desk at the hospital, but his new office was devoid of personal touches. It was all glass, chrome, and recessed lighting. Not even a plant to make the place feel cozier. Perhaps he hadn't had time to decorate, or maybe, now that he was the boss, he preferred to keep his personal life away from the office.

"He's very well," Colin replied, and, when he smiled, his gaze turned dreamy. Quinn was sincerely glad. Colin was a lovely person, and he deserved to be happy.

Once they'd had a chance to catch up on their personal lives, Quinn asked, "Have you been able to learn anything from the remains?"

Colin had always preferred to show rather than tell, so he invited her to follow him to the lab, where the woman from the well reposed on a metal slab, her body covered up to the neck with an avocado-green sheet. Quinn could see the postmortem scars just beneath the hairline and hoped that Colin had been able to determine the cause of death, but, given his closed expression, she told herself not to expect miracles.

"I must admit, this is probably one of the most complex cases I've ever worked on," Colin admitted as he pulled back the sheet to reveal the woman's now-naked body.

Colin worked on cadavers every day, so to him a nude corpse was nothing new, but to Quinn it felt like a violation, and she looked away and focused on the woman's face. Perhaps it was silly, but she felt that she ought to show the woman respect and not ogle her as if she were nothing more than an interesting specimen. She might be gone, but to Quinn she was still very much human.

"Why was this case so difficult?" she asked as she reverently touched the woman's hand.

"Well, for one thing, I have never had the opportunity to examine a bog body before. And for another, the lack of an actual bog presented me with a unique challenge. In order to date the body, it helps to study the layers of the bog as well as other archeological discoveries from the area. As you well know, they provide historical context," Colin explained. "The well might date to medieval times or even before, but we don't know precisely when the woman was deposited in the shaft, so it's difficult to narrow down the historical period that spanned her life."

"What about the usual scientific methods?"

“There’s DNA sequencing that can be obtained by pulverizing and analyzing a tooth, and carbon-14 dating, but, as you’re aware, these tests are costly and can take weeks, if not months, to carry out. There’s quite a backlog,” Colin said apologetically, “and, of course, victims of recent crimes get priority.”

“So you haven’t ordered the tests?” Quinn asked. She was deeply disappointed by Colin’s unexpected response.

“I contacted Rhys, but, although he’s eager to obtain the scientific data to supplement your own findings, he has yet to receive authorization for payment. I gather the top brass are not keen to invest so much in an hour-long episode.”

“Hosted by a woman with a questionable reputation,” Quinn supplied.

“No one doubts you,” Colin replied. “If they did, they wouldn’t have approved another episode, but it’s always about the bottom line and, now that they know the information can be obtained another way, one that doesn’t cost anything, they’re hesitant to shell out.”

“I see.”

This wasn’t going at all as she had expected, and there was the distinct possibility that they might have to give up and either cremate or bury the woman without learning her secrets.

“Rhys said there was a ring,” he said.

“A silver claddagh ring. It’s at home.”

Colin nodded but didn’t comment.

“Were you able to learn anything from the postmortem?” Quinn asked, still hopeful that the episode might be salvaged.

“Just the basics.” Colin came to stand on the other side of the slab, facing her as he began. “The deceased was in her late teens to early twenties, was in excellent health at the time of death, and had enjoyed a plentiful and varied diet. The stomach contained partially digested meat fibers—likely beef or lamb—along with potatoes, mushrooms, and fragments of root vegetables. The degree of digestion suggests the meal was eaten one to two hours prior to death. She had also been drinking alcohol. Analysis of the stomach contents did not reveal the presence of any known toxin.”

“So, presumably she was well-off,” Quinn mused.

“Most likely,” Colin agreed. “There are no calluses on her hands, and her feet are unblemished. This woman did not work with her hands or go

without footwear. The pronounced development of her thighs, calves, and core indicates regular walking and strongly suggests she was also accustomed to riding."

"And the cause of death?"

"There are faint horizontal bruises across the shoulder blades and the backs of the calves, a rounded contusion on the left temple consistent with blunt force trauma, and peaty water mixed with debris in the lungs."

"So the victim—and she clearly was a victim—was battered, then drowned?" Quinn asked.

"Battered is not quite the right term. My theory is that the victim was struck on the side of the head with a smooth, rounded object, then thrown into the well. The horizontal bruises on the back and the legs are not consistent with a beating. Given the location and shape of the marks, it's more likely that the body was moved, possibly with the aid of a cart or a makeshift stretcher that might have had crossbars. The blow to the head resulted in an intracranial hemorrhage, which, given the amount of blood on the brain, would have been severely debilitating. However, the ultimate cause of death was drowning."

"Colin, is there any evidence of sexual assault or pregnancy?"

Quinn knew she was clutching at straws. Colin would have said if he had found evidence of either, but even a supposition was better than nothing at all to go on. Many a woman had been disposed of because she had become demanding or inconvenient, or if her child could cause embarrassment or prove the cause of someone's undoing.

"No, there isn't." Colin smiled apologetically. "And I can't tell you if she was a virgin. The absence of a hymen does not conclusively prove that someone was sexually active."

So, another dead end, then. "And the garment she was wearing?"

"Silk. Probably white or nude-colored when new. There was a bit of lace at the neckline."

"Is there any way to date the fabric or the lace?"

Both silk and lace had been produced for centuries, so the presence of either did nothing to narrow down the time period, and the style was quite basic.

Colin echoed Quinn's thoughts when he said, "The garment was in the water too long to yield any significant clues. But since silk became widely

available in England in the seventeenth century, we can at least rule out anything before then."

Quinn thought it was far too soon to rule anything out. English women had not worn silk regularly until the 1800s, but it had existed in England as early as the seventh century, and Ancient Romans had imported silk from China and fashioned it into luxurious garments for highborn ladies. A Roman woman might easily have owned a silk sheath, just as a Frenchwoman might have worn a lace-trimmed silk gown decades before such a garment had become available in England. French silks had dominated the European market for at least a century before silk had been widely available to English nobility. Of course, a Roman maiden would not have worn a claddagh ring, but a young woman of European origin might have, even if she wasn't Irish.

"Without DNA sequencing, we can't rule out that she had come from another country," Quinn ventured.

"You are correct," Colin conceded. "Especially since her body was found so close to the coast. But the short hair might be a clue to the time period."

"Yes and no. Short hair for women became fashionable in the twentieth century, but before that those nursing the sick often cut their patients' hair for practical reasons since it was easier to take care of. The victim might not have been ill at the time of her death, but perhaps her hair had been cut a few months before and was in the process of growing in."

"Also possible," Colin agreed. "There's nothing to suggest otherwise."

"Is there any likelihood that she committed suicide?" Quinn asked.

"I suppose the wound could be self-inflicted or accidental, and maybe she had fallen back onto something that had left those bruises, but I couldn't say with any certainty."

"What about the position of the body?"

"If she jumped in, then, of course, she would go in feet first. But if someone threw her in, they could have angled the body either way, so the position doesn't prove either case."

Quinn tore her gaze away from the still face and looked at Colin. "Was there anything at all on the body?"

"I thought you might ask. Was the claddagh ring not sufficient, then?"

"Turns out it didn't belong to her. I drew a blank when I held it."

Colin's expression became pained. "You could have told me, you know," he chided. "I would have kept your secret. And knowing would have explained so much."

"I'm sorry, but at the time I had made the decision to keep my psychic ability to myself. I simply wasn't ready to tell everyone."

"Did you think I wouldn't believe you or would have derided your gift?" Colin asked, obviously hurt by the lack of trust.

Quinn sighed. "I don't know. Maybe. It's a difficult thing to share, especially with someone who's dedicated his life to science and the pursuit of irrefutable facts."

"A pathologist cannot ascertain psychic ability based on the postmortem, since the individual's brain is not noticeably different, but I believe that some people possess abilities that the majority of the population are not blessed with."

"I don't know how much of a blessing it is, to be honest. To relive the worst moments of someone's life is not without its trauma, but it is gratifying to clear someone's name or to offer them the justice they did not receive in life."

"So, how did the person who posted the tweet find out?" Colin asked.

"As with any secret, there are still a few people who know. And then the circle grows wider, and eventually someone betrays one's confidence."

"That must have been devastating."

"What was unexpectedly painful was the ugly things people said, particularly people I had called my friends. But I'm relieved not to have to hide anymore."

"There will be more hurtful comments once you're back on TV," Colin pointed out.

"Yes, but as long as I can support my findings with scientific data, there's little they can do to hurt me. And as long as there's social media, there will always be trolls."

Colin sighed. "As much as I can appreciate the benefits of the internet, sometimes I think the world was a kinder place before social media. We were all excited to reconnect with old friends and see what everyone was up to, but good intentions quickly turned into self-involvement and offered the ability to hurt people anonymously and avoid the consequences."

Quinn chuckled. "Before there were keyboard warriors, there were gossips and poison pen letter writers. As long as there are people, there will

be those who spread malicious rumors and lies, and take pleasure in causing someone pain."

"Very true. There's no running away from human nature, is there? Just as there's no getting away from malicious intent. People were likely murdering each other before they even had a word for the act." Colin looked down at the body, then met Quinn's gaze. "So, if the ring did not belong to her…"

"I'm flying blind," she admitted.

Colin grinned, and a spark of hope flared in Quinn's chest. He walked over to the counter, where the tools of his trade were displayed on a stainless-steel tray, and picked up a small plastic container. Inside was an earring, and Colin held it up to the light. A dozen tiny amethysts glowed like captured twilight, the stones nestled in a spiderweb of filigreed gold.

"It was caught in her hair," Colin said. "I expect she lost its mate before she went into the well, or maybe it's resting at the bottom. I do hope this will tell you what you need to know. But even if you never discover who she was, you have still given her a chance at eternal life. The body is sure to become the subject of a case study for pathology students and might be left on display."

"I highly doubt that was the afterlife she aspired to," Quinn said sadly.

"She was so young, she probably never gave death a thought," Colin mused.

"Whether we find out who she was or not, I think she should be allowed to rest in peace."

"I suppose at this juncture the decision is up to Rhys. He's already invested a considerable amount to transport and analyze her remains. But I'm sure you can sway him should he decide to donate her body to science."

"I intend to," Quinn said. "Thank you for this."

Quinn scooped up the container and stowed it in her bag. As much as she wished she could test the earring right away, she would have to wait to find out if it had belonged to the Lady of the Well. She might have a few minutes in the afternoon, but she didn't want to rush it. She intended to do this properly.

EIGHT

When Quinn got home, Emma was in the lounge. Her friend's mum had collected her from school and dropped her off, something she did several times a week. Quinn returned the favor on alternate days. Gabe had offered to get Alex and Mia since Quinn hadn't known how long she would be. Emma's feet were on the coffee table, and she wore pearly pink Beats headphones—last year's Christmas present and Emma's most prized possession. Her dark hair was pulled into a messy bun atop her head, and her blue gaze was fixed on nothing in particular as she bobbed her head in time to the music.

"Emma," Quinn called out but got no response. "Emma."

It was only when she walked to the center of the room and waved her hand in front of Emma's face that her daughter finally noticed her. She pushed the headphones back until they were around her neck, and Quinn heard a faint beat since the music was still on.

"Hi, Mum. Where've you been?"

"I went to see Colin Scott."

"About that dead lady?"

"Yes."

Quinn settled across from Emma and studied her serious face. Once, a long time ago, Emma had expressed her reservations about what her parents did for a living, and the conversation had stayed with Quinn. Emma's birth mother and grandmother had died when Emma was three. She never spoke of them these days, but Quinn knew that she still missed the two women who had been her only family before the accident that had taken both their lives. Emma slept easier at night knowing that their remains had not been disturbed or analyzed by individuals who saw them as nothing more than an opportunity to further their knowledge. She felt they deserved to be left in peace.

"Do you mind that she will be shown on television?" Quinn asked.

"A little, yeah," Emma replied. "I wouldn't want that done to me."

“She’s a lot older than you.”

“By how much?”

“About ten years,” Quinn replied.

Ten years was a lot to a twelve-year-old, but in reality it was nothing, the blink of an eye in the timeline of a world that had existed for billions of years.

“And you think that makes it all right?” Emma asked, sounding more like a middle-aged woman than a carefree tween.

Did she think it was all right? Quinn asked herself. Would she want her remains laid on a slab, dissected, and then shown on television? Probably not. But if she had been murdered, she’d want someone to find her killer and hold them responsible, even if they could no longer be prosecuted for their crime.

“Colin thinks she was murdered, Em,” Quinn said. “Does that change how you feel?”

Emma looked thoughtful. And sad. “Do you know her name?”

“Not yet.”

“And she was about twenty-two?”

“Thereabouts.”

Emma nodded and sighed with her whole being. “I hate that she has no say in what will be done to her, but I would want someone to find my killer if that happened to me.”

“Does that mean I have your blessing?”

Quinn hadn’t planned to ask when she’d accepted Rhys’s offer, but she suddenly realized that it meant the world to have Emma’s understanding. At seven and almost nine, Mia and Alex were too young to care about someone they’d never known. And Gabe supported her without reservation. Emma was the wild card, and she was even more sensitive since losing both Phoebe and Sylvia so recently.

“Will you leave her alone if you don’t have it?” Emma asked.

“If it means that much to you, then yes,” Quinn said.

And she meant it. Rhys would never understand or support her decision, but he was a grown man focused on ratings and profit. Emma’s feelings meant so much more and were the only ones that truly mattered.

“Do it, Mum,” Emma said. “She deserves justice, even if the person who murdered her is probably long gone. At the very least she will get her

name back. And maybe she had family. Do you think they might still be alive?"

"That depends on when she lived. Colin wasn't able to date the remains."

"So you think she might have died during the Iron Age or something?"

"Probably not that far back, but maybe a few hundred years ago. Or maybe she lived recently and her family is still searching for her. We think she was married. Or engaged."

"You think?" Emma asked, her eyes widening at the possibility. "What if she had a child?"

"Then I hope this will bring them closure. Although according to the police database, her description doesn't match any missing persons reports."

"Maybe she was never reported missing. Or maybe her family thought she left. They might think she's out there somewhere, living her best life, and all this time she's been floating in that well, like some specimen in a horror movie." Emma shuddered dramatically. "Speaking of movies, can we watch the *Barbie* movie tonight? We can invite Logan and Max again. I like it when they come over. And we can do it early, since it's a school night."

"Shoot Logan a text. I bet Max will enjoy the film."

"It will go right over his head," Emma said disdainfully. "But Mia and Alex will probably like it." She suddenly looked worried. "You can't let Alex touch that woman's stuff, Mum. I don't want him to see what happened."

Quinn had desperately hoped that her ability would not be passed on to her children. While Mia had been spared the Sight, it had recently become clear that Alex had not been so fortunate. He was still too young to understand what he was seeing, so they took care to keep him from handling anything that had belonged to the deceased and might distress him if he were to witness their memories. "Don't worry. I will keep the earring Colin found safe."

"Earring? I thought it was that Irish ring."

"It wasn't hers."

"Really? So why was she wearing it when she died?"

"That's what I intend to find out."

"Twenty-two years old," Emma said under her breath. "Blimey."

Quinn would have used a stronger word, but she would be setting a bad example. Not that Emma didn't hear that sort of talk every day at school.

"Logan can't tonight," Emma said after she'd read an incoming text. "Want to dance?" she suddenly asked.

"Dance? What, now?"

"I just love this song. It's Bebe Rexha and David Guetta."

Quinn only recognized one of those names, but she acknowledged that her days of dancing with her daughter were probably numbered, since Emma was on the cusp of becoming a teenager and would soon start to think everything Quinn did was mortifyingly embarrassing.

"Sure. Let's do it."

"Brilliant," Emma said and put the song on speaker. And then they jumped around until they were both breathless and laughing at each other's antics.

It was just after five, and the kids had finished their homework and had gone to their rooms before dinner, when Quinn took the container from her bag and held it tight as she raced upstairs. She couldn't wait another minute to see if the earring would work. Her heart thumping, she got comfortable on the bed and prayed that this time she would see something other than darkness. She opened the container, dropped the earring on her palm, and shut her eyes.

NINE

NOVEMBER 1923

Ravenglass, Cumbria

“Where have you been?” Honor demanded as soon as Geneva walked into the drawing room.

Honor looked very put out indeed, her cheeks pink with indignation. At seventeen, she was on the cusp of womanhood, but, with her long hair tied back with a velvet ribbon and the powder blue woolen dress with its pleated skirt and Peter Pan collar, she still resembled a child.

“You said we could drive into the village. I was looking forward to it. And I thought we might go for tea,” she whined.

“We can still go. I only went for a walk,” Geneva said apologetically as she pulled her cardigan closer about her in a defensive gesture. She hated when her sister was in one of her moods.

“You went for a walk with him, didn’t you?” Honor demanded. “Rory Sullivan.”

She said the name as if it were tainted, which made Geneva want to deny the accusation, but she hated to lie to her sister. They had always been truthful with each other, and she did need someone to confide in. But the fact that Rory was the estate manager and worked for the family made her feel as though she had to justify her decision.

“I did,” she admitted. “I like him, and he likes me.”

“And what do you expect will come out of all this liking?” Honor asked, one brow lifting quizzically.

“I don’t know. I haven’t thought that far.”

“Well, maybe you should.” Honor sighed and shook her head, clearly baffled by her sister’s shortsightedness. “Genny, Father will never allow it. You’re setting yourself up for heartbreak, and leading the poor man on. He probably thinks you have a future together.”

“I know Father can be inflexible, but times are changing,” Geneva argued. She had told herself that same lie so often, she almost believed it.

“Are they?”

“Ireland is now a free state.”

“That’s in the midst of a civil war. Genny, Rory Sullivan might not be political, but he is still Irish, and he’s Catholic. And Father will never accept him as anything other than hired help.”

“Then don’t tell him,” Geneva implored. “Rory and I are just friends.”

“What sort of fool do you take me for? You light up like a Christmas candle the moment Rory walks into a room. Not that I blame you. He is gorgeous, but do you think Father is blind? If you keep this up, he’ll sack the man and send him packing, which would probably be the best thing that could happen, at least to you.”

“Don’t say that,” Geneva cried.

“I think there are going to be some changes around here,” Honor said as she threw herself into a wingchair.

“What do you mean? What changes?” Geneva sat across from her and studied her sister. Honor knew something, but she would dole out the information bit by bit to make it last longer. She thrived on intrigue and was always keeping secrets. Perhaps it gave her a sense of control and made her feel important in a household where she had no say in anything.

“Mr. Lefferts was here earlier. He and Father were closeted together for quite a long while, and Mr. Lefferts looked rather grim when he left.”

“It’s probably just estate business. Father said he was going to organize a pension for Mrs. Lowry.”

“He could have asked Mr. Lefferts to do that over the telephone.”

“Yes, he could have, but perhaps there were papers he needed to sign. Anyway, if you don’t want to go into the village, I’m going to ring for tea. I’m parched.”

“You missed lunch,” Honor said accusingly. “I had to eat by myself.”

Geneva hadn’t missed lunch, but she wasn’t about to admit that she’d eaten with Rory.

“I’m sorry, but I wasn’t very hungry.”

Honor made a huffing sound to indicate what she thought of that excuse.

“Where was Father? Did he not join you for luncheon?”

“He asked for a tray in his room.”

That wasn't unusual. Their father had been unwell the past few weeks and had needed to rest more. Geneva thought he might have needed some peace and quiet after his meeting with the lawyer, since Honor had a way of dominating the conversation and at times became bullish and argumentative.

Geneva walked over to the bellpull to summon the maid. "Perhaps we can go into the village tomorrow," she offered.

"Why, does Rory Sullivan have lunch plans?"

"Honor, please, don't be cross," Geneva pleaded. "I'm sorry I forgot. I'll make it up to you. I promise."

"You didn't forget," Honor snapped. "You chose to spend time with someone else instead."

"And what will happen when I get married?" Geneva teased.

"I will get married too, and we will have babies at the same time, and rear them together. It will be perfect."

"You mean we'll all live together in this house and play happy families?"

"Why not? There is such a thing as a happy family, you know. It's not just a myth."

"No," Geneva agreed, but she didn't think there were too many happy families left, not anymore.

The war had robbed nearly every family of its husbands and sons, and those who had come back were never quite the same: their experiences at the front had left them forever altered. Geneva's family had suffered its share of losses, having seen their number reduced by half over the past decade. How could one have a happy family when so much of that family was gone? Their mother and older brother had passed since the start of the war, as well as several footmen, grooms, the former estate manager, and tenants, who'd gone off to fight. The house that had been full of life and light was filled with the ghosts of those lost, their spirits lingering in the silent rooms and wandering the paths of the withered garden.

"What did you want to shop for?" Geneva asked once Sally had brought the tea and a plate of leftover marble cake. She didn't want to talk about Rory anymore.

"Christmas presents," Honor replied.

"Christmas is weeks away."

“I know, but choosing the right gift makes me happy. And we have two more to shop for. Father said he will invite Aunt Clarissa and Rose. This will be their first Christmas without Uncle Gerald,” Honor said.

“They’re still in mourning.”

“It’ll be nearly a year by then, and there’s nothing wrong with spending the day with family. It’s too sad to be all alone at Christmas.”

“Yes, it is sad,” Geneva agreed, recalling the Christmas of 1917, when it had been just her and Honor, and what was left of the staff. The following Christmas hadn’t been much better, although their father had come back from the front by then, so it had been the three of them.

Geneva had just poured out the tea when their elderly butler stepped into the room. “Forgive the intrusion,” Peters said. “But his lordship has asked to see you, my lady. I think it’s quite urgent,” he added when Geneva didn’t immediately get up.

“I’ll save you a slice of cake,” Honor promised.

“Make sure that you do. Last time you ate every last piece.”

Honor grinned and reached for a slice of cake. “I was hungry.”

TEN

Douglas Bellamy was in the library, which had always been his favorite room. It was stuffed with old books, out-of-date magazines, and the week's newspapers, and smelled of wood, leather, and pipe smoke. The green leather chairs were well worn and the carpet a bit faded, but Douglas refused to replace either and said the items were still quite serviceable, much like himself. He sat so close to the hearth, his feet had to be roasting, but he shivered when Geneva opened the door and let in the cool draft from the corridor.

"Are you all right, Father?" she asked as she approached. "Honor said you didn't come down to luncheon."

"Just a little tired. Mr. Lefferts went on and on." He chuckled softly. "That man can talk. Can you hand me my pipe, dear?"

"Of course."

The pipe and tin of tobacco were on the mantelpiece, but Douglas would have had to rise to reach them. Geneva filled the bowl with tobacco, handed the pipe to her father, then struck a match and held the flame to the bowl until fragrant smoke curled up from the smoldering leaf.

Her father had suffered from a persistent cough for several years, but he insisted it was nothing and tried to fend off the bouts by smoking his pipe. He claimed it soothed his lungs, which had been damaged by mustard gas during the war. Despite being the Earl of Gosforth, Douglas had spent his career in the military and had been posted to Belgium just before the Battle of Ypres. Geneva privately thought the notion of treating compromised lungs with smoke was utter rubbish and that he needed to see a doctor, but there was no arguing with him. Besides, aside from the cough, he had been remarkably well until the past few weeks, when he'd caught some nasty bug. His hair was still thick, though now more gray than brown, and his face remained surprisingly unlined for a man of forty-six. Douglas's vision had deteriorated somewhat since returning from the front, and he now wore gold-rimmed reading specs, which, at present, reflected the

leaping firelight and made it difficult to discern the expression in his dark eyes.

"Sit down, Genny," he said. "I need to speak to you."

"Why was Mr. Lefferts here?" Geneva asked as she settled across from him. "Was it about Mrs. Lowry's pension?"

Their housekeeper had finally decided to retire but had promised to stay on for several more weeks after the new year to train her replacement, who would arrive on January the second.

"Yes, in part. But he and I had other matters to discuss."

"Anything I need to worry about?" Geneva asked.

She had been teasing, but the look on her father's face sent a chill down her spine. Whatever he wanted to discuss with her wasn't going to be pleasant.

"Genny, I've made a hash of things."

"What on earth do you mean, Father? Are we in debt, is that what you want to speak to me about?" she asked, thinking that was probably what he was referring to. Their staff was greatly diminished, and her father hadn't approved any significant new purchases since he'd come back from the front.

Douglas shook his head. "I should have got my affairs in order before I shipped out, but I couldn't bring myself to think about my own mortality. And I had to believe Jack would come back," he said, his voice cracking. "I had to trust your brother would get through it or I wouldn't have been able to do my job."

Geneva nodded but didn't reply. Jack had been her older brother, her best friend, and her confidant. He'd been her world. And then he was gone, and all she had was a photograph of him in his uniform before he'd shipped out. His smile was so cocky, so self-assured. Jack had never doubted he would come back. None of them had. He had been too alive to die. But then so had every other young man who had lost his life fighting a senseless war.

"Several months ago, I informed Mr. Lefferts I needed to make a will."

"Surely there's time," Geneva protested.

Douglas shook his head. "I'm afraid I've run out of time, Genny."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"When I saw Dr. Miller in September, he ordered some tests."

"Oh, God," Geneva moaned.

Douglas nodded. "Lung cancer. There's no treatment, I'm afraid."

“How long do you…?” She couldn’t bring herself to finish the sentence.

“It’s a matter of months.”

“Oh, Daddy,” Geneva cried. She hadn’t called him that since she was a little girl, but at the moment she felt like a child—frightened and in need of parental comfort. “Surely there’s something that can be done. Surgery, or maybe a stint at a sanatorium.”

Douglas shook his head. “The cancer has metastasized. It’s already in the lymph nodes and the bones. And it might have already attacked the brain.”

“No,” Geneva wailed. “Please, no.”

Douglas looked like he was going to cry. “I fear it gets worse, Genny.”

“How can it possibly be worse?”

Her father smiled ruefully. “Your mother always refused to discuss matters pertaining to the estate, and I suppose I have become accustomed to not talking things over with my family.”

“Good heavens, Father. Are we bankrupt too?”

“We’re not bankrupt. The estate is solvent.”

“Then what is it? What do we need to discuss now, today?”

She could barely keep the tears at bay and couldn’t wrap her head around matters of business when she had just been informed that she was about to lose her only surviving parent. In the eyes of the law, she was an adult, a woman capable of looking after herself, but she felt like a little girl who’d suddenly realized she was lost and didn’t know how to find her way home. How did one go on when everything was about to change? Again, when they had just learned how to live without people they had loved and still mourned.

Douglas sighed heavily, which led to a bout of coughing that lasted several minutes. He tried to stifle the spasms, but that only made it worse, and his face turned scarlet as blood rushed to his head. Spittle flew from his mouth, and his eyes bulged as the coughing intensified. Geneva sprang to her feet, desperate to help, but she knew from past experience that there was nothing she could do. The fit had to run its course, and it did, leaving her father panting and his hand shaking as he stuffed his handkerchief into his pocket and once again sucked on his pipe.

“I’m sorry,” he muttered.

“You have nothing to apologize for.”

Douglas lifted his hand to get her attention, and Geneva fell silent. He had something to tell her, and he needed to get it off his chest before another spasm overtook him and he was interrupted again.

"As soon as I received the results, I went to see Mr. Lefferts about my will. I should have consulted him sooner, I know. But the news came as something of a shock to me as well. And I'm so very sorry."

"Sorry about what?" Geneva wailed. "I don't understand."

"Genny, your great-grandfather had two daughters, and then, years later, when he was in his fifties, his second wife gave birth to a son. When the child was born, in an effort to prevent his daughters from inheriting, he entailed the estate."

"What does that mean?"

Geneva's grandfather had inherited Bellamy Hall, and her father had been next in the line. As the oldest, she would inherit when her father passed. Or so she had assumed, since Jack was no longer there to take up the reins.

"An entailment means that the estate can pass only to a male heir. Or the closest male relative if there's no direct heir. I had two sons, so there was no cause for concern, and the late Mr. Lefferts, the current Mr. Lefferts' father, never thought to warn me. And then Edwin died of smallpox, and Jack died at the Somme, and, suddenly, there was no male left to inherit. Had you married and had a boy, the title and estate would pass to your son, but now I must make sure you girls are provided for. So I had Mr. Lefferts make some inquiries."

"Inquiries about what?" Geneva whispered.

She was suddenly very cold despite the heat of the fire, since the truth of their predicament was finally beginning to sink in. As far as she knew, there were no male relations. The family was all women—her and Honor, Aunt Clarissa and Rose, and two unmarried female cousins who'd moved to a pensione near Florence a few years before Honor was born. Her father didn't have a brother or even a living male cousin, so there was no nephew who could come to the rescue.

"Surely the estate must pass to a female descendant if there's no one else to inherit," she said.

Douglas shook his head. "If there's no male heir, then the lot goes to a trustee. If there's no trustee, the estate is seized by the Crown."

"Is there a trustee?" Geneva asked, suddenly breathless.

Her father exhaled deeply. “The trustee was my father’s closest friend, John Marlow. The role passed to his son Jason upon his death. Jason passed two months ago. And Jason’s boy died in Belgium.”

“So, what happens now?”

Geneva was doing her best to hold back tears. This morning, her biggest dilemma had been whether she should meet Rory for lunch. Now her whole life was coming undone, and once her father was gone she and Honor might no longer have a home or an allowance to live on.

“As it turns out, there is a male relation,” Douglas said, and smiled for the first time since Geneva had walked into the library. “My father’s cousin, Alan, decamped to America when he was in his twenties. He was seduced by the promise of easy gold and went out to California.”

“Did he find gold?” Geneva asked.

She was surprised by the turn the conversation had taken, but seeing her father smile gave her some hope for the future. Perhaps this cousin would look after them until Geneva married. Then there would be the promise of a new generation.

“I believe he did, but I don’t know how much,” Douglas said with a shrug.

“And this Alan is to inherit?”

Douglas shook his head again. “Alan died some years ago, and it proved quite difficult to locate his widow, but Mr. Lefferts persevered, and the inquiry agent he’d engaged out in California eventually tracked Constance Bellamy to Montana. She married a rancher, of all things, so her surname had changed,” he said, sounding quite bemused. “Her son with Alan, Jesseph, is the only remaining male relation.”

“But that’s ridiculous. We’ve never even met him. Why can’t you add your own stipulation?” Geneva demanded. “Your grandfather changed the terms when it suited him. Why can’t you?”

“That’s not how these things work, my dear.”

“Surely it should be up to you who you leave your home to,” Geneva protested.

“My grandfather’s will was a legal document that was ratified by the court. I can’t simply ignore his wishes.”

“What do you even know about this Jesseph?”

“He’s in banking. And he lives in New York,” Douglas announced.

“How old is he?”

“I’m not exactly sure, but he can’t be more than thirty.”

“Is he married?”

“He is not.”

“Engaged?”

“I don’t believe so.”

“Did Mr. Lefferts speak to this man?” Geneva asked. Her father seemed uncertain of the most basic facts.

“No, but he wired him, and Jesseph replied by return cable. Then Mr. Lefferts sent him a letter explaining the situation.”

“What will happen to Honor and me once he moves into our home?”

It felt callous to speak of the future as though Douglas were already gone, but Geneva needed to understand what was going to happen. She was still reeling from her father’s revelation and would need time to absorb the sorrow and shock of it, but he had summoned her to discuss the future of Bellamy Hall, and that was where she had to keep her attention. The rest would come later, when she was alone and could give vent to her grief in private.

Douglas blanched, and Geneva knew she had reached the heart of the matter. It wasn’t only the house they stood to lose, but everything their life there had meant.

“Darling, the only way to ensure that you and Honor are provided for and that the next generation inherits the title and the estate is for you to marry Jesseph Bellamy. If he’s amenable.”

“Marry him?” Geneva cried. “I’ve never even clapped eyes on him. And what makes you think he’ll want to marry me? He’ll be a man of independent means, if he isn’t already. He’ll have no use for me, especially if he already has a sweetheart in New York.”

“Which is why you must charm him.”

Geneva opened her mouth to protest but then suddenly felt quite overcome. So much had been going on behind the scenes these past few months, and now the curtain had been pulled back, and her life had been blown up as if she’d just stepped on a landmine. Her father was dying, her home and the entirety of the estate would go to a complete stranger, and, if she hoped to stave off penury, she had to charm a relation she’d never met and hope he didn’t evict her and Honor the moment their father passed.

“I don’t think I can face it,” she whispered. “I don’t want to meet him.”

“I’m afraid you don’t have a choice. Jesseph is coming for Christmas.”

Geneva staggered from the room and had barely made it to the downstairs lavatory before she was sick. She flushed the toilet, washed her hands, and rinsed out her mouth, but the foul taste remained and her stomach continued to heave. The past half hour had been like a terrible dream, except she was wide awake and the nightmare was real. She wanted to march back into the library and tell her father that she would not do it and their American cousin could sod it, but she knew she couldn’t do that. She had been raised to do her duty, honor her parents, and do right by future generations.

As she leaned against the cool wall tiles and sucked in several deep breaths to combat the persistent nausea, she finally understood just how trapped she really was.

ELEVEN

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

A jarring noise jolted Quinn out of the vision. The irritating riff reverberated in her brain until awareness slammed into her like a ten-foot lorry. She'd forgotten to silence her mobile and someone was ringing—probably a telemarketer. They phoned her more often than family and friends these days. She grabbed the phone and huffed with irritation when she saw a photo of a smiling Rhys filling the screen.

"So, who is she?" he asked without bothering with pleasantries.

"I don't know yet. How did you…?"

"Colin told me he found an earring, and I have it on good authority that you visited the lab this afternoon."

"Oh, so you've been badgering him as well?" Quinn teased.

"Of course, and I'm dying to know. Have you taken a peek?"

"Yes," she said, drawing out the word to torment Rhys.

"And? Come on now. Inquiring minds want to know."

"1923."

"1923?"

Rhys sounded disappointed, but it wasn't as if Quinn had any say in the historical period. She reported what she saw. She knew Rhys would have preferred that the woman was Roman or medieval, but he would make the story work regardless, and she was sure he had already switched gears and was reframing the first shot in his mind.

"It could be intriguing," he said, sounding considerably more enthusiastic now. "That's only a hundred years ago. Recent history."

"It might be recent, but we won't find anyone who knew her. Even if they were a child at the time, they'd be long gone."

"But there are bound to be records. Have you got a name?" Rhys asked.

“Bellamy.”

“And her first name?” Rhys prompted.

“Geneva. She had a younger sister, Honor.”

Rhys went quiet, and Quinn knew he was googling the names on his phone.

“You’re not going to believe this, but there are hundreds of results for Geneva Bellamy. Not as many for Honor.”

“I believe it,” Quinn replied. “What did you think you were going to find? A headline that proclaimed Geneva to be missing and a follow-up article that laid out all the facts?”

“One can hope,” Rhys grumbled, then his attitude instantly brightened. “That wouldn’t make for good television, though, would it? We must encounter a few dead ends before we find an important lead. Draw out the mystery.” He didn’t wait for Quinn to comment but went on. “So, what’s the setup? The artifacts always take you to a turning point in the victim’s life, correct?”

“The Bellamys owned Bellamy Hall, which is the house that now belongs to Lynn Michaels. The father, Douglas Bellamy, was gravely ill, and the daughters were just about to discover that the estate is entailed.”

“That’s perfect!” Rhys exclaimed. “It’s just like *Downton Abbey*. And when that show ended, it left a void in the hearts and minds of its legions of fans that we can now fill. I love it!”

“*Downton Abbey* was a work of fiction, Rhys,” Quinn reminded him.

“But it was based on real, legal situations. Plenty of patriarchs entailed their estates to prevent them from being divided among the daughters or passing out of the family. I grant you, it probably wasn’t as common in 1923, but if the conditions had been set forth centuries before, and the family had never come up against a situation where there wasn’t a direct descendant, it would not have even figured into the equation.”

“Well, it did in this case, since there were only two daughters, and their father had months left to live.”

“Splendid!” Rhys exclaimed. “I knew this would be the one that would bring *Echoes from the Past* out of the archives. Is there a hot chauffeur? Oh, please tell me there is.”

“I don’t know yet.”

Quinn decided not to mention Rory Sullivan. She had yet to meet him, and, because the man was Irish, Rhys would latch on to the information and

immediately assume that the claddagh ring belonged to him.

"And you're sure it was Geneva in the well? Did she have short hair?" Rhys asked.

"Both sisters had long hair when I saw them. And there's a strong family resemblance between the two girls."

"All right. Keep me posted," Rhys said.

"I will ring you as soon as there's something to tell," Quinn promised.

She was amused by Rhys's eagerness but also hesitant to give in to her own excitement and her need to find out the answers. Hearing about something dreadful was not the same as experiencing it, and she knew that she would be put through an emotional wringer before she got to the end. And there wasn't going to be a happy ending. The body in the well pretty much blew any possibility of that out of the water, both literally and figuratively.

"All right, then. But don't take too long. You know what? I'm going to get on to the costume department. They can start working on the wardrobe. Are the sisters attractive? We'll need to put out a casting call."

"Hold your horses," Quinn replied with a chuckle. "You're getting ahead of—"

She didn't get to finish the sentence because her mobile beeped, indicating there was an incoming call. She was going to decline it until she saw the name on the screen. Primrose Nursery School.

"Rhys, I'm going to have to call you back," she said absentmindedly.

"You won't get rid of me so easily," Rhys was saying, but Quinn didn't let him finish, just switched to the other call.

TWELVE

"Mrs. Russell? Quinn Russell?" an anxious female voice asked as soon as Quinn answered.

"Speaking."

"Mrs. Russell, my name is Ruth Watley. I'm the head here at Primrose Nursery School. I'm sorry to disturb you, but we have you listed as the emergency contact for Max Wyatt."

"Yes, I'm his aunt. What's happened? Is Max all right?"

"Max is absolutely fine, but understandably emotional. His father did not come to collect him. All the other children have already left."

"Logan didn't show?"

"We waited and waited, but Mr. Wyatt didn't turn up, and we need to lock up."

"Did you ring him?"

"Yes," the woman said irritably. Of course they'd called him. That would have been the first thing they had done. "We rang his mobile several times, and we texted. He did not ring back."

"Please tell Max I'm on my way. And if you hear from my brother, kindly ask him to phone me."

"Of course. Thank you, Mrs. Russell. Max and I will wait for you."

Quinn dashed downstairs, grabbed her bag and car keys, told Gabe not to hold dinner, and sprinted out the door. It was nearly seven o'clock, and Logan usually collected Max at six. Logan had been something of a wild child in his youth and had been known to go on multiple-day benders, but this was so unlike him these days. He was a devoted father and had never forgotten to pick up Max or missed any important appointments or special days. Quinn called him several times on her way to the nursery school, but he did not pick up, and the texts had not been read. The next time she rang, she was informed that his mailbox was full, which meant that he had not picked up his messages in several hours. Probably not since Emma had texted him earlier that afternoon and he had responded.

Although Quinn had managed to hit every red light on the way, she made it to the school in under twenty minutes. Ruth and Max were playing a game, but as soon as he saw Quinn, a tearful Max threw himself into her arms and buried his face in her thigh.

"Where's Daddy?" he cried. "I want my daddy."

"Daddy had something very important to do, but I spoke to him, and he said you can have a sleepover with Alex. How does that sound?"

Max gazed up at her, his little face streaked with tears, suspicion and excitement warring for dominance in his expression. He looked so much like Logan that tears sprang to Quinn's eyes. He had the same thick black hair and hazel eyes, and when he finally smiled he wore that familiar look —one that suggested he was keeping the most wonderful secret and could scarcely wait to share it.

"Daddy said I could have a sleepover? He will come tomorrow?" Max pressed.

Quinn nodded, suddenly unable to speak. She hated to lie to him because, whereas some children would be happy to spend time with their cousins and wouldn't bother to question the reasons too closely, Max was a sensitive, anxious child and would continue to fret. She was beside herself with worry, but she didn't want to pass on her fears to her nephew, who was already on edge, his eyes seeking reassurance.

"Yes," Quinn promised. "Daddy will come for you tomorrow. Get your satchel and coat."

Max ran towards a row of colorful cubbies, and Quinn turned to Ruth.

"Thank you so much for waiting with him," she said. "I'm sorry it took so long."

Ruth tilted her head to the side and studied Quinn's tense face. "Is Mr. Wyatt all right?"

"I don't know," Quinn said. "This is so unlike him."

"He's a great dad. I had hoped he got stuck on the tube or had to work late, but, even if that had been the case, he would have phoned to let us know."

"I wasn't able to get in touch with him," Quinn said. "And I'm really worried."

"I'm sure there's a perfectly reasonable explanation."

Quinn detested platitudes, but what else could the woman reasonably say? She had stayed late already and probably longed to get home and enjoy

what was left of her evening. Quinn didn't want to detain her any longer, so she took Max by the hand and led him to the car, now grateful that she still had Mia's child seat in the boot. As soon as he was securely buckled, she guided the car into traffic and headed for home. Max, who had exhausted himself with worrying and was nearly ready for bed, fell asleep, his head lolling to the side and his hand clutching the strap of his bag as if he were afraid to let it go.

Gabe stepped outside as soon as the car pulled up. "What happened? You left so fast."

"Logan never showed, Max was upset, and the woman who waited with him needed to lock up. I couldn't get hold of Logan, Gabe."

Gabe took that onboard but didn't say anything. Instead, he opened the back door, unbuckled Max, and carefully lifted the child into his arms. Max immediately woke and wrapped his arms around Gabe's neck.

"Hello, Uncle Gabe," he said sleepily.

"Hello, mate. Are you hungry?"

Max nodded.

"Then you're just in time."

"Can we watch a film after dinner?" Max asked.

"What time do you normally go to bed?" Gabe asked, even though he knew perfectly well.

"Eleven o'clock," Max replied without missing a beat.

"Somehow I don't think that's true."

"Ten o'clock," Max cried, now enjoying the game.

"Nah, I don't think so," Gabe replied.

"Nine o'clock."

"Probably more like eight," Gabe guessed.

"Half eight?" Max pleaded.

"If it's OK with Aunt Quinn."

"Is it?" Max asked, turning to her.

"Just this once."

Quinn grabbed Max's things and followed them inside. She was both worried and furious with Logan. If something had come up, she would have gladly collected Max, but the fact that Logan hadn't bothered to notify anyone had really rattled her.

Where the hell was he, and what was she supposed to tell Max if Logan didn't show tomorrow morning?

THIRTEEN

As soon as Max was on the sofa, comfortably wedged between Alex and Mia, and his attention fixed on the TV, Quinn escaped to the study. She phoned Logan one more time, then sent another text, which also remained unread. She then sent him messages through Facebook, Instagram, and X, and emailed him for good measure, before she called the London Hospital, where he worked as a nurse. After she got transferred to various departments and put on hold for nearly a quarter of an hour, she was finally connected to one of Logan's coworkers, who told her that Logan's shift had ended at five o'clock. Quinn called his friend Pamela, but she hadn't heard from him since the previous weekend and didn't know where Logan might have gone or with whom. Quinn even called Rafe, but he brusquely told her he was no longer in contact with his ex and had no idea what Logan got up to.

Frightened and at a loss, Quinn did the one thing she had promised herself she wouldn't do. She rang Jude. She hated to alarm him, especially when he was in another country and couldn't possibly help, but she needed to speak to someone who loved Logan and Max, and who might at least offer her some advice and emotional support.

"Hey, Quinny." Jude sounded happy and relaxed when he answered the call, and she could hear Tamzin's voice in the background as she talked to the children. "How are things?"

"Have you heard from Logan today?" Quinn asked. She couldn't bring herself to engage in several minutes of small talk before getting to the point.

"Yeah. He sent me a meme."

"But you did not speak with him?"

"No. Why?"

Quinn filled Jude in, and his tone instantly changed to one of concern. "That's not like him at all. Max is his world."

"I'm really getting scared now, Jude."

"Don't panic. There must be a reasonable explanation."

Quinn inhaled sharply. “What sort of reasonable explanation would account for Logan suddenly not replying to anyone?”

“I don’t know,” Jude admitted. “Even if Logan lost his wallet and his phone, he’d find a way to get to the nursery. It’s not that far from the hospital. He would have walked.”

“Unless he couldn’t,” Quinn said, her voice hitching.

“Logan has you listed as his emergency contact in his phone. Someone would have phoned if something had happened to him.”

“But what if he didn’t have his phone on him?”

“He would tell them.”

“Unless he couldn’t,” Quinn said again. “What if he was hit by a car? Or attacked?”

“Quinn, you’re letting fear get the better of you.”

“That’s because I don’t know what to do,” Quinn exclaimed. “Where do I go? Whom do I call?”

“What about that friend of yours, the writer?” Jude suggested. “Nicole?”

“What about her?”

“Isn’t her father-in-law the chief constable?”

“He retired.”

“OK, but he was a policeman for decades, right? Maybe he can offer some advice. Or better yet, make a few calls.”

“That’s a good idea,” Quinn conceded. “I’ll ring her.”

“Do you need me to come?” Jude asked. “I can be on the next flight to London.”

“No. I’m still hoping Logan will turn up, apologize, explain, and take the bollocking I intend to give him with good grace.”

“I hope so too. Because I’m not prepared to consider the alternative. Is Max OK?”

“He’s watching *Haunted Mansion* with Alex and Mia. He’s anxious, though. He keeps looking at the door, as if he expects Logan to walk in at any moment.”

“Not having their parent come for them is one of the most frightening things to happen to a child, and Max already has crippling separation anxiety, thanks to Rafe. That wanker,” Jude added under his breath.

Quinn agreed with Jude’s assessment of Rafe’s betrayal, but now was not the time to bash Logan’s ex. And she could admit—though not to Logan

or Jude—that the situation hadn't been entirely Rafe's fault. When Logan and Rafe had announced they were having a baby, Quinn had seen hundreds of red flags snapping in the wind, but it hadn't been her place to tell her brother that his new partner was still a child himself and that, from her vantage point, the relationship was clearly never going to last.

Logan had wanted a child with an intensity that bordered on desperation, and it was this nonnegotiable desire to become a father that had led to the breakup with Colin, with whom Logan had happily cohabited for years. Colin had loved their life as it was and hadn't wanted to complicate it by bringing a baby into the mix. Now Colin was in a loving relationship with Adam, and Logan was alone, embittered, and too afraid to expose Max to another partner who might not stay.

"Should I keep Max at home tomorrow if I don't hear from Logan?" Quinn asked.

"I think you should take him to school. Any disruption to his routine will only make him more anxious. At school, he will be surrounded by other children and kept busy. At home, he will be watching you for any sign of trouble. You know how observant he is."

"That's true. Thanks, Jude."

"Please, keep me posted. I will leave immediately, day or night, if you need me to come."

"I'll ring you tomorrow. Say hello to Tamzin and the girls."

"Will do."

Quinn ended the call and selected Nicole's number. Her friend picked up on the second ring.

"Hi. I'm so glad you called," Nicole said eagerly. "How did it go? Was Colin able to determine the cause of death?"

Like Gabe, Nicole was fascinated by Quinn's gift and eager to vicariously experience her forays into the past. Quinn had helped Nicole several times with her own research and had even been able to offer reassurance when Nicole's husband's younger sister, Edie, had disappeared on her way to work several months ago. Edie had narrowly avoided a terrible fate, but although she had been rescued, and just in time, the young woman hadn't been the same since and had relocated to the States, where she wasn't assaulted by memories of her ordeal every time she left her flat. And now Quinn hoped Nicole might return the favor.

“I’m actually calling for a different reason,” she said and quickly explained what was happening.

“Oh, God,” Nicole said softly, and Quinn knew that she was thinking of Edie. “I’ll ring Sean straight away.” She paused. “Maybe it would be better if you spoke to him directly. He knows you, and I’m sure he’ll be happy to help. I’ll send you his mobile number.”

“Thank you,” Quinn said. “I appreciate that.”

“Anything Kyle and I can do, you only have to ask.”

Quinn wished Nicole a good night and opened the text containing Sean’s number. She made the call and waited with trepidation for Sean Cadogan to answer the phone.

FOURTEEN

Sean was a lovely man, and Quinn did not feel any awkwardness as she explained the situation and asked for his advice. She knew he wouldn't dismiss her fears, but neither would he stoke them unnecessarily. What she really wanted was for Sean to tell her that everything would be all right and Logan would return to them unharmed, but he wouldn't do that either. He would give her his honest opinion, both as a friend and as an experienced policeman.

"Who is it, darling?" Sean's wife, Carla, called out in the background when there was a lull in the conversation. "Is it Edie?"

"It's Quinn."

"*Echoes from the Past* Quinn? What does she—?"

"I'm sorry about that," Sean said as it grew quiet in the background. He must have walked into the bedroom and shut the door.

"What should I do, Sean?" Quinn asked. "Should I go to the police?"

"Give Logan until tomorrow afternoon," Sean advised.

"Because someone needs to be missing twenty-four hours to file a missing persons report?" she asked.

"That's not strictly true, but in the case of an adult, it's advisable to wait. People go AWOL all the time. It's irresponsible and inconsiderate, but not answering one's messages for a few hours doesn't prove that the person has been a victim of a crime or in an accident. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the misper turns up on their own, looking shamefaced and spouting excuses."

"But what if Logan doesn't come back?" Quinn asked.

Sean's advice made perfect sense when applied to strangers, but Quinn knew with unwavering certainty that Logan would never not show up for Max. Anyone else, but never his baby.

"We'll deal with that if it happens," Sean said, and the use of *we* made Quinn feel a little calmer. She trusted Sean and knew he would do everything he could to help if the situation escalated.

“Is Logan seeing anyone?” Sean asked. His tone was casual, but Quinn knew her answer mattered.

“He hasn’t been in a serious relationship since he and Rafe Hoffman broke up a few years ago.”

“But that doesn’t mean he hasn’t been dating,” Sean replied.

“Do you think he went off with some random bloke?” Quinn retorted. She didn’t mean to sound angry or defensive, but that was the way it had come out, and she was instantly contrite. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. It’s only that Logan wouldn’t do that.”

“That’s not what I was getting at,” Sean replied calmly. He had dealt with countless worried family members over his thirty-year career with the Met and had probably heard it all.

“What, then?”

Sean sighed. “There are individuals who are unable to deal with rejection. When someone is assaulted—and I’m not saying that’s what happened to Logan—it’s rarely random. That does happen, of course, but a strong young man is not a likely candidate for a mugging. Those looking to rob someone of their valuables will choose someone they can easily overpower. So when an individual is targeted, chances are the victim and the perp have crossed paths before.”

“You think Logan was attacked by someone he’d gone out with?” Quinn asked.

“It’s not beyond the realm of possibility. What’s Logan’s dating MO?”

“What do you mean?”

“Is he the sort of person to see someone a few times, or is he more of a one-night stand kind of guy?” Sean asked patiently.

“I really couldn’t tell you. Logan has been in two committed relationships since I first met him, but he’s been single for a while now. I have no idea what his MO might be, or if he even has one. Perhaps that depends on who he’s seeing.”

“Let’s put his love life on the back burner for now,” Sean suggested. “Is there anyone who might hold a grudge against him? Anyone he’s had an altercation with recently?”

“Like whom?”

“Maybe a disgruntled patient, or a relative who took offense at something Logan said or did while caring for their loved one.”

“And so they kidnapped him and are holding him hostage?” Quinn exclaimed, horrified by the suggestion.

“I’m not suggesting that Logan was kidnapped, but maybe someone approached him, an argument ensued, and things turned nasty.”

“Logan left work at five o’clock. It’s now after eight. Even if that happened, it would have been hours ago,” Quinn reasoned.

“Maybe he went to A&E.” *Or was taken to A&E and was in no condition to ask anyone to ring his next of kin* seemed to hang in the ether between them.

“Should I ring the hospitals?” Quinn asked.

“Any injuries that are a result of obvious violence or a serious accident will be reported to the police by A&E staff, so you don’t need to do that. If anything happened, the police would come to you. They would be able to track down Logan’s next of kin even if he was unable to tell them himself.”

“So, I just wait for news and hope someone comes?” Quinn cried, a tad hysterically.

“Quinn, you need to keep a cool head,” Sean replied calmly. “I know you’re worried, but Logan has been out of touch for less than four hours. If he was a minor, I would be more concerned, but he’s a healthy, fit man in his thirties. If he doesn’t surface by tomorrow morning, let me know, and I’ll make some calls. Until then, try to remain calm. That little boy will be watching you for any sign of fear, and he will know if something is wrong and internalize it. So until you’re sure that something really is wrong, you carry on as normal.”

“Should I go to Logan’s house and check if he’s there?” Quinn asked in a last-ditch effort to identify something she could do.

“No. If the police need to get involved, they will have to search the premises, and you might unwittingly destroy crucial evidence. I know it’s hard, but please, be patient.”

“All right. Thank you, Sean,” Quinn said contritely.

“You’re very welcome. I’ll speak to you tomorrow.”

Quinn ended the call and set aside her phone. She acknowledged that Sean was right on all counts, but her insides twisted with apprehension. The best thing she could do was to focus on the practicalities. She found a T-shirt, track bottoms, and a sweatshirt Alex had outgrown and set them aside for Max to wear to school tomorrow. Then she prepared pajamas and took out the hooded towel Alex used to love. The hood had a monkey face and

brown terrycloth ears. She'd give Max a bath, put him to bed, and tomorrow she'd take him to nursery. Then she'd pop to the shops and pick up a few things for him. He couldn't keep wearing Alex's cast-offs.

She paused just as she was about to turn on the taps in the bath, having realized that she was already assuming Logan wouldn't come back. That frightened her even more. Despite Sean's calm reassurance that Logan was most likely all right, deep down she knew something was wrong and she had just gone into crisis mode. It took all her self-control not to show Max that she was worried. She gave him a bath, made sure he brushed his teeth, and put him to bed on a foldout sofa in Alex's room. Max was asleep in moments, Alex's teddy bear tucked up against his side.

By the time she got into bed herself, Quinn was thrumming with anxiety, and Gabe gathered her into his arms and held her close until his breathing slowed and he fell into a deep sleep. Knowing she wouldn't be able to rest, Quinn reached for the plastic case and closed her fingers around the delicate earring. She may as well see what happened next.

FIFTEEN

NOVEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Despite the early hour, the house was silent that evening. After an emotionally charged afternoon, Douglas had taken to his bed, and Honor's reaction to the news had been so volatile that, after hours of listening to her sister rage and weep, Geneva felt utterly depleted. She had been forced to leave Honor to wrestle with her grief alone and had sought refuge in the quiet of her own room. She had settled into her favorite chair by the window and had not found the will to move for several hours.

During the day, the parkland and the beach were lovely, but now the nearly bare trees stood like sooty smudges against the night sky, and hazy moonlight filtered through gauzy clouds drifting lazily overhead. Waves crashed against the shore, and the sea that sparkled playfully in the sunlight now looked like an oily puddle of petrol that stretched towards the horizon. As she stared out, Geneva felt a desolation she had not known since her mother's death—and then Jack's, the news of which had reached them only two weeks later. Douglas had still been at the front, leaving her and Honor alone, two young girls shattered by loss and completely unprepared to shoulder their grief unsupported. When their father had eventually returned, it had taken time and sheer determination to claw their way back to something resembling normality. But now that thin veneer of acceptance had been stripped away, and their old wound had been torn open and bleeding again.

More than anything, Geneva wanted to close her eyes and let this awful day come to an end, but she knew she wouldn't be able to sleep. She needed to confide in someone, to talk through her options, but there was no one she could turn to—at least not within the house. The servants had to sense that something was wrong, but it would be unfair to burden them with the details before she had more information and could offer either

reassurance or, if it came to it, severance and a character reference. Her father would be furious if he discovered what she was about to do, but she could not bear the weight of her suffering alone. Not tonight.

She padded downstairs in stockinged feet, tugged on a pair of wellies, a waxed jacket, and a flat cap she found in the mudroom, then slipped quietly out the door. If anyone happened to look out a window, they would simply take her for the gardener. The night was cold and dark, but the walk was short—barely a quarter of a mile—and she knew the way by heart. Geneva walked past the garage and then hurried around the stable block, and down the narrow path that led to the row of cottages tied to the estate. Before the war, all the cottages had been occupied, but now two were empty, the families who'd lost their menfolk gone to the cities, where they had a better shot at making a living. The cottages were in a reasonable state of repair, thanks to Rory, but they were not equipped with gas lines or wired for electricity. And they likely wouldn't be now unless the new owner decided to modernize.

If the light in Rory's cottage wasn't on, she'd turn back, Geneva decided, but the glow of an oil lamp beckoned her forward and she knocked softly on the door, mindful of alerting Mr. Blatt, the gardener, to her presence. When Rory appeared in the doorway, he was dressed in a pair of cords and an open-necked shirt. Geneva had never seen him in anything but a tweed suit, starched shirt, and tie, and was momentarily taken aback by his casual appearance. An auburn forelock had fallen into his face, and his jaw was shadowed with evening stubble. Rory's eyes widened at the sight of her, and his forehead creased with concern.

"Geneva, is everything all right?" he asked. He had finally agreed to stop calling her Lady Geneva when they were alone together, but he had yet to call her Genny.

"May I come in?" she asked, her voice quavering with uncertainty.

"Of course."

Rory stepped aside, and Geneva slipped inside. The cottage was tiny, with just two rooms and a privy out back. The furniture was outmoded, and included some pieces brought from the big house once they had been discarded. A tufted wingchair stood before the hearth, and there was a small table and two chairs, and a sideboard that held a few pieces of crockery. There was also an ancient range, but Rory took his meals at the house and probably didn't light it unless he wanted to make a cup of tea or generate

some heat during the winter months. The door to the bedroom stood open, and Geneva caught sight of a bed covered with a blue quilt, a wooden chest with rounded brass fittings, and a narrow wardrobe. Seeing where Rory slept felt awfully intimate, and she dragged her gaze away.

Perhaps she shouldn't have come, she thought as she allowed Rory to take her jacket and cap and settled in the wingchair. Geneva had never shared her worries with anyone outside the family, not even when she was a little girl. She was the sort of person to retreat to her room and hide in a book until she felt more in control, but she found herself pouring out the whole story as soon as Rory pulled up a chair and joined her by the fire.

When she had finished, Rory walked over to the sideboard, took out a half-full bottle of whisky, and poured two fingers' worth into a glass.

"Get that down ye," he said as he handed her the glass and watched as Geneva threw back the drink as if it were water. The whisky was fiery and tasted awful, but the heat was also strangely comforting, and she held out the glass for a refill.

"Slow down," Rory said when she started on the second drink. He took the glass from her once she'd finished the whisky and set it on the mantel. He was silently cutting her off.

"I don't know what to do," Geneva cried. "I've never felt so lost, not even after Mother and Jack died."

She had still had her father then, and the members of staff she'd known all her life. Now it would be just her and her sister, and she would have to look after Honor and depend on a man whose name she had never heard until that afternoon. Possibly as his wife, but the prospect made her feel as if she were about to become a prisoner of war rather than the lady of the manor.

Rory reached for her hand and held it between his own. "There is nothing to be done, lass," he said softly.

"What do you mean? There's always something one can do. Isn't there?"

Rory shook his head. "Not in this instance. Yer father is dying, Geneva, and his end won't be either painless or peaceful. Ye can't ruin what's left of his time on this earth with childish arguments and pointless recriminations. He didn't entail the estate, some long-dead ancestor did. And I assure ye, this hurts him a lot more than it hurts ye."

“I doubt it,” Geneva muttered. Rory smiled softly at her but didn’t say anything, so she went on. “Surely he can choose to ignore this ridiculous clause.”

“I don’t know how these things work, mind, but if Mr. Lefferts wasn’t able to find a way then I don’t suppose yer father could have.”

“But I’ve never even seen this man, Rory. And he’s going to get it all. Every last thing,” Geneva wailed.

“So he will.”

“And Father wants me to marry him,” she cried.

“I can see why he would,” Rory replied thoughtfully.

He was so infuriatingly rational, Geneva began to regret her decision to come. She had hoped Rory would share her outrage and propose various schemes for thwarting Jesseph Bellamy from inheriting what should rightfully be hers and Honor’s, but his quiet acceptance made her feel even angrier and more alone.

“I’ve got to go,” Geneva said and sprang to her feet.

Rory got to his feet too and pulled her into his arms.

“Ye needn’t worry,” he whispered softly in her ear. “I will look after ye. We can get married and live our own life. We don’t need the estate. We only need each other.”

Geneva felt herself relax and leaned into Rory, her cheek resting against his solid chest. Perhaps the effects of the whisky were finally making themselves known, or maybe it was because this was what she had hoped for all along, but she suddenly felt deliciously languid and a little too warm. Rory held her close and stroked her hair, and she felt safe and cared for. It was such a lovely dream he offered, but things were never that simple, not when legacies and estates were involved.

“What about Honor?” she muttered, choosing to focus on the human cost rather than the holdings and wealth that would be lost to her.

“Honor can live with us until she finds her own life,” Rory said softly. “Just bide yer time, my wee Genny, and when ye’re ready, I’ll be right here, waiting.”

“Do you really mean that, Rory?” she asked. She loved that he had called her his “wee Genny.” It made her feel closer to him.

“Of course I do.”

Geneva wanted to ask if that meant they were now engaged but decided against it. She’d sprung this on Rory, and he had responded with

his heart, not his head. He needed time to think, and so did she. She lifted her face and Rory kissed her, his lips claiming hers with tender promise.

It was only the third time they had kissed, but this time was different. When the gentle kiss became more urgent, fueled by desperation and strong liquor, Geneva found she didn't have the strength to resist. It felt so good to be held, and desired, and to feel that she wasn't terrifyingly alone. She allowed Rory to pull her closer and matched him kiss for kiss, and before she knew it he had her cardigan off and was unbuttoning her blouse as he maneuvered her through the open door and into the bedroom. She knew she should put a stop to it before things went too far, but her body seemed to have a mind of its own, and her hands went to the buckle of his belt as he unbuttoned her skirt and she stepped out of the wellies.

Rory's skin was warm beneath her hands, and a sprinkling of auburn hair covered his chest and glowed on his arms. His blue eyes looked almost black in the semidarkness of the bedroom, and his breath was ragged with need. Before she knew it, Geneva was in her brassiere and silk knickers, and Rory's cords were on the floor. His hands roamed over her body, caressing every inch of her. His touch awoke feelings that were new and inexplicably urgent, but, as he slid his fingers inside her knickers, it suddenly felt intrusive and wrong. Geneva instinctively tensed.

"It's all right," Rory whispered. "Try to relax."

"Rory, I—" she began, but he was intent on his task and not really paying attention. "Rory," Geneva tried again as she planted her hands on his chest and tried to push him away.

She wasn't ready for this and needed to slow things down. But Rory silenced her protests with kisses that were now a bit rough, and before she knew it he'd parted her legs with his knee and had pinned her down with his body. Instead of feeling aroused, Geneva felt trapped, and the things he was doing to her seemed like a violation. She tried to shift him, but he was too heavy. And then it was too late.

"God, ye're beautiful," Rory panted as he thrust into her. "My wee angel."

Geneva tried not to fight it, and, after a few moments, the act became more pleasurable. At least it no longer hurt. And then Rory stopped, but did not get off her. He brushed a stray lock out of her face and smiled into her eyes. He looked so happy.

“Ye’ll enjoy it more next time,” he said. “The first time is never good for the lasses.”

How many lasses have you deflowered? Geneva wanted to ask but remained silent.

“Are you all right, love?” Rory asked as he finally rolled off her.

Geneva nodded. She couldn’t trust herself to speak. She had dreamed of what it would be like to have a man make love to her, but this had been nothing like what she had envisioned. It wasn’t beautiful and romantic but painful, quick, and rather awkward. As she lay naked atop Rory’s quilt, she suddenly felt exposed and ashamed, and all she wanted was to cover her nudity and be on her own.

Rory handed her a handkerchief and said, “Here, clean yerself up.”

Geneva’s cheeks burned with mortification as he took the handkerchief from her and showed her what he meant. Then he balled it up and threw it on the floor.

“I have to go,” she choked out. “I will be missed.”

“I’ll walk ye back,” Rory said. He was already pulling on his clothes. “Unless ye want to have another go,” he added and smiled suggestively.

“No,” she cried. “Really, I must get back. You don’t need to walk me.”

She hastily dressed and almost sprinted towards the door as soon as she put on her jacket and boots, and pulled the cap low over her eyes. But Rory blocked the way.

“Genny, ye needn’t worry. It will be all right,” he promised. “We will be married, and it will be like this always.” He kissed her again, his tongue sliding into her mouth. “We’ll be together every night,” he whispered when she broke the kiss and pulled away.

“Yes,” Geneva croaked and ran out into the silent night.

SIXTEEN

Geneva felt better once she was on her own and her unease began to recede. She was being silly, she told herself as she hurried down the path. Of course it would be embarrassing and uncomfortable the first time. She had no experience of these things and had not been prepared. She and Rory had been overtaken by passion, just like the lovers in the romance novels she liked to read. But Rory had been tender and gentle, and had tried to reassure her when he had sensed that she was spooked. And now the difficult part was behind her and the lovemaking was bound to get better with time.

Much as she hoped that was true, it wasn't the most pressing concern to occupy her mind. Rory's proposal had felt like a life preserver thrown to a drowning woman, and Geneva was buoyed by his affection and commitment to her, but as she neared the house her optimism began to ebb, and she acknowledged that her relief was nothing more than a temporary reprieve from the inevitable. For one, there was the estate, and her father would be heartbroken if she was to walk away from the home and land her family had cherished for generations. For another, there was Honor, and the staff, who would look to her for confirmation that everything would continue as before once Douglas passed. Geneva could hardly leave it to some unknown relation to look after them properly.

And then there were the differences in her and Rory's stations and their faiths. They hadn't come up against any real obstacles yet, but that was because they had kept their budding romance secret and had never had to settle on a compromise. Rory went to Mass, and Geneva attended St. Michael's with her family, and had done since she was christened there as an infant. Rory was Catholic, and he might want his children to be raised in his faith. And if her children were to be brought up in the Catholic Church, Geneva would have no choice but to convert, a prospect she didn't relish. But it wouldn't do to have a divided family, in which she might one day become an outsider and possibly even the enemy.

And who would even marry them? A Catholic priest would not perform the ceremony if Geneva wasn't indoctrinated into the faith, and the vicar of St. Michael's wouldn't be too keen to marry her to a Papist. Conversion seemed like the logical solution, but was she prepared to make such a commitment and live as a Catholic in a country that was predominantly Protestant? And would Rory even wish to stay? He might want to go back to Ireland so they could be closer to his family. Was she ready to promise him that?

Geneva supposed if she loved the man, she'd have to accept his background and faith, but if she were honest, the question of religion felt weightier than the question of love or the prospect of lifelong commitment. Was that a sign that she had doubts? Did Rory? Did he assume she would do whatever was necessary to make their marriage work? Would he? They had never spoken of these things. Until tonight, they had never discussed marriage, or even their immediate future. They'd stepped out a couple of times in recent weeks and had avoided focusing on their differences, instead giving in to their mutual attraction, and allowing it to carry them on a wave of emotion. But now the wave was about to crash against the rocks, and they would either be broken apart or find a way to float.

Geneva came to a sudden stop as another realization dawned on her. Rory had offered to marry her, but, although he'd told her she was beautiful, he'd spoken no words of love. What if he had his own reasons for offering her a future? Geneva resumed walking, her steps slow and ponderous, the brief surge of hope firmly replaced by fear and doubt.

The only thing she knew for certain as she crossed the darkened foyer and started up the stairs to her room was that nothing would ever be the same. For any of them.

SEVENTEEN

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

It was still dark when Quinn came awake, but, although she had ample time until her alarm went off, there was no way she could go back to sleep. She reached for her mobile, her heart aflutter with hope, and turned the screen away from Gabe so as not to wake him. It was just after five o'clock, and she realized with mounting panic that her mobile had been silenced since ten o'clock, per the schedule she had set. She should have thought to take it off Do Not Disturb, in case Logan tried to call, but there were no missed calls. There was, however, a text sent from an unregistered number just after midnight. Quinn opened it.

Keep Max safe. Don't involve the police.

The text had to be from Logan. Perhaps he'd lost his phone, or maybe he couldn't text from his own number. Or what if someone was impersonating him?

She decided to risk it and immediately replied.

Where are you? What happened?

But the message showed undelivered. Perhaps Logan was out of range, or maybe he'd taken out the SIM card or had disposed of the phone. Something was clearly very wrong, but she now had more questions than answers, and she wasn't about to get any clarity.

"What is it?" Gabe asked as he came awake and peered at the screen over her shoulder.

Quinn passed him the phone. "What does this mean?" she exclaimed, her frustration boiling over.

"It means Logan is in trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

“Maybe he got mixed up in something he shouldn’t have,” Gabe said disloyally.

“But what if someone else sent that text? Logan could be in danger, and now they know I won’t go to the police because I’ll think that I’m following Logan’s instructions. What should I do?”

“Tell Sean. It’s the only thing you can do.”

Quinn shook her head. “I just don’t understand. Logan hasn’t put a foot wrong since Max was born, and he hardly goes out these days. He responded when Emma texted him yesterday afternoon. What could have happened since then?” She turned to look Gabe full in the face. “Do you know anything?”

“I swear, I don’t,” he replied. “If there’s anyone Logan would have confided in, it’s you. Or Jude.”

“He never said anything to either of us. What should I tell Jude?”

“Tell him the truth.”

“But he’ll want to come,” Quinn replied.

“Maybe he should. You shouldn’t have to deal with this yourself, whatever *this* is.”

“I’m scared, Gabe. If this was Logan, he expressly told me to keep Max safe, which must mean he’s in danger. And what do we tell Max? He’ll know something is wrong, but he’s too young to comprehend anything beyond the fact that his dad is not here.”

“Well, we certainly don’t tell him his father might be in trouble. Let’s tell him Logan had to go on a work trip.”

“I hate to lie to him.”

“It’s better than frightening him. We can tell him more once we know what we’re dealing with.”

“All right,” Quinn agreed. “Do you think it’s safe to take Max to nursery school?”

Gabe considered the question. “The school won’t allow anyone who was not previously authorized by Logan to take Max out of the building. I think he’ll be safe, but maybe you should consult Sean before you decide. I trust his judgment.”

Quinn nodded. “I don’t think I should call him from the house. Max might overhear the conversation.”

She could hardly phone Sean this early in the morning, so she would have to wait until at least eight, by which time Max would be up and getting

ready for school.

"You can go for a walk or phone Sean from the car," Gabe suggested. "I'll ask Max to help me make breakfast. He won't suspect a thing."

"Thank you," Quinn said and hugged him. "I don't know what I would do without you."

"Well, let's hope you never have to find out," Gabe said and pulled her close. "It's too early to get up, and you're extremely tense. Let me give you a massage."

Quinn knew precisely what sort of massage he had in mind but didn't protest. There was nothing she could do at this moment, and Gabe was right, she was tense, and he always knew how to make her feel better. She surrendered to his ministrations until she heard Max's piping voice calling for her from Alex's bedroom.

"I got him," Gabe said. He jumped out of bed, pulled on jeans and a T-shirt, and headed for the door.

Quinn dressed, took a quick shower and brushed her teeth, then pulled her hair into a ponytail and was out the door before Max could ask her about Logan. She was in no mood to walk, but speaking in front of the house was risky, so she got into her car and pulled out her mobile. Sean answered on the second ring.

"I'm sorry to ring so early," Quinn began, but Sean cut across her.

"What happened? You wouldn't be calling me otherwise."

Quinn told him about the text and expressed her concerns. "What do you think, Sean? Should I go to the police?"

"No," he replied. "Logan is clearly not missing, so there's nothing to report."

"But he might be in danger."

Quinn had hoped that Sean would help her to decipher Logan's cryptic message, but all he was telling her to do was wait, which was the hardest thing. And she needed to explain the situation to Max. She might be able to hold off on the conversation for a few hours, but once she collected him from school, she'd need to tell him something, since Logan would have called and asked to speak to him if he were really on a business trip.

"I don't know why Logan didn't use his own phone, but if he's able to text, for the moment we have to assume he's safe. The only reasonable advice I can give you is to do nothing until you hear from him again and know more."

“Thank you, Sean. I appreciate your help.”

“Don’t mention it. Let me know if you hear from him again.”

“I will,” Quinn promised.

She knew she should go back into the house, but she couldn’t seem to find the strength to get out of the car. It had taken her hours to fall asleep last night, and now she was tired and cross. She was also angry. Logan had sent the text at a time when he’d hoped she’d be asleep. He had not wanted her to answer, nor had he planned on giving her more information until he was good and ready. He didn’t have to ask her to look after Max. She would do so regardless, so the only reason he’d messaged her was to warn her off reporting his disappearance to the police.

“What are you mixed up in, Logan?” she said under her breath as she finally reached for the door handle.

Max appeared to be in good spirits when Quinn dropped him off, and asked if they could have pizza for dinner. That was a promise she could confidently make, so she gave him a hug and a kiss by the gate and watched him run through the door. Ruth Watley gave her a friendly wave, then disappeared inside once all the children had gone in. Quinn returned to the car and considered her options. She could go for a walk to clear her head, but she was too tired, and not in the mood to be around other people. She could research the Bellamys but thought that was premature. She preferred to allow the story to play out in its own time without jumping ahead.

Taken together, the earring and the claddagh ring were confirmation of the victim’s identity, which was an important first step in any investigation. She now knew who, where, and how. What she needed was the why. And she could also use a distraction from her mounting concern for Logan. Ready to dive in, Quinn got herself a large coffee, texted Nicole to thank her for her help, then set off for home. She had work to do.

EIGHTEEN

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

It had been nearly a month since her father had made his announcement, but, instead of making peace with the situation, Geneva found it harder and harder to go on, knowing he had only a few months left to live. Douglas was fading fast, the strength of will he had relied on to fight his illness finally giving out. Honor alternated between sulky silences and emotion-fueled outbursts. And Rory, although understanding of Geneva's distress, was growing impatient, since his future also hung in the balance, both personally and professionally. But she couldn't bring herself to give him an answer. Not yet. And she had not gone to his cottage since the night she'd told him of her predicament, despite his insistence that they needed to talk. She wasn't ready to talk, nor was she ready to engage in renewed intimacy. Not unless she meant to marry him. Rory was right, they had much to discuss, but all that would have to wait.

As the day of Jesseph's arrival drew ever closer, she became more emotional and short-tempered. It was as if she were being marched to her own execution, and the anticipation of what was to come was becoming almost worse than the thing itself. She didn't want to meet the man, but she also understood that it was best to face him rather than allow him to grow larger and more terrifying in her mind. At least then she'd know what she was up against and might find a way to reason with him once he was nothing more than flesh and bone rather than some mythical monster.

She hadn't said so to her father, but, as far as she was concerned, marriage was off the table even if the man was willing. So, either Jesseph would agree to look after the sisters or he wouldn't. As she gazed up at the familiar façade of Bellamy Hall, Geneva knew it would break her heart to leave the only home she'd ever known, but, given the tragic losses nearly everyone in the country had suffered so recently and the young men who

had been killed in the Great War, losing one's home wasn't the worst thing that could happen to a person. She had to remain steadfast, for both her father and her sister, and stop moping about.

Rory was right. It wasn't fair to make her father's final days intolerable, so she would try to make the best of the situation and prevail upon Honor to do the same. They had to focus on Douglas and spare him any unnecessary suffering. And until he was truly gone, Geneva wasn't going to make any decisions about the future, no matter how impatient Rory got. She felt too emotionally raw and had yet to broach the really difficult subjects that would decide their future.

She hadn't told Honor of Rory's proposal, and in her quieter moments, when her sister sought reassurance rather than an opportunity to vent her frustration, they talked of the future. It was a terrifying prospect to suddenly find themselves cast out of their home and into a world of which they knew precious little, but countless women had managed to survive after they'd lost their men in the war. And the Bellamy girls would be no different. Perhaps Geneva could take a secretarial course or find a position as a teacher. It would be more difficult to place Honor, since she wasn't yet of age and wasn't qualified to do much of anything, but they would cross that bridge when they came to it. Geneva would speak to Aunt Clarissa when she came for Christmas. Maybe they could stay with her and Rose in London until they got on their feet. They didn't need much, just a roof over their heads. Surely Aunt Clarissa could spare one room in her townhouse. The more Geneva and Honor spoke of it, the more manageable it all seemed.

So, the days went on much as before, and, when it all got too much and her father's suffering became too difficult to bear, Geneva found solace in solitude. She went for long walks along the wintry mudflats, retreated to her room with a book, or, on fine days, went for a drive. Douglas had been against her learning to drive, but Geneva had reminded him that plenty of women had driven ambulances during the war and that one didn't need to be male to handle a motor. Douglas had held out until Geneva turned eighteen but had finally succumbed to her pleas and taught her how to drive. They'd started out on deserted rural roads, where she wasn't likely to encounter anyone but sheep, but eventually her father's confidence had grown and he had permitted Geneva to drive in more populated areas. He still didn't like it when she went out on her own, but since he had shared his

devastating news, she hadn't bothered to ask. She simply took the car and left, usually before Honor was up so she didn't have to invite her to come along. Her sister needed her support, but, although Geneva was doing everything in her power to help her through this difficult time, Honor could be selfish. She needed to unload her anger onto someone else in order to feel lighter.

NINETEEN

On the morning of December the tenth, Geneva rose early. She ate a light breakfast of toast and tea, and then, as she did every morning, went to check on her father. His care had largely fallen to his valet, Dennison, who had been with Douglas for nearly four years, and was as loyal a man as any employer could hope for.

Tom Dennison had survived the war but had been discharged shortly before the armistice due to severe shell shock. In the months that had followed, he'd suffered nightmares, bouts of melancholy, and sudden aggression, and found it nearly impossible to adjust to civilian life or secure steady work. Mrs. Dennison had sought the advice of their doctor, who'd recommended a stay at a psychiatric facility. There, Tom had endured solitary confinement, ice baths, and electric shock therapy. By the time he was released, he had been meek as a lamb—but his wife had given up on him and taken up with another man, who had moved into their home.

With nowhere else to go, Tom had returned to his mother, the Bellamys' cook. Douglas, whose valet had been preparing to retire, had taken pity on the young man and arranged for him to be trained up. Dennison rarely spoke and had yet to form friendships among the staff, but he was devoted to Douglas and tended him with the gentleness of a loving mother nursing her child. He was also noticeably fond of Geneva, who always took the time to speak to him and refused to treat him with contempt, unlike several members of staff, who thought him a queer fish and had branded him a coward.

When Geneva looked in, Douglas was asleep. He was reclining on so many pillows that he was nearly sitting upright, yet even with his head elevated his breathing remained labored. His skin had taken on a waxy cast in recent days, and the room smelled of illness and pungent medicines. Dennison, who had been dozing in a chair by the bed, woke with a start and sprang to his feet. He stood there awkwardly, as if expecting Geneva to reprimand him.

“How is he?” Geneva whispered, mindful of waking her father.

“He had a peaceful night,” Dennison replied.

Dr. Miller had shown him how to administer morphine, which Douglas flat-out refused during the day but sometimes asked for at bedtime so he could rest.

“Did he take morphine last night?” Geneva asked.

Dennison nodded. “He was in a lot of pain.”

“Thank you for taking such good care of him.”

The valet’s cheeks turned pink with the praise. “It’s my privilege, my lady.”

“I can sit with him for a while. Go have your breakfast.”

The man looked conflicted. He’d barely left her father’s side the past few weeks, and slept in Douglas’s dressing room so he could keep an eye on Douglas through the open door.

“Go on, Tom,” Geneva said softly. “You can’t look after him if you don’t look after yourself.”

‘What about you, my lady?”

“I’ve already eaten. Please, go.”

Dennison smiled gratefully. “I won’t be long.”

“Take as long as you need, and if you’d like to have a kip this afternoon, come and get me. I will be happy to sit with Father. You need your rest too,” she said and laid her hand on Dennison’s arm. He stiffened and backed away, clearly scandalized.

“I’m sorry,” Geneva muttered, embarrassed. She had never touched him before and knew she had thoughtlessly crossed a line.

“Quite all right, my lady. And thank you, my lady,” he muttered as he hurried out the door.

Geneva took the chair he had vacated and exhaled deeply. Whether it was the stress of the current situation or the close air in the room, she suddenly felt a headache coming on, building behind her eyes, and radiating into her temples. Quietly, so as not to wake her father, she slid open the drawer of his bedside table.

Douglas had suffered with migraines since he’d returned from the front, and Dr. Miller had prescribed ergotamine, which had become available quite recently and was considerably more effective than aspirin. Geneva thought she might take half a pill to stave off her own migraine. She was surprised to find that the drawer was full of vials. She thought her

father took the morphine when he needed it, but this looked like he was suffering through the pain rather than opting for relief. Perhaps Douglas felt more in control when he refused the pain medication, or maybe he was saving it for a different reason, one she didn't care to think about. Geneva couldn't find the ergotamine, so she helped herself to two aspirins and dry-swallowed them.

She started when her father laid a hand on her wrist. His skin was cool and dry, the weight of his hand insubstantial.

"You needn't worry," he said softly.

"What do you intend to do with all that morphine?"

"What are your plans for the day?" he asked, deftly avoiding the question.

"I don't know."

"Perhaps you could do me a favor."

"Anything," Geneva said, glad to be able to help.

"I'd like to give Tom Dennison a gift. Something besides the usual Boxing Day bonus. He's been so kind to me."

"Of course. What a good idea. What will you give him?"

"He treasured his father's watch, but he smashed it during one of his more violent episodes at the psychiatric hospital. He took it to Mr. Hale, but it wasn't fixable. I would like to give Tom a nice watch, as a parting gift."

"Oh, Father," Geneva said miserably.

Douglas patted her wrist. "I rang Mr. Hale and asked him to recommend a good watch. He did, and offered to order it for me. It was delivered to the shop yesterday. Can you collect it? I will give it to Tom on Christmas Day."

"Of course," Geneva said. "I'd be happy to."

"Then you'd best get going," Douglas said. "I don't want Honor to know."

"Why not?"

"That girl is incapable of keeping a secret, and I don't want anyone to feel slighted."

"I understand. Dennison will be back shortly. I sent him downstairs to have his breakfast."

"I'm not a child. I can be left alone, you know," Douglas said with a slight smile.

“Are you in any pain?” Geneva asked, needing to be certain he would be all right.

“I’m perfectly fine. In fact, I think I will come downstairs for breakfast. I fancy a fry-up, and I would rather not eat it in bed, like an invalid.”

“What a fine idea,” Geneva said. Perhaps her father’s renewed appetite was a sign of improvement.

“Go on,” Douglas prompted, so she kissed him on the forehead and left the room.

TWENTY

Geneva put on her coat and hat, grabbed her reticule and gloves, and walked out into the blustery morning. She hadn't planned on going into Ravenglass, but she was happy she could help her father, and she could use a new book, since she was about to finish the one she was reading. She'd drive into the village, visit Mr. Hale's jewelry shop and collect the watch, stop into the bookshop, and then maybe have a cream tea. The owner of the tearoom used to work at the house when Geneva was a girl and was always up for a chat. Geneva walked to the garage, threw open the doors, and tossed her reticule onto the passenger seat of the Austin 7.

"Let me crank her up for you, my lady," Grady said as he followed her into the garage.

He had been the Bellamys' chauffeur since before the war, one of the few men to remain behind when nearly everyone else either enlisted or was later called up. Grady was a conscientious objector, and, although he had endured no small amount of abuse—both verbal and physical—for his refusal to fight, he had never once wavered in his convictions.

"I can do it," Geneva replied chirpily.

"Come now, Lady Geneva," Grady chided her. "Allow me to help you while I still can."

She turned to look at him. "Whatever do you mean?"

Grady smiled regretfully. "I don't suppose his lordship has told you, but I've handed in my notice. I leave in a fortnight."

"Leave? But where are you going?"

"I've accepted a position in Ulverston, my lady, as a chauffeur for Mr. Bolton. The gentleman is afflicted with gout and can no longer get around on his own. I reckon the job will see me through until I'm ready to retire."

"I will be sorry to see you go," Geneva said.

And she would be, but she could understand. Her father had not left the house in weeks, and Geneva preferred to drive herself and Honor when

they went out. These days, Grady's only passengers were the housekeeper and the cook, whom he drove into the village on their days off for a spot of shopping and a chinwag with their lifelong friends.

"I heard about the entailment, my lady," he said. "I expect everyone will be forced to leave before long."

"Mr. Bellamy might wish to keep the current staff," Geneva replied, but the reassurance sounded hollow, even to herself.

Why would a young American businessman wish to keep her father's aging retainers when he could bring in his own people? And that was assuming he even opted to stay. What if he sold the lot as soon as Douglas breathed his last and returned to the States?

"Nah, I doubt that," Grady said, echoing her own thoughts. "The young gentleman will want to bring in his own people, and rightly so, my lady. In time, you'll come to see it his way."

Geneva supposed the staff had speculated about the outcome of Jesseph's visit and her own role in the future of Bellamy Hall. It was inevitable. It was nearly impossible to keep anything from the staff, and, whereas some might choose to ride it out and see what happened, others would see to their own futures and seek a new situation.

"I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Grady," Geneva said once he'd cranked the engine and stowed the crank in the glovebox.

"And I you, my lady. You be careful now." Grady tipped his cap and stood aside as Geneva got into the car and prepared to leave.

As she pulled out of the garage, she saw Honor at her bedroom window. Even from a distance, her sister looked angry, and she stuck out her tongue and turned her back as Geneva drove past. Her sister's juvenile reaction made her feel awful. She was the one behaving like a child and sneaking out before Honor was up and could ask to come along. It was selfish and unkind. She'd take her out on Saturday. And maybe buy her a pre-Christmas present to cheer her up and also to apologize for her insensitive behavior.

TWENTY-ONE

Geneva's misery dissipated once she drove through the gates and down the empty lane. It was bitterly cold, but the sky was blue, the sun was shining, and the shackles of sadness and guilt began to loosen once she left the estate grounds. It was as if she could leave all her problems at the house and become someone else entirely when she went out. Of course, that was the furthest thing from the truth, mostly because everyone in Ravenglass had known her since the day she was born. She was Lady Geneva Bellamy, and she had to play her part, lest she embarrass the family. But she suddenly felt rebellious. She wanted to do something that made her feel young and carefree and in charge of her own life.

When she arrived in the village, the main street was unusually crowded with pedestrians, motorized vehicles, and horse-drawn carts. Christmas was in a fortnight, and everyone was either placing their orders with the butcher, the greengrocer, and the wine merchant, or collecting the orders they had already placed and stocking their shelves in time for the holiday.

Geneva parked the car and walked down the street to Mr. Hale's shop. He had just opened up and was arranging the window display. There were a few important pieces, the gold and gemstones winking in the sunlight. He also made sure to display simple, affordable items that would make lovely gifts for the wives and sweethearts of the local men.

"Good morning, Mr. Hale," Geneva said as she entered the shop.

"Good morning to you, my lady. You're out early today."

"Father asked me to collect the watch he ordered."

"Yes, of course. I'll just get it for you."

Mr. Hale stepped into the back, and Geneva studied the items in the glass-fronted counter. One particular piece caught her attention. It was a gold bangle fashioned in the shape of a serpent devouring its own tail. An emerald gleamed where the snake's eye would be, and its back shimmered with a dusting of tiny diamonds. The bracelet brought to mind Estelle

Taylor, the American film star Geneva had seen in *Monte Cristo* at the Empire in London. Cousin Rose—who had been allowed to join them at the cinema—had remarked that Geneva might resemble the actress herself, if only she were not so prim.

"Can I show you something, my lady?" Mr. Hale, ever the salesman, asked as he positioned himself behind the counter.

"I was just admiring the snake bangle, but I don't think I can afford it. It's stunning, though," Geneva said wistfully.

Mr. Hale smiled happily. "The stones are paste, and I would be happy to sell it to you at cost. Your family has given me so much custom over the years."

"Really?" Geneva exclaimed. "How much?"

"Fifteen quid."

"Yes. I'll take it. If you would just wrap it for me."

"Don't you want to try it on?"

"No. I'm quite certain."

Mr. Hale placed the bracelet in a blue velvet box and handed it to her, along with the watch. Geneva paid for her purchase, then slid the two boxes into her reticule. The beaded purse bulged unattractively, but there was no helping it. She didn't feel safe to leave the items in the glovebox of the open tourer, since someone with no scruples could easily help themselves if they spotted her leaving the jeweler's shop and depositing something in the car.

Extremely pleased with her purchase, Geneva headed to the bookshop, where she bought a copy of *Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street* by Virginia Woolf and the new edition of *Vogue*. The model on the cover wore a short, beaded dress, and her soft curls were cropped close and framed her face with playful charm. Geneva thought she looked irresistible and thoroughly modern. Her hand went to her own hair, which was pinned up beneath her dark green bucket hat adorned with stiffened flowers. She suddenly felt old and dowdy. She had hardly bought any new clothes since her mother's death, and she hadn't given much thought to her hair. Her maid, Lettie, had done her hair since she was six. Lettie had trimmed the ends twice a year, and arranged Geneva's hair into simple hairstyles that were appropriate to an adolescent girl and then a young woman. The only time she had done anything special was when there had been a party to celebrate Jack's eighteenth birthday. There had been no parties at Bellamy Hall since.

Before she could change her mind, Geneva marched towards Mrs. Siddon's hairdressing and barber shop and stepped inside. There were two customers, one woman having her hair colored and the other getting a Marcel wave. Geneva knew it was the latest thing, but, although Honor had proclaimed it the cat's meow when she'd seen a photo in a magazine, Geneva herself didn't think it was very flattering. She was resolved to make a change, though, and sucked in a determined breath as the bell above the door jingled, alerting the proprietress to her arrival.

"Lady Geneva," Mrs. Siddon exclaimed. "Please, come in. How can I help?"

"I'd like to cut my hair," Geneva announced, and the two women in the chairs nodded approvingly and smiled at her in the mirrors.

"Of course."

Once Geneva had taken off her coat and hat and sat in the only vacant chair, Mrs. Siddon asked, "Did you have a particular style in mind?".

Her tense reflection looked back at her, and she quickly looked away. The thought of having her thick, wavy hair chopped off made her nervous, but she recalled her earlier resolve and decided that for once in her life she was going to be bold.

"I'd like it short," she said.

"With or without a fringe?" the proprietress asked.

"Without. I think. Maybe the tapered bob?"

"May I recommend the shingle? It would bring out your natural curl and frame your face beautifully," Mrs. Siddon said.

"Yes. Let's do that," Geneva immediately agreed.

Mrs. Siddon reached for a cape and draped it over Geneva's shoulders, then beckoned to her assistant and instructed her to see to the other customers. The proprietress would cut Geneva's hair herself, since her new style would be the talk of the village and she would want the credit for the transformation. The other two ladies looked mildly put out but did not protest. Instead, they watched as the proprietress pulled out the pins and combed Geneva's hair as it hung loose about her shoulders. She sprayed the tresses with water, then reached for the scissors.

Geneva held her breath as the first damp coils fell to the floor, but, as Mrs. Siddon continued to snip with practiced ease, she started to relax. Slowly, the new style began to emerge, and she loved what she saw. Once the hairdresser had dried and styled it, she gingerly touched it, then shook

her head. The newly shorn hair bounced around her face, the curls glossy and light.

"I hope you like it, my lady," Mrs. Siddon said. She looked a little nervous as she waited for Geneva's verdict. The other ladies looked at her expectantly before they expressed their own opinions.

"I love it," Geneva exclaimed. "I don't know why I waited so long."

"I find that a woman must be ready to make a change. Otherwise, she'll regret her decision."

"It's stunning, Lady Geneva," the assistant said.

"Very glamorous," one of the other ladies gushed.

Geneva paid for her haircut, then put on her coat and carefully lowered her hat onto her curls. She looked like a different person, and she fizzed with excitement for the first time in a long while. Now that she had a new hairstyle, she needed lipstick. Mulberry red, she decided as she left the hairdresser's and walked down the street. She kept checking her reflection in the shop windows, gratified to see a sophisticated young woman smiling back at her.

It was well past noon by the time she walked into the tearoom, and she was famished. She hung up her coat, and Mrs. Lynley led her to a table in the corner.

"You look ever so stylish, my lady," she said. "The new cut suits you. And so does the lip color. It brings out your eyes."

"Thank you," Geneva said, and smiled back.

"The usual? A pot of Darjeeling and a scone?" Mrs. Lynley asked.

"Yes, please," Geneva said. "Two scones," she amended. "I'm rather hungry."

"The scones are fresh out of the oven, my lady. And I'll bring you extra clotted cream. I know how you like it."

"Thank you," Geneva said again.

Once Mrs. Lynley left, Geneva took out her copy of *Vogue* and studied the woman on the cover. She thought she could give the model a run for her money, especially if she purchased a similar frock and got some nail varnish.

She had just opened the magazine when a man she had never seen before entered the tearoom. He carried a traveling case and wore a rather dashing fedora that matched his camelhair coat. He smiled when he spotted her, then set down his case and removed his coat and hat. On any other day,

Geneva would have looked away. But today she felt modern, and daring, ready for anything. So she shut the magazine and set it aside.

She had something more interesting to look at.

TWENTY-TWO

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

Once again Quinn was jolted out of the vision, and she dropped the earring. She had intentionally left her phone on, afraid to miss a call or text from Logan. It took her a moment to get her bearings but, once she was in the here and now, she lunged for the phone and answered the incoming call without bothering to check the caller ID.

"Mrs. Russell?" a female voice asked.

"Yes. Speaking."

"Ruth Watley here." Ruth's voice was tense and shrill.

"Is Max all right?" Quinn exclaimed, instantly alarmed.

"Max is fine, but there was an incident, and I think it would be best if you came to collect him right away."

"What sort of incident?"

Ruth inhaled sharply. "Someone tried to take Max. A woman. Naturally, we didn't hand him over, but I have a mind to call the police."

"Who was she? What did she say?"

"She said Mr. Wyatt had asked her to get him from the nursery."

"Did she give a name?" Quinn asked, her own voice tense and shrill now.

"She did, yes. She said her name was Quinn Russell. She even had ID in your name."

"Oh my God," Quinn whispered. "Do you have an image of this woman?"

"We don't take photos of individuals who come to collect the children."

"But surely you have security cameras."

A pause. "Yes, we do."

"Then I will need a screenshot, Ms. Watley. I'm going to the police."

Ruth sighed. “I will get you that screenshot. Now, please come and get Max. I’m very sorry to do this, but I think it would be best if he didn’t return until this situation is resolved. We cannot afford to endanger the other children or members of staff.”

Quinn experienced a flash of anger but managed to remain calm. Ruth Watley was doing the right thing, the only thing she could do under the circumstances. It was up to Quinn to figure out what was going on, but, before she did anything, she had to have eyes on Max.

“I’ll be right there, Ms. Watley,” she said. “Please, do not let Max out of your sight,” she added when she checked the clock. The children usually played outside for an hour after lunch, and she didn’t want Max to leave the building.

“I will keep him inside and wait with him in my office,” Ruth promised.

“Thank you.”

Quinn was already ringing Gabe as she pushed her feet into trainers, grabbed her bag and keys, and raced to the car.

“I’ll meet you there,” Gabe said. “Do not leave until I arrive.”

“I understand. I’m frightened, Gabe,” Quinn wailed. “What’s happening?”

“I don’t know, but we’re going to figure this out. Once we know Max is safe.”

The drive to the nursery school seemed to take an age. The streets were congested with lunchtime traffic, and Quinn found herself leaning on the horn a lot more often than was strictly necessary since there was little anyone could do other than wait for the traffic to clear. She breathed a sigh of relief when she pulled up in front of the school. Everything appeared to be quiet and there were no police cars in sight, which had to mean that Max was still safely inside.

One of the other teachers buzzed her in and escorted her to Ruth Watley’s office. Max sat on a beanbag in the corner, a picture book in his lap. He was pretending to read a story to a stuffed dog he was holding, and he seemed happy and calm. Ruth Watley sat across from him, her gaze fixed on the child as if he might vanish at any moment. Quinn noted that the positioning of the beanbag made it impossible to see Max through the window, which was good thinking on Ruth’s part in case someone was lurking behind the building.

“I just sent you the screenshot,” Ruth said.

Quinn pulled out her mobile and opened the attachment. Based on the angle of the image, the camera had to be above the front door, since the woman was walking up to the building. She must have been aware she was being filmed because she’d kept her head down. All Quinn could see was that the woman had wavy dark hair and pale skin. It was impossible to clearly see her features. Beneath a short black raincoat, she wore a green top and jeans, and white trainers on her feet. Quinn couldn’t even make out her age. She could have been anyone from anywhere.

“Is there anything more you can tell me about her? Did she resemble me?” Quinn asked.

“A bit, but I think she was younger.”

“And what sort of ID did she show you?”

“I don’t recall what it was,” Ruth admitted. “I became so flustered when she claimed to be you, I didn’t even bother to look at the identification.”

Quinn looked at the image again. There were probably few people in the UK who hadn’t seen a promotional advert for the *Echoes from the Past* program, but the host was listed as Dr. Quinn Allenby, not plain Quinn Russell, so whoever met this woman might not put two and two together and realize that she was meant to be the same person. This woman clearly knew that Quinn Russell was Max’s aunt and was listed as Logan’s emergency contact. And if she had presented her phony ID to someone who’d never met Quinn, they might have surrendered Max to her, which was a terrifying thought.

Max had finished reading the story and was watching Quinn from his spot in the corner.

“Ready to go home, buddy?” Quinn asked him.

She tried to sound upbeat and unconcerned, but Max’s expression turned quizzical. He knew it was too early to leave for the day since he’d just had lunch.

“My home?” he asked.

“No, my home.”

“Will Daddy be there?”

“No, sweetheart, but Uncle Gabe is coming to meet us.”

Max set aside the book and the dog and climbed off the beanbag. He silently walked to the door, his little shoulders hunched and his mouth

turned down at the corners. He might be five, but he understood in that instinctive way children did that something bad was happening and he was at the center of it.

"Why would someone want to take Max?" Ruth hissed as soon as he was through the door.

"I don't know," Quinn replied. Then a thought occurred to her, and she asked, "Did this woman have an accent?"

"No. Why?"

"No reason. Thank you, Ms. Watley. I will keep you apprised of the situation."

"Please do. We will all be thinking about Max."

Quinn helped Max on with his jacket, then took his things from his cubby and put them in his school satchel. When Gabe texted to say he was outside, she took Max by the hand, and together they walked out, Max looking dejected and Quinn walking as if a hidden sniper were about to take her out. She breathed a sigh of relief when nothing happened.

"Hey, mate," Gabe said to Max as soon as they reached the gate. "Did you have a good day?"

"No," Max replied broodily.

"Me neither," Gabe replied.

"Why not?"

"Because sometimes people can be difficult," Gabe said.

"What people?"

"The people who're supposed to know better."

Max nodded wisely, and Gabe lifted him and strapped him into the child seat. After a moment's consideration, he got into the back seat with Max and put his arm around the boy. Max sighed like a little old man and rested his head on Gabe's shoulder, then reached out and took his hand.

"Let's go home," Gabe said.

Quinn didn't need to be told twice. Home felt like the only safe place.

They didn't discuss the situation in front of Max. Quinn focused on driving. She knew she was probably being silly, but she couldn't help but feel as if she were being watched. Gabe and Max played a game in which Gabe would call out a type of vehicle and a color, and Max would have to spot it and point it out. When they got home, Gabe and Max settled in to play a loud video game while Quinn hurried upstairs to phone Sean Cadogan.

She was a bit breathless when he answered and spoke in run-on sentences as she relayed what had happened. Sean heard her out without interrupting, then asked her to forward the screenshot of the woman.

"She knew where the camera was," he said once he'd looked at the image.

"Yes."

"And she doesn't seem familiar at all?"

"No. Maybe if I saw her face…"

"The situation has clearly escalated," Sean said, and Quinn almost let out a bitter bark of laughter.

You think? she wanted to say, but bit her tongue. "Should I go to the police?" she asked instead. She was actually surprised that Ruth Watley hadn't reported the incident to the police, but Ruth had probably thought it wise to avoid any kind of negative publicity for the school and had left the decision to Quinn.

"Not yet, but I'm going to get in touch with a former colleague at Scotland Yard, and we'll see what we can discover. In the meantime, I think you need to make sure your family is safe."

"Do you think we're in danger?"

"We don't know how far this person or whoever she's working with will go to grab Max. Or how they're involved in Logan's disappearance. The woman clearly knows your name and your relationship to Max, and that you're Logan's emergency contact and the one person authorized to collect Max from the nursery school. Doubtless she also knows where you live. That gives her an advantage."

Quinn's panic began to mount. She'd half hoped that Sean would say something that would calm her, but he was clearly no longer treating Logan's disappearance as voluntary and was obviously concerned not only for Max's safety but also for the rest of them. And Quinn would never knowingly endanger her children.

"What should we do?"

"I think you should go away for a few days."

"The children have school," she said without thinking, then realized how unimportant that was in the face of a possible kidnapping.

"It's Wednesday," Sean pointed out. "If they miss Thursday and Friday, it's not the end of the world. Tell the school they're ill."

“And Monday they have an INSET day. It’s only for teachers, so the children don’t have to attend,” Quinn recalled.

“Even better,” Sean replied. “I will have answers for you by the time you return. You have my word.”

“Where should we go?” Quinn asked. “Where is safe?”

“You were just in the Lake District, weren’t you?” Sean asked.

“Yes.”

“Go back there. Find a place to stay that has good views all around. That way you’ll see someone coming before they get to you. And do not look for a rental on your computer or mobile,” he warned. “Just stop into a holiday rentals place once you arrive and ask what’s available. Pay in cash. And make sure to turn off the tracking on all phones before you leave London.” He paused momentarily, then thought of something else. “A rental vehicle would be best, if you can swing it on such short notice. Again, do not book it on your device.”

“Why can’t we take our car?”

“Because if someone is watching your house and they see your car in the driveway, they’ll assume you’re still here.”

Quinn was struck momentarily dumb. Sean was schooling her in the rudiments of spycraft, and the absurdity of it left her reeling, since this was suddenly her real life.

“Do you really think that whoever is doing this is so sophisticated that they can track our every move?” she asked, her voice trembling with anxiety.

Sean sighed audibly. “Probably not, but, until we know who or what we’re dealing with, it’s best to take basic precautions and reveal as little as possible about your plans online.”

“Can I still use my phone?”

“Yes, but turn off the Wi-Fi. All of you.”

“All right,” Quinn muttered.

“I will ring you as soon as I know anything,” Sean promised.

“Thank you,” she said. “I’m forever in your debt.”

“You’re very welcome. Now go,” he instructed. “Stay safe, and keep out of sight.”

After a whispered conference with Gabe, the two of them sprang into action, and within an hour they were on their way, Gabe behind the wheel of a nondescript silver minivan with Manchester plates. The children asked

endless questions about where they were going, why, what had happened to their own motor, and, in Emma's case, why she couldn't use the Wi-Fi on her phone. They also wanted to know why Rufus couldn't come along and had to be left at a kennel. Quinn and Gabe answered as truthfully as they could without alarming them unnecessarily, which was no easy feat since the children weren't ready to accept that they were going on a surprise minibreak.

They were fleeing London, but Quinn had no idea what they were getting away from or what they might be running towards.

TWENTY-THREE

Gabe

Once they were well beyond the city limits and the scenery shifted from urban sprawl to open countryside, conversation died away and everyone settled in for the long drive. Quinn stared straight ahead, her gaze fixed on the verdant valley beyond, basking in a shaft of hazy sunshine now that the rain had finally passed. Emma listened to music she had previously downloaded, since Gabe had set her mobile to airplane mode, Alex and Mia looked out the windows, and Max had fallen asleep.

Gabe welcomed the brief stretch of silence. There had been no time to think or to plan; he had simply followed Sean Cadogan's orders, as though he were a soldier and Sean his commanding officer. He couldn't afford to question Sean's advice, or the decades of experience behind it, not when the stakes were so high. Nor did he dare antagonize Quinn when she was already so on edge. Still, he wondered if leaving had been the wisest course. When people ran, they rarely escaped their problems; more often, they brought them along.

Gabe chuckled inwardly. People always said you married the person, not the family, but those people were either still single or married to orphans. When he was a boy, he had longed for a sibling. He'd imagined a brother or sister as a built-in best friend—someone who would care unconditionally and offer unwavering loyalty. On some level, he'd still believed that when he'd married Quinn. Over the past decade, however, he'd come to understand a harsher truth: No one resented you quite like your siblings did, and, in some of the more extreme cases, they acted on that resentment because they simply couldn't help themselves.

Quinn's extended family was a charming, extremely attractive, highly intelligent band of lunatics. And that went for her biological father as well. Seth Besson had raised and shielded the most remorseless sociopath of all, his only son, Brett, and Gabe couldn't help but think that Seth had known

more about Brett's issues than he had let on. Gabe sometimes wondered if someone's lack of a moral compass was a result of nature or nurture. If it was nature and the gene for moral deficiency got passed along, he thanked God that it had bypassed his wife and their children, who didn't have a duplicitous bone in their little bodies.

Despite Quinn's lack of guile and her boundless kindness to her long-lost kin, for a while there the lunatics had been running this asylum. But the past few years had been relatively quiet. Her twin sister, Jo, was gone, Brett was serving a life sentence for multiple crimes, and Seth was back in New Orleans. Gabe had never liked or trusted Sylvia. That woman had made a string of questionable decisions, and he believed Quinn was better off without her birth mother's expert gaslighting. He'd never imagined Sylvia would die in the first weeks of the pandemic, though, and he regretted that Quinn still carried so many unresolved feelings about her.

Gabe liked Logan and Jude. Jude had clawed his way back from heroin addiction and managed to get his life on track. Logan hadn't been lucky in love, but he was a devoted and responsible dad. Still, Gabe did not believe for a moment that what had happened to Logan was random. Like his mother, Logan had a habit of making morally dubious choices that had the power to ruin other people's lives. The so-called surrogacy had not been nearly as straightforward as Logan liked to pretend. In fact, it hadn't truly been surrogacy at all.

Logan identified as gay and preferred male partners, but he'd been with women before. Chrissy hadn't just been a surrogate; she was Max's biological mother. And the child hadn't been conceived in a clinic but the old-fashioned way. In the UK, surrogacy was meant to be altruistic, and intended parents were expected to cover only the surrogate's expenses and loss of earnings. But Logan hadn't gone through legal channels. He'd simply handed Chrissy twenty grand to have his baby and walk away. That was dodgy as hell—and not just morally. In Britain, she couldn't sign away her rights with a backroom deal, so if Chrissy changed her mind, or decided to squeeze Logan for more money, the whole thing could implode at any time.

And given that Chrissy had originally been Rafe's friend, Gabe suspected this arrangement had created tension in the relationship, though he doubted it was the sole reason Logan and Rafe had ultimately split. Rafe might have enjoyed being with an older man, but he hadn't been ready for

the responsibility of a child, especially one conceived through ethically murky means.

And Lord knew what else Logan might have been involved in. Lately he had been flush with cash. Quinn assumed he had inherited the money from their mother, but what if there was a different, less legitimate explanation? What had Logan done along the way that might now be catching up with him? Whoever had come after him might not have been seasoned professionals, but they were no amateurs either—and they were clearly willing to take risks.

Quinn chose to see her remaining siblings through rose-colored glasses. Gabe did not. Jude would always walk the narrow line between sobriety and relapse, and Logan would cut corners if it got him what he wanted. And he had done in the past. Perhaps this time he'd messed with the wrong people. And now Gabe's family was in danger, and it was his responsibility to keep that sweet, vulnerable boy safe until either Logan resurfaced or they were forced to confront a far grimmer reality and decide what came next.

Gabe never admitted it aloud, but he spoke to his mother in his head all the time. He missed her desperately and was consumed by guilt over leaving her alone in Berwick when the pandemic began. He couldn't have known how bad things would become, and he'd genuinely believed she would be safer in Northumberland than in London. He'd made the wrong choice. Phoebe had died frightened and alone, with no one to hold her hand or offer comfort as she took her final breath. Gabe didn't believe in comforting stories about the afterlife, but he wanted to think his parents were together somewhere, and that they were proud of him. They had been honorable, loving, trustworthy people, and he hoped they had died knowing they'd raised a decent man.

And as he sped down the motorway, the wind rising once again and the first drops of rain splattering against the windscreen, Gabe wished he could ask his mum for advice. And then, as clearly as if she were beside him, he heard her voice in his mind.

Protect your babies, Gabriel. And cherish Quinn. She's more fragile than you realize.

TWENTY-FOUR

As they approached Windermere, Quinn pulled a business card out of her back pocket and handed it to Gabe. He glanced at it, then looked at her quizzically.

"Let's go there," she said.

"Montrose Lake House," Gabe read aloud. "Where did you get this?"

"Nicole gave it to me when we were planning a weekend away for our anniversary."

They'd decided to go to the Cotswolds instead, but Quinn had kept the card and had stuffed it into her pocket before leaving the house. Nicole and Kyle had escaped London during the pandemic and spent a few nights with Kyle's friends, Sam and Reggie. The two men had purchased an old Tudor manor house near Keswick after Sam's acting career fizzled out, and had opened a boutique hotel. The lakeside hotel would be the perfect place to hide out for a few days, since it was off the beaten path and no one would know that was where they'd gone, not even a holiday rentals agent. And if Sam and Reggie weren't able to accommodate them, they might be able to recommend another hotel or rental in the area.

"All right," Gabe said. "But I'm going to need a map. I'll never find this place without satnav."

"We can buy a map at any gift shop in Windermere."

"Can we get more snacks?" Alex asked.

"I need to go to the toilet," Mia wailed.

"Me too," Max said.

Emma remained silent, music pumping in her ears as she stared fixedly at the scenic landscape that rushed past the car windows. The younger children saw this impromptu getaway as an opportunity to skip school and have an adventure, but Emma was old enough to know this trip for what it was, an escape, and she was worried, both for Logan and Max and for her own family.

The children were hungry, so they found a place to eat, purchased a map, several bottles of water, and some snacks, and continued on their way. Quinn tried the number on the card, but the calls went directly to voicemail, which was concerning. Perhaps the hotel had closed since Nicole and Kyle went there, but it was still worth a shot. And there were bound to be other guesthouses in the vicinity that might have room for walk-ins.

Emma perked up when they finally pulled up to the hotel. Several cars were lined up in the car park, and they saw a couple leaving the house and walking towards their vehicle. So the hotel was definitely open for business. As a mother, Quinn was relieved; she needed to know that the children would have a safe and comfortable place to sleep tonight. But as a historian, she couldn't help but admire the architecture.

Constructed of solid gray stone, the Tudor building was imposing and faintly unwelcoming. Twin-peaked gables crowned the roof, and tall mullioned windows set deep within thick walls lent the façade a stately air. The leaded glass caught the late afternoon light, while stout chimneys hinted at multiple hearths within. Functional rather than sprawling, the house conveyed a sense of permanence and quiet authority, built by skilled craftsmen to endure for generations.

Carefully pruned rose bushes framed the front of the house, while blooming damson trees and sloe bushes dotted the grounds, lending them a natural, untamed air, so unlike the uncompromisingly geometric layouts of traditional Tudor gardens. Behind the house, a vast lake shimmered like mercury, and Quinn couldn't help imagining how the place must have appeared centuries earlier, when it must have been the seat of some important local family.

"I'll wait in the car," Gabe offered.

Inside, the manor was a seamless blend of old and new, ancient and modern. Polished wood gleamed beneath recessed lighting, and the coffered ceiling appeared original to the house. Through an open door, the lounge revealed furnishings that looked comfortable but had obviously been chosen to complement rather than clash with the historic décor.

"Hello there," a deep voice boomed from somewhere to Quinn's left, and she recognized Sam Cross the moment he stepped forward to greet her. She'd seen him in a BBC adaptation of *King Lear* that had earned him a BAFTA nomination in the early 2000s.

Now, twenty years later, Sam reminded her of an aging Viking. His thick blond hair and beard were shot through with silver, his blue eyes crinkled warmly when he smiled, and his stout, barrel-chested frame would have looked perfectly authentic clad in leather and fur, a sword strapped to his hip.

Reggie, who had come to join them in the reception area, was the exact opposite of his partner. He was tall, Black, bald, and several years younger than Sam. Yet together they had the unmistakable air of an old married couple—two people, who, despite their obvious differences, had somehow grown to resemble one another.

"Darling, I'm so sorry," Sam said when Quinn told him that the hotel had been enthusiastically recommended by Nicole and they'd need two rooms for several nights' stay. "We would bend over backwards to accommodate friends of Kyle and Nicole, but we're fully booked this weekend. I wish you would have called a few weeks ago. Or made a reservation online."

"This was a spur-of-the moment getaway," Quinn explained.

"Are you on the run from the law?" Sam asked with a throaty chuckle.

"Not quite," Quinn replied, but the quip wasn't far from the truth.

Reggie had yet to say anything, but his eyebrows lifted as if he had suddenly thought of something. "Sammy, what about the boathouse?" he suggested and turned to Quinn when Sam nodded approvingly. "It was recently remodeled and converted into a private rental, but we haven't opened it up to guests yet."

"Why not?" Quinn asked, sensing there might be a hitch.

"A pipe in the master bath was leaking, so the water had to be temporarily shut off. The plumber is coming back next week." Sam rolled his eyes dramatically, as if to suggest that plumbers and contractors the world over made the same promises—and rarely kept them. "But the second bathroom is operational and is equipped with a shower stall. We would, of course, give you a discount to offset the inconvenience," he added smoothly.

"We'll take it," Quinn said and felt a wave of relief. At least accommodation was sorted. They'd deal with the rest once they were settled.

"Splendid," Sam agreed and smiled winsomely. "There are two bedrooms, and we can sort a folding bed for the little boy. There's a fully

operational kitchen, but you would have to bring in your own supplies. I'm afraid we can't accommodate so many additional people for dinner, but you're welcome to join us for breakfast. We do not serve lunch." He smiled apologetically. "Is that all right?"

"Yes, absolutely," Quinn assured him. And it was. They would have everything they needed, and most importantly retain their privacy.

"I'll get the keys," Reggie said and disappeared down the corridor. He returned with a pair of old-fashioned brass keys. "I'll take you over, shall I?"

"Yes, please."

"And I'll bring fresh towels and toiletries," Sam promised. "And if there's anything you need, dial nine on the house phone."

"Thank you," Quinn said, but her mind was already on the practicalities.

The kitchen was actually a bonus. She'd pop out and get some groceries, and they would hole up at the boathouse until she heard from Sean.

"You can take out the rowboat if you like," Reggie said as he showed them around the lovely old house that was located some distance down the shore and had its own parking spot. It was clearly a later addition to the property, probably Victorian, and resembled a gingerbread house with its weathervane-topped central tower, lacy white trim, and arched doorway and windows. "There are two sets of oars."

"What's that there?" Emma asked and pointed to a wooded island in the middle of the lake.

A badly charred Gothic ruin was just visible through the trees. Empty windows gaped in a crumbling stone wall, and the interior was open to the elements since all that remained of the roof were a few blackened beams.

"That used to be an abbey, but the nuns who survived the attack on their home during the Dissolution of the Monasteries were driven out. The building burned down centuries ago, and the property was abandoned by the new owner after his pregnant wife disappeared without a trace. We would ask that you don't go out to the island," Reggie said. "It's not safe."

He wore an expression of distaste and turned away from the window, clearly unwilling to say any more. Quinn had read Nicole's book, *The Devil's Den*, which was set on the island and based on real historical events, but she wasn't about to tell Emma about the young bride who had vanished

on the night of the fire. That might pique her curiosity, perhaps enough to prompt her to venture out to the island and investigate the ruin and the ancient crypt that had been sealed centuries before to conceal the remains of the women who had been murdered on the island.

"This place is so cool," Alex said once Reggie left them to get settled in.

"Dad, can we take the boat out?" Emma asked.

"Maybe tomorrow," Gabe replied absentmindedly.

He was looking around, no doubt evaluating the security of their temporary home. There were a dozen windows but only one door, which faced the lake. The windows were equipped with black wooden shutters that could be latched from the inside. The boathouse had that faintly sterile, unlived-in scent common to new houses—or to a home fresh from an extensive renovation. The kitchen cupboards smelled woodsy, the walls and trim were newly painted a nondescript beige, and the bathroom tiles gleamed a pristine white. In a way, it was reassuring to know that no one had slept in the beds or used the amenities.

As with so many other people, the pandemic had made Quinn acutely aware of the cleanliness and safety of all the places she had once entered without a second thought. It reminded her of the countless strangers who had sat in the same chairs, touched the same buttons and door handles, and thumbed through menus that were usually handled with unwashed hands. And it made her wonder just how many people had slept in the same hotel beds and on sheets that were laundered in huge industrial washers that were rarely cleaned.

Quinn was distracted from her musings by Max, who, still clutching the teddy bear he had appropriated, walked over to the sofa, and huddled in the corner. He looked frightened and small, and his eyes filled with tears as he looked from Quinn to Gabe, clearly in need of reassurance.

"Come on, matey." Gabe held out a hand to the little boy. "You and I are in charge of dinner. What should we get?"

"Pizza," Max whispered.

"Pizza it is. With toppings of your choice."

Max brightened a little. "Can we have sausage and green peppers?"

"Of course."

"I don't want sausage," Mia protested.

"I do," Emma said.

“We will order two pies,” Gabe promised.

“Can you pick up something for breakfast?” Quinn asked. “The cupboards are empty.”

Gabe nodded, and he and Max went out to the car. As soon as they left, Sam arrived with a folding bed, a stack of towels, and a pretty basket filled with little bottles, soaps, and colorful bath salts, which would be of little use since they couldn’t use the tub. He also brought a bottle of red wine.

“On the house,” he said as he set the wine on the kitchen counter. “Do you have everything you need? Pillows, blankets, phone chargers? Wi-Fi password?”

“We’re not allowed on our phones,” Emma said bitterly.

“One of those weekends, eh?” Sam said and winked at her. “What have you done to deserve that, pet?”

“I don’t know,” Emma muttered under her breath and marched into the bedroom.

“Well, I see you have your hands full,” Sam said and backed towards the door. “Have a pleasant stay.”

TWENTY-FIVE

“Mum, what are we really doing here?” Emma demanded once Sam had left, Mia and Alex had found something to watch on TV, and she had followed Quinn into the kitchen. “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” Quinn admitted warily as she lowered herself into the nearest chair.

“What do you mean you don’t know? You’re meant to be the adult.”

“And as an adult, I can admit when I don’t know something,” she replied.

“Did something happen to Logan?” Emma asked, her gaze growing fearful.

“That’s a very real possibility.”

“Are we in danger? Is Max?”

“We’ll be safe here.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Emma screeched.

Quinn decided that, if she wasn’t honest with Emma now, her daughter would probably never trust her again. She hated to frighten her, but she also needed an extra pair of eyes, just in case.

“Emma, someone tried to take Max.”

“What do you mean *take*?”

“A woman pretending to be me showed up at the nursery. She attempted to kidnap Max.”

Quinn had been hesitant to use that word, but whatever she chose to call it that was what it was—a kidnapping attempt.

“Oh my God, Mum. What’s happening?” Emma cried and instantly lowered her voice when her brother’s and sister’s heads snapped up in the other room.

“Emma, please, we need your help,” Quinn whispered.

“What can I do? I am twelve,” Emma reminded her.

“You can remain calm for the sake of the other children. They look to you for guidance.”

“They’re looking to you, Mum,” Emma countered.

“Yes, they are, but if they see that you’re acting normally, they will feel reassured.”

Emma sighed heavily. “All right. But what am I meant to do if I can’t use my phone? That’s what I normally do when I’m around them.”

“Read a book,” Quinn suggested.

“Where am I supposed to get a book?”

“I can ask Dad to pick up a book in town. Is there anything you’d like to read?”

“Can I read *The Housemaid*?” Emma asked slyly.

Quinn was sure the book wasn’t appropriate for a twelve-year-old but decided she should pick her battles if she intended to get through the next few days with her sanity intact.

“How about I download it on my mobile, so you can listen?”

She didn’t think anyone would be able to trace a download from Audible if she used her cellular data with location tracking turned off.

“Yeah, all right. Better than reading,” Emma agreed. She looked dubious. “You’re going to let me use your phone?”

“Not like there’s anything I can use it for,” Quinn grumbled. “Just promise me you won’t go online.”

“Do you really think someone is tracking us?”

“I was advised not to take the risk,” Quinn replied and hoped that Emma would be satisfied with this answer.

Emma nodded wisely. “Yeah, they can probably pinpoint our location if they are.”

That was a terrifying thought, but Quinn wasn’t going to go down that rabbit hole. They had followed Sean’s instructions to the letter, and now they would wait and see what tomorrow would bring. Quinn downloaded the book for Emma, then, once the children were happily occupied, she decided to check out the bedrooms. Max’s bed would be set up in the master bedroom, and her children would take the second bedroom. There were two beds, so the girls would share, and Alex would have a bed to himself. She was sure there would be endless arguments and complaints, but eventually they’d settle down. Sharing a bed for a night or two was hardly the end of the world.

Quinn wished she could spend an hour with the earring, but she was too afraid to leave the children unattended for even a minute. If she did

manage another foray into the past, it would be once Gabe came back. Unable to use her phone, she grew restless. What was she to do? She should have brought her laptop so she could do some research, but, since Wi-Fi was off the table, the computer would be virtually useless to her anyway. She would have loved a cup of tea, but there were no teabags or milk.

"Mum, you have a call," Emma said. She was staring at the screen of Quinn's mobile. "Someone called Sean."

"Thanks, Em."

Quinn reached for the phone and stepped outside.

TWENTY-SIX

Quinn strode down the dock, determined to speak to Sean in private. The children were unsettled enough already, and she didn't want them overhearing the conversation. The narrow dock jutted out over the lake like a pirate ship's plank, and she stopped at the very end, far enough from the house that she wouldn't be heard. The sky was darkening, the first stars of evening twinkling in the lake's mirrored surface. The island—now little more than a shadowy hillock—seemed to crouch like some furry beast, its back hunched, its head bent towards the water. Quinn knew she was being fanciful, but she was utterly alone, and even the reassuring lights of the main house were obscured by the clump of trees that formed a natural barrier between the boathouse and the rest of the property.

"Are you safe?" Sean asked as soon as Quinn answered the phone.

"Yes. We're near Keswick, at Montrose Lake House."

"And Max?"

"As well as can be expected under the circumstances. He misses his dad."

"I'm sending you a photo," Sean said. "Look carefully and tell me if you've ever seen him before."

Quinn opened the image and studied the man in the picture. The photo had been taken from above and in profile, so she couldn't see his face clearly. He was lanky and wore jeans, a dark green sweatshirt with some sort of logo on it, and work boots. A black cap was pulled low over his eyes, but she thought they might be light. He had a strong nose and a square jaw, and his dark blond hair was cut short at the back and sides.

"I've never seen him before," Quinn said.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes. Who is he?"

Sean sounded annoyed. "The colleague I had in mind is running another investigation and was unable to help. I had to tap another former employee, who, truth be told, wasn't overly keen to get involved. But he did

promise to help. DI Malone pulled CCTV footage from the cameras outside the hospital. It would appear that this man was waiting for Logan. He trailed him at a discreet distance once Logan left the hospital after his shift ended at five. He followed him all the way home."

Quinn gasped at the implications of this. "Sean, Logan could be at home. He might be hurt."

"He's not. DI Malone sent two officers to perform a welfare check. They didn't find Logan, but they found traces of blood and gunshot residue."

"Can DI Malone not check the cameras near the house? Maybe he could see where Logan went." *Or was taken*, Quinn's mind supplied unhelpfully.

"He did that already. A man driving Logan's car left the house just before six. He was alone."

"A man?"

"He was wearing what appears to be the same cap as the chap in the photo and a sweatshirt with the hood pulled up. It was impossible to make out his face."

"Don't the Met have facial recognition software?" Quinn exclaimed, and wondered if that was just something they used in crime shows to heighten the drama.

"Retrospective search, which analyzes images pulled from CCTV, can be highly effective when certain criteria are met."

"And in this case they were not?"

"Even if the cameras caught a clear image of the man's face, which they did not, he would have to be on a watchlist in order to be identified."

Quinn felt her exasperation mounting. "So, all DI Malone knows is that one man left Logan's house on the night he went missing. He does not know if the man driving Logan's car was in fact Logan, nor does he know what happened to the other person."

"Quinn, there are no cameras facing either the front or the back of Logan's house. The closest cameras are at the junctions, and they caught the image of the car. Since there was no one at the house when the police went to check, Logan or the man who'd followed him could have left by either the front or the back door and got lost in the crowd."

"So, what now?" Quinn asked.

She was suddenly very tired, mired in hopelessness that did not seem likely to lift on its own. She needed something to hold on to, some scrap of encouraging news, or at the very least reassurance that everything possible was being done to find Logan.

"Because Logan is still missing and blood was found at the scene, DI Malone has opened a case into Logan's disappearance and Max's attempted abduction. I'm sending you his contact information. Ring Malone tomorrow morning. He'll probably ask you to go to a local station. They can set up a secure video link so DI Malone can speak to you directly. And if you spot either the man or the woman in the photos, call the police immediately."

"I understand."

"I will let you know if there are any new developments, but I doubt Malone will keep me looped in on the investigation now that it's official."

"Thanks, Sean."

"Call me anytime. And stay safe," Sean said and rang off.

Much as she needed time to process what Sean had told her, Quinn didn't care to remain outside a moment longer. Night had fallen, and the landscape that had appeared so picturesque only an hour before now seemed to pulse with malevolence. She shuddered at the possibility of being watched. What if someone was out there, just biding their time, waiting to snatch Max?

Her trainers thudded dully against the wood of the dock as she sprinted back to the house and locked the door behind her.

Once the children were in bed, Gabe opened the bottle of wine Sam had so thoughtfully provided and poured them each a glass. He then settled next to Quinn on the sofa and gave her his full attention as she summarized her conversation with Sean and showed Gabe the photo of the man who might be responsible for Logan's disappearance.

"I can't even begin to understand what's happening," Quinn said after Gabe had looked at the image and handed the phone back to her.

Gabe looked thoughtful. "Perhaps these people want something from Logan and had hoped to use Max as an incentive."

"But what could they possibly want?"

“Logan works in a hospital and has access to drugs. Opioids, antipsychotics, morphine.”

“Logan would never steal medications.”

“He would if his child’s life were in danger,” Gage pointed out, then another thought seemed to occur to him. “Prisoners are sometimes brought to the hospital for treatment. Perhaps these people were hoping to break out one of their own.”

“Be serious. This is not an episode of *Line of Duty*.”

“I’m just thinking out loud,” Gabe said, a tad defensively.

“I know. I’m sorry. I’m just so rattled.”

“Let’s see what DI Malone has to say when you speak to him tomorrow.”

“What can he say?” Quinn replied. She felt sad and defeated and valiantly fought the tears that threatened to fall if she allowed herself to give in to despair. “All they seem to know is that a man they cannot identify followed Logan home from the hospital. Something occurred that resulted in one of them shedding blood. An as-yet-unidentified person was seen driving Logan’s car. The end.”

Gabe set down his empty glass and pulled Quinn close. “It’s not the end. It’s the beginning. You have to allow the police to do their jobs.”

Quinn sniffled and swiped at her leaking eyes angrily. “And how long are we supposed to hide out here? A day? A week? A month? Who’s to say they will find anything? What are we to tell Max?”

“I know this is not very helpful, but we have no alternative but to take this day by day.”

“You’re right. It’s not helpful,” Quinn huffed. “I can’t stand the not knowing.”

Gabe kissed the top of her head. “Not knowing also means there’s still hope. Now, come to bed. You’re exhausted and upset. Things will look better in the morning.”

“Will they?” she grumbled.

“Probably not, but we must remain stoic, for Max’s sake, and for the emotional wellbeing of our children.”

Not to mention our own, Quinn thought. “You go on. I need a few minutes.”

Gabe nodded. She didn’t need to spell it out for him. As soon as the bedroom door closed behind him, she pulled out the case containing the

earring from her bag and settled in an armchair farthest from the window. Someone else's troubles seemed vastly preferable just then.

TWENTY-SEVEN

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Geneva watched the newcomer over the top of her book as he entered the tearoom. He crossed to the first available table, set down his case, removed his hat, and draped his coat over a vacant chair before sitting. He looked tired, and a little lost, but the fatigue did nothing to diminish his air of debonair elegance.

"Good afternoon, sir," Mrs. Lynley said as she sidled up to him. "What can I get you?"

The man smiled up at her. "Do you have coffee?"

Geneva liked the way he said "coffee." He had a lovely accent.

"I'm afraid we only serve tea," Mrs. Lynley replied rather huffily. "It being a tearoom."

The man nodded as if she had just confirmed his worst suspicions. "Tea, then. And a sandwich. Ham, if you have it. I'm famished."

"Of course, sir."

Mrs. Lynley clearly did not hold with foreigners, but Geneva was intrigued. Given the man's accent and the timing of his arrival, he could very well be Jesseph Bellamy, and, if he was, she was grateful of the opportunity to observe him. Unfortunately, the man noticed her interest and smiled. She could hardly pretend she hadn't seen, so she smiled back. His table was close enough for them to converse, and he availed himself of the opportunity.

"I feel like I have been traveling for days," he said wearily.

"Where were you traveling from?" Geneva asked politely.

"Southampton. It's not a straightforward journey, and required an overnight stay in London."

"And before that?"

"New York. I arrived yesterday, on the RMS *Olympic*."

Geneva had never traveled farther than London or spent the night in a hotel, and the idea of crossing the ocean aboard a luxury liner struck her as incredibly romantic. She imagined beautifully dressed passengers sipping martinis, dancing to the strains of a live orchestra, and lingering over exquisite meals served by white-gloved waiters. Later, they would retreat to their elegant cabins and drift off to sleep to the restless murmur of the sea, lulled by the gentle rocking of the ship. The reality was likely far more mundane, but she could dream, since she wasn't likely to experience a transatlantic voyage for herself anytime soon.

"Did you have a pleasant voyage?" Geneva asked. It was obvious the man was eager to talk, and she was genuinely interested.

"As pleasant as can be expected at this time of year. The sea was a bit rough, and it was freezing up on the deck, but she's a fine ship, and I met some interesting people." He chuckled. "It's been a long while since I had so much time to myself. I'm not much used to being idle."

"What do you do?"

"I'm in banking. Are you by any chance local, miss?" he asked when she failed to comment on his occupation.

"Yes. I live a few miles outside the village."

"I need to get out to Bellamy Hall. Do you know anyone who can take me?"

"I can drive you," Geneva said.

"That's very kind of you. I will be more than happy to compensate you for your trouble." He looked momentarily unsure, then said, "May I join you, miss?"

Geneva set aside her book and smiled, hoping the expression came across as cool and sophisticated. She was pleased to discover that her newfound audacity had not deserted her. Perhaps it was the new hair, or the realization that Jesseph Bellamy was not a complete toad, but she found herself enjoying the unfamiliar sense of control.

"Mr. Bellamy, I presume?" she asked coyly.

"Erm, yes," the man said as he relocated to her table. "Jesseph Bellamy, but my friends call me Jesse."

Now that he sat directly across from her, Geneva had the chance to study him more closely. His sandy hair curled softly and appeared to have been freshly trimmed. In the light from the window, his eyes were a lovely shade of blue-gray, the color emphasized by his bronzed skin. And when he

smiled, he offered a glimpse of even, white teeth. With an angular face and a nose that was a trifle too long, his features were not perfect, but he was undeniably attractive, and blessed with a natural confidence that put Geneva at ease.

"How did you know?" he asked, but she did not get the chance to respond.

Mrs. Lynley arrived with a tray and set two teapots, Jesse's sandwich, and Geneva's scones on the table. She didn't bother to hide her curiosity, since she had probably heard through the village grapevine that an American heir was coming to take charge of the Bellamy estate and realized this had to be him. She made certain they had everything they needed, cast a disapproving glance in Geneva's direction, and a downright nasty one in Jesse's, and finally walked away.

Jesse's eyes searched Geneva's face for clues as she poured them both tea, then set the pot on the table before adding a bit of milk and a sugar cube to her cup.

"I'm Geneva Bellamy," she finally admitted.

"Should I be worried that you'll poison my tea?" Jesse asked. His gaze went to her face in mock alarm.

That was about the last thing Geneva had expected him to say, and she found herself amused by his insouciance.

"Why would I poison your tea?"

"Because I'm here to ruin your life," Jesse replied. "I can't imagine you would be well disposed towards me."

"The jury is still out," Geneva muttered.

"Is there anything I can do to sway the jury?" He smiled winsomely into her eyes.

"You can state your case and divulge your intentions."

Jesse nodded. "All right. I came because I was curious."

"And not because you liked the idea of becoming an English aristocrat?"

He actually laughed at that. "You are refreshingly direct, Geneva, but the answer to your question is no. In all the days of my life, I don't ever recall thinking to myself that it would be nice to become an English lord. I think it's an antiquated system that needs to be abolished."

"So, you came for the money, then."

“I came because I thought I would be helping,” Jesse replied after he’d taken a bite of his sandwich and chased it with a sip of tea. He made a face at the tea and reached for the sugar bowl.

“Helping how?” she asked.

“It is my understanding that your father is unwell and that the question of succession weighs heavily on his mind. As I’m the only living male relation, I thought I would answer his summons and do whatever I could to make things easier.”

“Are you really so altruistic?”

“I’m really not,” Jesse said.

“Then what are you after?”

“A holiday. I haven’t been anywhere in years, and I fancied a change.” He grinned broadly. “I learned that turn of phrase from a lovely English lady I met onboard. I think she *fancied* me,” he added confidentially.

“And did you return her feelings?” Geneva asked, suddenly worried that the lovely English lady would become the new mistress of her home.

“She was a peach, but not really my type.”

“Why not?”

“I prefer my ladies a bit younger,” Jesse confided.

“Why? How old was she?”

“Seventy-eight.”

“And how old are you, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Twenty-eight last month. I was a turkey baby.”

“I beg your pardon?” Geneva exclaimed.

“I was born on Thanksgiving. The date varies from year to year, but my birthday always falls around Turkey Day.”

Geneva had no inkling what he was talking about but didn’t ask him to explain for fear of sounding simple. He clearly expected her to know what he meant.

“How is your sandwich?” she asked.

“Not too bad. Should tide me over until dinner.” Jesse’s expression turned serious. “How is your father, Geneva?”

She felt the pricking of tears and didn’t know why she suddenly felt so emotional. This man didn’t know her father and was only being polite. And the sooner Douglas passed, the sooner Jesse would inherit.

“Thank you for asking. He’s as well as can be expected.”

“I’m glad to hear it. Might the doctors be wrong?”

“I doubt it. But I think he will breathe easier now you’re here.”

“I expect that largely depends on what his expectations are,” Jesse replied. He seemed a little happier with his tea now, and took another sip.

He expects us to marry, Geneva nearly said, but managed to refrain from mentioning her father’s plans. Revealing the truth would make her sound pathetic and desperate.

Jesse applied himself to his sandwich, but Geneva had quite lost her appetite and couldn’t manage more than a few bites of a scone. Eager to leave, she reached for her reticule and took out her change purse.

“Please, allow me,” Jesse offered.

“I can still pay for my own tea, Mr. Bellamy.” She didn’t mean to sound defensive, but that was how it had come out, and he raised his hands, holding them palms out.

“By all means, *Miss Bellamy*.”

“That’s Lady Geneva,” Mrs. Lynley said haughtily as she accepted Geneva’s money.

“Forgive me,” Jesse said as he paid for his own meal. “I’m naught but an ignorant American.”

“Shall we go?” Geneva asked and stood to put on her coat.

“Whenever you’re ready, *my lady*. May I give you a hand with your parcel?”

“I can manage, thank you.”

“Do you have a chauffeur, Lady Geneva? And is the poor chap waiting out in the cold?”

“I’m quite capable of driving myself,” Geneva replied and headed to the door once Jesse was ready.

“A lady after my own heart,” he said as he grabbed his case and followed her outside.

“Do you drive, Mr. Bellamy?”

“I do, indeed. I own a sweet Model T Ford back home. But I also fly.”

“You do?”

“I was with the Royal Air Corps during the war. Flew an Avro 504 on raids that took off from an airfield in Kent. An army buddy keeps his plane at Mitchel Field in Long Island and lets me take it out from time to time. I had engine trouble the last time I went up. I thought that might be the end of me,” Bellamy admitted with a sad smile.

“That sounds rather terrifying.”

“It was, at the time, but there’s nothing like flying. It’s the most exhilarating feeling in the world.”

Geneva couldn’t help but be impressed and felt slightly more favorably disposed towards him. A tiny seed of admiration took root in her heart as she led him to her car and wordlessly handed him the crank.

TWENTY-EIGHT

"May I present my sister, Honor," Geneva said when she led Jesse into the drawing room, where Honor was mooning over a photo of Douglas Fairbanks in last month's issue of the *Picturegoer*. "Honor, this is our cousin, Jesseph Bellamy. I met him in the village."

Honor stared from Geneva to Jesse, her mouth opening in shock. She looked like she was about to say something but seemed to change her mind. She closed the magazine and set it aside, then got to her feet and walked towards Jesse. Her face was set in lines of consternation, and the way she walked, one would think she was wading through a river of treacle.

"It's an *honor* to meet you," Jesse said with a disarming grin. "And please, call me Jesse."

The play on her name only upset Honor more, and she turned on her heel and stalked away without offering a word of greeting.

"I'm sorry. Please excuse me," Geneva tossed over her shoulder as she followed her sister.

"Honor, what do you think you're doing?" she hissed as soon as she found her sister in the library. "You don't have to roll out the red carpet, but you can at least be civil to the man."

"No, I can't," Honor snapped. "He's come here to take our home, and he thinks it's all a great big joke."

"He was only trying to put you at ease," Geneva replied.

"Why? Because it worked so easily with you?"

"I can't talk to you when you're being unreasonable."

"You cut your hair," Honor said accusingly.

"I wanted a change."

"You could have asked me to come along." Honor's eyes filled with tears.

"It wasn't planned, Honor. Father asked me to collect an item he'd ordered from Mr. Hale. After I was finished with my errand, I walked into the hairdresser's on a whim."

Honor shook her head, and tears of rejection spilled down her cheeks. “I feel so alone,” she choked out.

Geneva crossed the space between them and drew Honor into her arms. “You’re not alone, you silly girl. I’m right here. And Jesse doesn’t seem so bad.”

“He’s a monster,” Honor muttered into Geneva’s shoulder.

Geneva didn’t bother to try to convince her otherwise. Honor was scared and felt threatened by Jesse’s arrival. Until a few minutes ago, he had been just a name—a bogeyman—but now he was here, and he was all too real. Geneva knew nothing she said would make a difference. Honor needed time to accept Jesse’s arrival, and he needed the space to win her goodwill. And Geneva’s as well. Just because he seemed friendly and charming didn’t mean he was worthy of their trust or would consider their position once everything was his.

“Steady on,” Geneva whispered into Honor’s hair. “We’ll take this one day at a time.”

“We don’t have a lot of days left,” Honor reminded her as she pulled away. “Dr. Miller came while you were out.”

Geneva was instantly alarmed. “What did he say?”

“He said Father should be in hospital.”

“Why? He’s perfectly comfortable right here.”

Honor’s sad gaze sent an arrow of terror straight to Geneva’s heart. “He’s going to need round-the-clock care once things get really bad. And Dennison can’t be trusted to follow Dr. Miller’s instructions. His allegiance is to Father.”

“Surely we’re not there yet,” Geneva said brightly. “We still have time.”

“We don’t,” Honor said with a stubborn shake of the head. “Dr. Miller is sending a nurse. She’s coming tomorrow. She will look after Father until he agrees to go to the hospital. Or…” Honor couldn’t bring herself to finish the sentence, but Geneva knew what she meant.

She nodded. She had known this day would come. She just hadn’t thought it’d come this soon. In her mind they had still had a few months, maybe until the spring, but now they would be taking things day by day, and then hour by hour. Douglas had been right when he’d said he’d run out of time. They all had.

“Then let’s make this Christmas special,” she said. “It’ll be like old times. We’ll get a twelve-foot tree and decorate the house with holly. And you and I can go to Midnight Mass at St. Michael’s.”

“He’ll want to come too,” Honor muttered, clearly referring to Jesse.

“So let him.”

“It’s never going to be just us again, will it?”

Probably not, Geneva wanted to say, but this wasn’t the time for honesty. “It will always be just you and me,” she promised. “The Bellamy girls against the world.”

Honor nodded, but Geneva could see she didn’t believe it. She was already grieving their father and the life they’d had, and her pain would only become more acute in the coming days. It wasn’t the bricks and mortar Honor was afraid to lose but what was left of her family, and her perceived place in the world. If Jesse took Geneva away from her, she’d be on her own, a third wheel for a two-wheel carriage. And she was terrified.

TWENTY-NINE

"Is she all right?" Jesse asked when Geneva found him in the drawing room. He'd helped himself to whisky from the drinks caddy and was sitting by the fire, his legs casually crossed, the *Picturegoer* in his lap.

"She will be. It's a lot to take in."

"I understand. Anything I can do?"

"Don't rush her," Geneva said. "It will take her time to accept you."

Jesse nodded. "Can I get you a drink?"

Already he was acting as if this were his home and he were the master, but Geneva was too sad to feel anything beyond mild irritation.

"No, thank you. But you help yourself," she added a bit testily.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to overstep," Jesse said and set the glass down. "I just thought it would be easier to serve myself than to summon someone."

"It's all right," Geneva assured him. "You did the right thing."

"OK, then," Jesse said and smiled at her. "And since I've nearly finished my drink and you don't want one, perhaps I can meet your father?"

A nervous twitch pulled at his mouth, and Geneva felt just a little bit sorry for him. Despite his good fortune, this couldn't be easy for him. He was walking into hostile territory, and he would have to win everyone over if he was to be made welcome.

"Maybe later. He's resting," Geneva said.

"Of course. I'm sorry. I can only imagine how difficult this must be for you all."

"It is."

"If there's anything at all I can do to help, just name it," Jesse said, his expression earnest. "Would it make things easier if I stayed at a hotel?"

"I don't think so. You need to be here, at the hall, to learn about the estate, and to allow us the chance to get to know you."

Jesse nodded in acknowledgment. Geneva had hoped he'd say something reassuring about the future, but instead he turned to gaze into the

dying embers of the coal fire, his elegant fingers loosely wrapped about the nearly empty glass. She wondered what he was thinking but didn't feel she had the right to ask. They were strangers to each other, and, even though their relationship was now on the clock, they still needed to take the time to build a foundation.

When Douglas hobbled into the room, they both turned towards the door. His skin had a yellowish cast and his eyes were glazed, possibly with morphine, but he managed a smile and held out his hand to Jesse, who'd sprung to his feet and hurried to the door to greet his host.

"Sir, it's a pleasure to meet you," he said solemnly.

"The pleasure is all mine, son. Thank you for coming on such short notice."

Douglas's gaze slid to the chair Jesse had been sitting in, and the young man apologized.

"Forgive me. Did I take your seat? I didn't realize."

"It's quite all right. Would you mind fixing me a drink, Jesseph?"

"Please, call me Jesse. I've always hated the name Jesseph. Makes me sound like some biblical prophet."

Douglas nodded, and a tiny smile appeared on his face. "It does."

"Father, you shouldn't be drinking," Geneva said under her breath as soon as Jesse went to the drinks cabinet. It was dangerous to mix morphine with alcohol. Even she knew that.

"Or what? I will die?" Douglas joked. "Scotch. Neat," he called out to Jesse.

"Yes, sir."

Jesse handed Douglas his drink and was about to sit on the sofa when Geneva got up and offered him her seat.

"You two have much to discuss, and I'd like a few minutes to freshen up."

Douglas peered at her, as if trying to pinpoint what was different. "You cut your hair," he said at last.

"Yes. Do you like it?" Geneva patted her hair self-consciously.

Douglas looked momentarily dismayed, then nodded. "In my day, hair was considered a woman's crowning glory, but my day is nearly done. It suits you, my dear. You look very modern."

"Thank you, Father," Geneva said quietly.

It seemed they couldn't discuss anything without constant reminders of her father's fast-approaching demise. She needed no reminders. One look at him, and her heart broke all over again. But she had to remain strong, especially now that Jesse had arrived and would be looking for chinks in the armor.

Geneva was just about to walk through the door when Douglas called out to her. "Genny, wait."

She turned. "Yes?"

"I was thinking. I'd like to properly celebrate Jesse's arrival. Introduce him to our neighbors and friends. How long do you think it will take to pull together a party?"

"A party?" Geneva gaped at her father. Was he serious? It was nearly Christmas. People had plans and would be spending the holiday with their families.

"What about a New Year's Eve bash?" Douglas suggested. "We'll have a quiet family Christmas, then ring in the new year in style."

"I suppose it can be done," Geneva replied.

"I can help," Jesse offered.

"Excellent, then you two are in charge."

"Honor will want to be involved," Geneva said. If they left Honor out, she'd never forgive either of them.

"Of course she will. She's feeling rather low, I'm afraid," Douglas said. "It's never easy for a child to accept change."

It's no picnic for me either, Geneva wanted to rage, but she had to remain strong. Honor would have no one else to look to in the coming days.

"I'll leave you two to get acquainted," she said and walked out into the corridor.

She needed a few minutes to herself, to process the events of the afternoon, and to try to tamp down her anger at her father's unquestioning acceptance of Jesse. He'd never thrown a party in her honor, not even when she'd turned twenty-one. But they had to honor Jesse. Perhaps they should send for the trumpeters and shout about his inheritance from the castle walls.

The king is dead. Long live the king, she thought bitterly and instantly felt ashamed of herself.

THIRTY

"So, what's he like, the American?" Rory asked when Geneva met him the following day.

His gaze was anxious and searching, and she knew he was desperate to ask her other, more personal questions, but now wasn't the time. And as before, she had no answers to give him, at least not ones he'd like.

"Not as awful as I thought he would be," Geneva confessed.

"Should I be worried?"

The question was asked in jest, but Geneva couldn't formulate a reply quickly enough to satisfy Rory, and he bristled.

"You've changed your mind about us," he said accusingly.

"I haven't," Geneva protested, but even she knew there was little conviction in her voice.

"You have. You came running to me when you thought all was lost, but, now that the heir apparent is handsome and charming, suddenly you are presented with a more attractive option."

"Rory, I never said that."

"You didn't have to," he snapped. "I understand. Marrying this man will solve all your problems. You will retain your status, your home, and the lifestyle you're accustomed to. You won't have to sacrifice a thing. You can be married at St. Michael's, in the presence of your approving family and lifelong friends," he added angrily. "That's part of the problem, isn't it? My religion."

"In part, yes," Geneva retorted. "And if you tell me that the difference in our faiths is of no consequence, I won't believe you. It matters, Rory."

"Then let's talk about it. Properly this time. We've been dancing around the practicalities since the day you came to my cottage. Let's get it all out in the open."

"Rory," Geneva began, but suddenly realized she wasn't sure what she wanted to say.

He was right. On paper, Jesse was unquestionably the right choice, even if family and friends would whisper behind their hands that he was not quite the right sort—little better than a peasant when measured against the pedigree and accomplishments of his British forebears. In reality, the situation was more complicated, but things would be just as complicated, if not more so, with Rory. She could hardly tell him that it wasn't merely his faith that prevented her from giving him a firm answer; it was everything. Nothing about it felt right, and she regretted what had happened at his cottage. It wasn't entirely his fault. She had led him on, allowed him to believe she loved him and had welcomed his proposal, but she had led herself on as well. She hadn't been thinking clearly, and in her desperation she had made a mistake.

Now she lacked the courage to tell him the truth. Or perhaps she simply wanted to keep him dangling, in case things went wrong with Jesse, which they very well might. Jesse owed her nothing, and she had yet to discover whether there was someone waiting for him back home.

"Rory, I need time."

Rory nodded and walked away without another word, leaving her standing alone in the middle of the lane. He was understandably angry, but so was she. It wasn't as simple as marrying the man she loved and walking away from a situation that made her miserable. For one thing, she didn't even know if she loved Rory. She liked him, had felt drawn to him before that fateful night, but was that love? She had nothing to compare her feelings to. She had never been in love before—had scarcely even been in like.

Rory was her first romantic experience, and what she felt for him bore little resemblance to her expectations. But what could she have expected? All she knew of love came from books and the cinema, and that was not real life—at least not her life. They were hardly Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, or Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester. And in truth, that was not the sort of love she desired. She did not yearn for storms and anguish, but for something gentler and steadier, a love that was lasting and kind, not a relationship rooted in falsehood, tragedy, and despair.

And at this moment, she needed to set her own feelings aside and focus on the coming weeks—and on the party her father was so determined to host. They all knew it would be his last public appearance, and if he wanted to introduce Jesse as his successor and say goodbye to the people

he'd known all his life, then it was up to her to fulfill his final wish and put a good face on it.

Geneva returned to the hall to find Honor and Jesse in the conservatory. They were walking side by side among the plants. Honor was talking excitedly, while Jesse listened and nodded at the appropriate times. Honor's anger seemed to have dissipated, and, if not wholeheartedly welcoming, she was at least friendly. Geneva wasn't certain if it was Honor's personality or her age—or maybe a bit of both—but she bounced across the spectrum of human emotions as if she were a tennis ball. Or maybe it was because Jesse was good-looking, and charming, and had seemed to find the right approach to Geneva's capricious little sister.

"And we have to have music," Honor was saying. "We have a gramophone, of course, but the records are not suitable for dancing. It's mostly Mozart and Bach. And Strauss." She made a face that reflected her horror, and Jesse laughed.

"They have their place," he said. "I imagine many a couple first felt the stirrings of attraction while partnered in a waltz."

"Why would they?" Honor asked, clearly surprised by Jesse's observation.

"Because it's a socially sanctioned opportunity to get very, very close," Jesse replied, an amused grin tugging at his mouth. "Have you ever waltzed with anyone?"

"No," Honor said rather sulkily. Then her expression brightened. "Will you show me?"

"Maybe not just now," Geneva interrupted as she walked towards them down an avenue of palmettos.

"Spoilsport," Honor said, but there was no rancor in her voice. And the way she glanced at Jesse made it obvious that he'd given her something to think about. "Back to the New Year's party, then," she said. "We need something modern and lively, but there's nowhere to buy records. Father bought all his favorite records in London."

"If your father would permit me to borrow the car, I will find us new records," Jesse said.

"You'll drive down to London?" Honor asked.

"I'm sure there is a closer record shop. Where's the nearest town?"

"There are several, but I think Barrow-in-Furness would have a record shop," Geneva said.

“Then that is where I will go. Will you two accompany me? I will need your help to choose the best tunes. We can make a day of it,” Jesse suggested.

“I would love that,” Honor cried and clapped her hands. “I never get to go anywhere since my sister makes sure to steal away before I can ask her if I might come along.”

“I said I was sorry,” Geneva muttered.

“Did you? I don’t recall receiving an apology.”

“I’m sorry. I will never steal away again.”

“We’ll see about that,” Honor said, not sounding convinced. “Can we have a pub lunch?”

“What do you say, Geneva?” Jesse asked.

“Someone should stay here and look after Father.”

“Nurse Jeffries can look after him,” Honor replied. “She arrived while you were out. He seems to like her.”

“How can you tell?” Geneva asked.

“He didn’t ask her to leave.”

“That’s something, I suppose. I should go upstairs and say hello. And ask Father if we can go out for the day.”

“Do you need his permission?” Jesse asked. “You are of age.”

“It’s a matter of courtesy,” Geneva replied.

“Father won’t mind,” Honor said again.

Honor had a point. Douglas would hardly notice they were gone, since he spent so little time with them these days, and she could hardly allow Honor to go off with Jesse unchaperoned. It was an outdated concept, but what did they know of his character or past experiences with women?

“All right,” Geneva agreed. “We can go tomorrow, if you like. Or any day this week.”

“Swell,” Jesse said. “I don’t suppose you will permit me to drive?”

“Not a chance, but you can crank the motor,” Geneva conceded with a smile.

The grin slid off her face when she recalled that, as soon as her father was gone, Jesse would own both the motorcar and the crank, as well as everything else she now thought of as theirs.

“I want a new dress for the party,” Honor announced. “All my frocks are old-fashioned and childish. I’m no longer a little girl.”

“No, you are not,” Jesse said and grinned at her in a way that made Geneva want to slap him.

“I doubt Mrs. Harmon will have enough time to sew a new gown,” she said.

“I don’t want some fuddy-duddy gown, Genny. I want a sleeveless, knee-length frock with sequins and beads,” Honor countered and jutted out her chin defiantly. “There’s bound to be a dress shop in town. And if there isn’t, I will order a new frock from a catalog.”

“I doubt it will arrive in time for the party.”

“It will.”

Jesse smiled awkwardly and backed away. “I don’t think I have anything of value to add to this discussion. I will see you both later.”

“Where are you going?” Honor demanded.

“I’m going for a walk along the shore. Alone,” he added when she looked like she was about to offer to come along.

Jesse bowed formally and strode from the conservatory.

“He’s actually rather nice,” Honor said as soon as he was out of earshot. “All this time I was expecting some hideous gargoyle. I was horrid to him last night,” she admitted with a sheepish smile.

“He is nice, isn’t he?”

“I think we frightened him off.”

“I expect he has much to think about,” Geneva said.

“What’s there to think about? He has everything a man could possibly want.”

“And what do you know about what men want?”

Honor’s gaze was far too knowing for a girl of her years. “He has money and choices, Genny. What more *could* a man want?”

Geneva couldn’t argue with that. Jesse Bellamy did have choices, and his every decision would affect their lives in ways they couldn’t begin to predict.

THIRTY-ONE

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick, Cumbria

When Quinn woke, she had a missed call from Rhys from the night before, but nothing from Logan. At this stage, she wasn't even expecting to hear from him, not really, but she was still hopeful. She would drive into Keswick after breakfast and check in at the police station. She was eager to speak to DI Malone, but also terribly nervous, and wished Gabe could come with her for moral support, but they could hardly bring the kids. And it would take all of Gabe's attention and patience to deal with four restless children who didn't have their devices to fall back on.

"Maybe you should take them for a walk," Quinn suggested when they discussed their plans over breakfast. It was a beautiful day, and there was a path that wound around the lake.

"I'll see what the kids want to do," Gabe said noncommittally.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Quinn promised.

She spotted Emma watching from the window as she climbed into the car. The girl looked frightened and tense, and Quinn hated that she had caused her such worry. When a child lost someone they loved early on, their sense of invincibility was stripped away forever, their mind quietly reminding them that anything could happen at any moment. Unlike most girls her age, who still believed that nothing truly terrible could touch them, Emma knew better. She understood all too well that things did not always turn out all right, and people didn't always come back.

Quinn rang DI Malone as soon as she was on the road.

"Thanks for calling," he said gruffly. "I'll get in touch with the station, so they will be expecting you when you arrive."

The detective could have spoken to Quinn over the phone, but she suspected he wanted to see her face and gauge her reactions and body language. For all DI Malone knew, Quinn was in on Logan's plan and was

working to clear the path for him. But the path to what? If only she knew what he was up to. Logan had seemed completely himself in the days leading up to his disappearance, and he had responded to Emma's text that very afternoon. Perhaps he had been hiding something, but her instinct told Quinn that whatever had occurred had been unexpected, and Logan had had no other option but to react.

When she arrived at the police station, Quinn gave her name and showed her ID to the desk sergeant. Once her identity was verified, she was escorted to a small office equipped with a desk, two chairs, and a computer monitor. A young plainclothes policewoman, who introduced herself as DS Coyle, stepped inside and took a seat next to Quinn. She had chestnut hair, soft brown eyes, and a pleasant smile. The DS wore a gray trouser suit, and her hair was parted on the side and pulled into a bun. To Quinn, she looked like a banker or an IT specialist, but she was sure the detective sergeant had put in her hours on the street and had earned her promotion.

"Someone from this station must be present during the interview," DS Coyle explained.

Quinn found her presence comforting and thought the officer was there for Quinn's protection as well, since she would hear everything that was said and could be called upon to testify if Quinn's responses were in any way twisted to fit DI Malone's narrative. DS Coyle turned on the monitor, accessed the correct screen, then clicked on the link DI Malone had sent through once it was time for the interview. Malone appeared on the screen a few moments later.

The detective looked to be in his forties and had thinning brown hair, dark eyes that were magnified by the lenses of his rectangular frames, and a fleshy face. He had a ruddy complexion and a thick neck that was almost entirely obscured by the collar of his blue shirt. He wore a striped tie and an Apple Watch.

"Good morning, Mrs. Russell," he said. His tone was polite but not overly friendly.

"Please, call me Quinn."

"All right. Quinn." Malone did not smile to put her at ease. In fact, he looked suspicious and stern. "Have you had any more communications

from your brother since the text message you received on the morning after his disappearance?"

"I have not."

"Did he ever mention someone stalking him or sending him threatening messages?"

"No, never."

"So, everything appeared to be perfectly normal until he'd suddenly done a bunk?" Malone asked.

"Yes."

"Was he worried about anything?" the DI asked. "Money, perhaps?"

"As far as I know, Logan was comfortably off, especially since…" Quinn's voice trailed away.

"Since what?"

"Since his… our mother died. She owned a house and had investments and savings."

"Did everything come to him?" Malone asked.

"No, her assets were divided between her two sons."

"What about you? Were you not included in her will?"

Quinn sighed. "My mother and I hadn't known each other very long. She gave me up at birth, and we had only recently connected. Sylvia died at the start of the pandemic. She did not have time to make changes to her will."

"Did you feel resentful towards your brothers for not cutting you in?"

"Are you suggesting I murdered Logan and disposed of his body to get my hands on his money?" Quinn snapped.

"You said it, not me," Malone said with a shrug. "So, you don't think this is about money?"

"I honestly don't know what to think."

Quinn was taken aback by the man's unpleasant demeanor. He wasn't antagonistic, exactly, but he wasn't sympathetic or friendly either. Perhaps he needed to get her measure before he arrived at any conclusions, or maybe he was just a disagreeable and suspicious person. Mistrust came with the job, and, aside from Sean Cadogan's endorsement, he had no reason to trust her.

The detective's expression suddenly softened. "There's been a development in the case," he said.

"What sort of development?"

“Logan’s car was found in Ealing. It was burned out.”

“Was there…?” Quinn couldn’t bring herself to articulate what she was asking. Saying the words out loud made them all too real. Malone immediately understood, though.

“There was no body. And we weren’t able to get anything from CCTV. The lot where the car was dumped doesn’t have CCTV, and the traffic cameras picked up someone driving the vehicle, but it was impossible to say with any certainty if the driver was Logan Wyatt.”

“What about the man and woman connected to the case? Were you able to identify them?”

“Without a name, a clear image, or a way to determine how they knew your brother, it will take time.”

“So, what are you going to do?” Quinn asked. She hadn’t meant to sound accusing, but her family could be in danger, and she was justifiably afraid.

DI Malone was clearly trying to look sympathetic. “Because someone tried to abduct Max, we have to assume that these people are either after the child or intended to use him as leverage. Which is why I need to ask you a few personal questions about Logan.”

Quinn sighed. She knew where this was heading. “Go on.”

“It is my understanding that when Max was born, Logan was still with his partner.”

“Yes. He and Rafe parted ways three years ago.”

“Might Rafe want the child?”

“He never expressed an interest in remaining part of Max’s life.”

“Is Logan Max’s biological father?” Malone asked.

“He is.”

“And the mother?”

“Logan and Rafe used a surrogate.”

“And a donor egg?”

“No. Chrissy is Max’s biological mother.”

“Interesting,” DI Malone said under his breath. “Is it possible that Chrissy wants her son back?”

“She relinquished all rights and returned to the Czech Republic not long after Max was born. As far as I know, Logan and Chrissy have not been in touch since she left.”

“Do you have contact information for her?”

“I do not.”

“Do you at least know her surname?” DI Malone asked.

“No.”

“What about Rafe? Would he know how to find her?”

“You’d have to ask him.”

“Is Logan involved with someone new?” the detective inquired.

“I don’t believe so. And even if he was, why would they want to take Max?”

“I know it’s upsetting, Quinn, but I must understand every aspect of Logan’s life if I’m to find out what happened to him.”

Quinn took a calming breath. “I honestly don’t know, Detective. As a rule, Logan is not a secretive person, but we all keep things to ourselves, don’t we? And he’s already been hurt. Perhaps he was seeing someone but didn’t want to tell anyone until he was certain the person was someone special and they had a future together.”

“Might Max know?”

“I don’t think we should ask a five-year-old if his dad was seeing anyone.”

DI Malone sighed. “Well, I wouldn’t put it to him that way. But he might know if someone had been to the house or had spent the night.”

“I would really rather you didn’t question him,” Quinn said.

“Fair enough. I’m going to have a word with Rafe and Chrissy and see if anything shakes out.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Then we will explore other avenues of inquiry. At the moment, this is all we really have.”

“Can we go home?” Quinn asked.

“You can, but we can’t offer you protection, not unless we have reason to believe there’s a credible threat. The best I can do is make sure a patrol car passes your house several times a day.”

“Someone tried to take Max,” Quinn reminded him.

“Which is why we’re taking this very seriously. Do let me know what you decide.”

Quinn considered the situation. “We’re going to remain here until Sunday afternoon, as planned.”

“I think that’s a good idea. Please contact the local police department if you feel in any way threatened.”

“I will,” Quinn said and watched DI Malone disappear and the screen go dark.

If she had hoped that DI Malone would somehow reassure her, she felt even more at sea after speaking to him. And DS Coyle didn’t have much to add, but then this wasn’t her case. She was there as a matter of professional courtesy. The policewoman escorted Quinn into the reception area, handed her a card with a number to call should anything occur, and sent her on her way.

Quinn had just got in the car when Jude rang. She told him everything she had learned, and by the time she finished, she was crying, her vision too blurred by tears to drive.

“I’m coming, Quinn,” Jude said. “I can’t leave until tomorrow morning, but I should be with you by tomorrow afternoon. Tomorrow evening at the latest. You can’t deal with this alone, and Max needs all the protection he can get. Does he have a passport?”

“Logan took him on holiday to Greece last year.”

“Do you have a key to Logan’s house?” Jude asked.

“Yes, he gave me a key in case of emergency.”

“Well, I’d say this qualifies,” Jude said with a bitter chuckle. “Do you have it on you?”

“No, it’s at home.”

“Right. I actually have a spare key,” he seemed to suddenly recall. “Logan gave it to me when he first bought the house, in case I arrive in London and need a place to crash. I will go to Logan’s and look for Max’s passport. And then I will take him back to Germany. No one will be able to get to him at the base.”

“I suppose that’s one option.”

“What’s the alternative?”

“To wait and see what DI Malone turns up.”

“I’ll get the passport, but we’ll wait until Sunday to make any decisions. That gives us a few days.”

“All right, then,” Quinn agreed. “Sunday.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, sis. Give me the address, and I’ll come to you.”

“Thanks, Jude. I can’t wait to see you,” Quinn said after she had told him where they were staying.

“I just wish it was under happier circumstances,” Jude said and rang off.

Quinn pulled a tissue from her bag and dried her eyes. It made her feel better that Jude was coming, and Max would be happy to see his uncle. And if Logan didn’t turn up, taking Max to Germany might prove a good solution, since Quinn didn’t have the resources to keep him safe. What put her off was the conversation with DI Malone. Despite Sean Cadogan’s recommendation, she didn’t have a good feeling about the man. There was just something about him that didn’t inspire confidence. Perhaps it was his demeanor, or maybe it was that Quinn didn’t believe he really cared about solving the case. She got the feeling that he was just going through the motions and would tick all the right boxes until he could set the file aside.

But there was someone she liked and trusted, a private inquiry agent who’d consistently delivered results in the past. Quinn hadn’t spoken to Drew Camden since Brett had been convicted and sent to prison—thankfully, there had been no need—but she thought of Drew now. A lot could happen to a middle-aged man in five years, and the last few years had been like no other that any of them had ever lived through personally. But she had nothing to lose by trying, so she pulled up Drew’s number and made the call.

THIRTY-TWO

"Quinn."

Drew's voice was like a rumble of distant thunder, but she instantly felt comforted. Drew got things done, and, despite the years of noncommunication, he didn't sound like a man who'd moved to a retirement village and started his own murder club with other bored retirees.

"How have you been, Drew?"

"Not too bad." There was a brief pause. "I considered reaching out when Quinngate first broke but thought you probably had enough to contend with. I'm glad to see it's all water under the bridge now. Or is it? Has something happened? Did someone threaten you?"

"I'm not calling about myself. But I do need your help."

"I'm all ears," Drew said. And she told him everything.

"I can see why you wouldn't feel reassured," Drew said when she finished. "That DI should have had considerably more information by this stage."

"What sort of information?" Quinn asked.

"Well, for one, it's not that difficult to find out the name of Logan's surrogate and trace her movements. Likewise, he should have contacted Rafe and asked about his movements on the day Logan was followed home. At the very least, he should try to rule the two of them out of the investigation."

"Why would someone burn Logan's car?" She could think of a reason, but she needed to hear it from a professional.

"My guess would be that someone wished to destroy evidence."

"But evidence of what?" Quinn cried.

"Illegal substances, or the more likely possibility is that they hoped to destroy any traces of DNA. Now, don't go jumping to any unfounded conclusions," he warned. "The police did not find human remains in the car, which is reason to hope that Logan is still alive."

"I haven't heard from him in several days."

“He either can’t or won’t make contact because he believes he’s in danger.”

“But why would someone want to hurt Logan? What could he be involved in that would make him a target?”

“I can’t answer that just now, but I will have something to share with you tomorrow,” Drew promised. “But I do need you to answer a few questions. It will save time.”

He took down Max’s date of birth, the name of the hospital where he was born, Rafe’s details, and the address where Quinn and Gabe would be until Sunday.

“I’ll be in touch. If you hear anything or if something gives you cause for concern, ring me straight away.”

“I will,” Quinn promised. “And thank you, Drew.”

“Thank me when I find your brother.”

Quinn felt infinitely better by the time they ended the call. She stopped at the supermarket, picked up some groceries and bought ice cream for the kids, and set off for the boathouse. When she got back, Gabe and the kids were gone. Quinn felt sick with apprehension but ordered herself to remain calm. There was no reason to suspect that anything was wrong. She tried phoning Gabe but heard his mobile ring in the bedroom, where it was plugged in to charge. Emma’s mobile was on her bed, still attached to her headphones. Quinn looked around frantically for anything that might tell her where they had all gone. She let out a hysterical giggle when she finally went to put away the melting ice cream. There was a scrap of paper pinned to the fridge, the note scribbled in Gabe’s hand.

Gone fishing

She supposed the kids had become restless and Gabe had decided that this was a safe way to keep them occupied. Letting out a sigh of immense relief, Quinn put away the groceries, then took out the earring and settled in a deckchair. She’d go fishing too. For information.

THIRTY-THREE

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

They chose a brisk, sunny day to go into town. Douglas had insisted on coming downstairs and was comfortably settled in the drawing room by the time they were ready to leave. He sat before a roaring fire, a cup of tea in his hand and his favorite record playing softly on the gramophone. Nurse Jeffries, who although a pleasant woman had the demeanor of a drill sergeant, sat by the window, her melancholy gaze on the wintry parkland beyond. Geneva felt reassured by her presence and knew that she wouldn't take any guff from her father if she felt he needed to rest or was due for his medication. He was in capable hands, and the nurse had reassured them there was no call to rush back.

Geneva got behind the wheel, and, once Jesse cranked the motor, he called out, "I'm riding shotgun."

"What does that mean?" Honor asked.

"It means I'm riding in the front."

"What does a shotgun have to do with it?"

"A person armed with a shotgun used to ride next to the driver of a stagecoach, in case it was ambushed."

"Who by?" Honor asked.

"Hostiles."

"And are you expecting to get ambushed?" Geneva asked.

"You never know. You Brits are an unpredictable lot," Jess quipped and got in next to her.

Honor had no choice but to ride in the back seat, but she didn't seem to mind. She was so excited to go on an outing, she'd have ridden on the bonnet if the situation had called for it.

"Have you ever shot anyone?" she asked Jesse as they drove through the gates and started down the lane.

“I have,” he replied but did not elaborate, and Geneva realized that he was referring to his military service. Honor seemed to get that too because she didn’t ask any more questions and turned to gaze out at the passing landscape.

It was too windy to maintain a conversation, so the three of them sat in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Uncertain as she felt about everything at the moment, Geneva decided that she would permit herself to have a nice time and take a break from endless worrying. She wasn’t going to solve anything today, least of all her feelings about Rory. But as the car barreled along, she couldn’t help but replay their final conversation in her mind, her memories illuminated by the unforgiving light of day. And the lightness she had felt for a few short moments began to dissipate, her heart once again heavy with foreboding.

Rory had come to the house last night and had asked her to walk with him. It would have been churlish to refuse, especially after the way they had parted earlier, so she’d put on her coat and hat, and the two of them had gone outside and had turned onto the path that wasn’t clearly visible from the house.

Geneva hadn’t wanted Honor to see them. And she’d also realized that she didn’t care for Jesse to notice them walking off together. She owed him no explanation, but she preferred to keep her meeting with Rory to herself. Until she knew where things stood, it paid to keep her cards close to her chest. After all, Jesse wasn’t exactly showing his hand just yet.

“I’m sorry, Genny,” Rory said as soon as they were away from the house. “I had no right to lose my temper with ye. It’s just that I feel so helpless.”

“I don’t blame you, Rory,” Geneva said. “But I’m not in a position to make any decisions just now.”

“I understand.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that.”

Rory stopped walking and faced her in the gloaming, his eyes shadowed by the brim of his flat cap.

“I’ve had some time to think, and there are things I need to say to ye, lass. I know I should have said them before, but perhaps I needed to be certain in my own heart that I meant them. I love ye, Genny, and I will do whatever it takes. And if me becoming a Protestant will make things easier for ye, then I’ll do it. It took me some time to arrive at that conclusion, but

what I came to realize is that I'm a spiritual man, not a devout one, so the trappings of religion are not a sticking point for me."

Geneva opened her mouth to say that she loved him too, but found that she wasn't ready to make such a declaration, nor would she have offered to convert to make things easier for him. Maybe that was because she simply couldn't see past the next few weeks, or maybe it was an indication of her feelings for him. They weren't strong enough to overcome adversity.

"Rory, I need time," she said. "I know I keep saying that, but I'm simply not in a position to make any important decisions at the moment. Give me until the new year."

He nodded, but she sensed rather than saw his disappointment. He had hoped she'd give him something to hold on to.

"I have something for ye," he said. "I rang my mam and had her send it from Dublin."

Rory pulled a small box from his pocket, and Geneva's heart sank. She wasn't ready to wear his ring yet. She stared at the box, and after several tense moments Rory opened it at last. Inside was a filigreed silver band, with two tiny hands holding a crowned heart at the center. Geneva had never seen anything like it but thought it quite beautiful, if a little disconcerting. It reminded her of the Jesus figurines she'd seen where the heart was on the outside of the body. She knew it was meant to represent Jesus's love for all mankind, but the blood-red heart frightened her, maybe because instead of Jesus what she saw was Jack, whose chest had been ripped open by an exploding shell, his heart laid bare as he died.

"This is a claddagh ring," Rory said when the silence had stretched for too long. "It can be given as an engagement ring or a wedding band, but really it's just a sign of commitment. It's to show ye how much ye mean to me and how serious I am about a future with ye. Ye don't need to put it on if ye're not ready. But hold on to it, and when ye come to a decision, ye can either slip it on or give it back. Just know that ye have a choice, and maybe the knowledge will help ye to feel less adrift."

Geneva's eyes filled with tears. That was the nicest thing he could have said to her. Choices were what she craved most, and to know that he was giving her one made her understand just how deeply he cared for her.

"I will treasure it," she said and slipped the box into her own pocket. "And I will wear it proudly when the time comes."

Rory pulled her close and kissed her. And for the first time in days, she felt content rather than scared or weighed down by grief. They spent a few more minutes in the shadows, lost in a warm embrace, but then Geneva had to go. It was time to change for dinner, smile, and make small talk with the man who'd come to usurp her life.

Geneva was jolted from her thoughts when they reached the outskirts of Barrow-in-Furness. It was a grim industrial town, crowded with unsmiling, rough-looking people clad in worn, drab garments. The road was choked with motorcars, delivery wagons, and lorries, and the stench of grease, manure, and coal soot filled her nostrils. Unaccustomed to navigating such congested streets, she grew flustered, and slammed on the brake when a lorry pulled out in front of her. The car behind her clipped the rear bumper and forced the Austin 7 into the side of a parked dray wagon. As far as Geneva could tell, no real damage had been done, but the accident prompted a barrage of shouted insults from the vehicles behind her and the owner of the wagon, who insisted she'd crippled his horse—language so vile, it brought her to tears. Her hands trembled as she tried to right the motor.

"Pull over," Jesse said quietly.

She did, and he slid into the driver's seat once she had shifted over.

Jesse patted her gloved hand. "You could do with a gin fizz. What do you think, Honor?"

"I think I need one too. I'm quite overcome," Honor replied and raised a limp hand theatrically to her forehand.

"Ladies, say no more." Jesse guided the car down the crowded street with a mastery that managed to impress Geneva in her panicked state.

She shut her eyes, took a deep breath, and relaxed into the leather upholstery. It felt nice to have someone take charge, and she was suddenly sure that she would be just fine with Jesse at the wheel.

THIRTY-FOUR

Jesse was as good as his word and took care of everything. He located a decent hotel at the center of town and ushered them to the bar. It was a bit early in the day, but no one was going to raise an eyebrow if three people who were obviously willing to spend some money wanted a drink. Jesse ordered whisky for himself and gin fizzes for Geneva and Honor. He warned Honor to make hers last because she wasn't getting another. Geneva barely tasted the first fizz, but by the second she was able to slow down and enjoy the drink. The alcohol made her a bit queasy, but it also took the edge off, and not just from the stress of this one day, and she began to relax. By the time she finished her second glass, she had adopted a devil-may-care attitude and was ready to set off on their mission.

After consulting the bartender, Jesse led them to a surprisingly well-stocked record shop. Geneva and Honor had never heard of most of the musicians he asked about, but Jesse insisted they were the last scream in modern jazz. If nothing else, Geneva found herself charmed by the song titles, and Honor dissolved into giggles when Jesse requested "Yes! We Have No Bananas." The shop owner, sensing a substantial purchase, was more than happy to play the selections on his gramophone so Jesse could decide which records to buy. As the jaunty melodies filled the shop, Geneva felt her hips sway and her feet begin to tap. One tune—something called "The Charleston"—was particularly lively, and both Geneva and Honor found it catchy. Jesse added it to the growing stack of records. They left with "You'd Be Surprised," "Barney Google," "California, Here I Come," "April Showers," and "Swingin' Down the Lane," the records neatly wrapped in brown paper and tied with string.

After the record shop, they stopped at a department store. It was a drab place staffed by sullen shopgirls and offering an uninspired selection of merchandise, but a helpful floor manager led them to an out-of-the-way corner of the women's department. There stood a single rack of party dresses that glittered with sequins, beads, and diamantés. The girls

examined each frock before settling on a black beaded sheath for Geneva and a violet drop-waist dress for Honor, its surface shimmering with beads and its fringed hem lending it a lively swish.

Honor was in absolute heaven, and she had even unearthed a pair of beaded headbands, one adorned with a colorful peacock feather that she immediately claimed for herself. Jesse, ever the good sport, waited patiently while they tried on their selections. He then paid for the purchases without complaint, since Geneva didn't have enough money on her to cover the cost and the Bellamys did not have an account with the shop.

"I will pay you back as soon as we get home," Geneva promised, but Jesse shrugged good-naturedly.

"No rush. And if you skip out on the bill, I know where you live," he teased. "Shall we find a place to eat?"

"Yes, please," Honor exclaimed. "Now that I no longer have to try on dresses, I'm ready to indulge."

"And indulge you shall. I asked the manager in men's hosiery, and he recommended a pub just down the street. Passable food, warm beer, and a separate if slightly down-at-the-heel dining room suitable for the more respectable sort of clientele."

Jesse intoned this in an upper-crust, nasal British accent that made the girls shriek with laughter. Perhaps it was still the alcohol talking, but Jesse really was good fun, Geneva decided as she handed him the parcels and allowed him to escort her to the door.

"Did you go to jazz clubs in New York?" Honor asked once they had been seated and had been handed menus by the smiling waiter, who smelled a healthy tip and would clearly bend over backwards to make certain they were happy.

"All the time. The best speakeasies are in Harlem. The alcohol is still flowing, the music is sublime, and everyone is your friend, at least until the sun comes up."

"Speakeasies?" Honor asked, tripping over the unfamiliar word.

"Secret clubs that serve alcohol. There's a prohibition in the United States. Nearly three years now."

"Gosh," Honor said. "Can they do that?"

"They can do anything they like, but that doesn't stop people drinking. I actually think everyone is drinking more now."

"Where do they get the booze?" Geneva asked.

“It’s smuggled in. Irish whisky, English gin, Russian vodka, Mexican tequila, Scotch, beer, schnapps, you name it.”

“Maybe we should have another fizz,” Honor said. “In solidarity.”

“I’ve created a monster,” Jesse said with a shake of the head. “Although an adorable one.”

Honor grinned happily at the compliment. “I’d like to see New York, even if they don’t allow anyone to have cocktails.”

“You’d love it. It’s a fizzing town,” Jesse said and raised an eyebrow to indicate he had absolutely intended the play on words. “There’s so much to do. The city never sleeps.”

“You must find us quite provincial,” Geneva said. “Will you not grow bored living in the country?”

What she really wanted to ask was what Jesse’s plans were. She couldn’t see him playing the country squire, not after the life he was clearly accustomed to. Would he close up the house and leave, or would he take matters further and sell the lot? He might take whatever was left once the death duties were paid and return to New York, never to give his English cousins another thought.

“I could never get bored with two such lovely ladies for company,” he replied smoothly. “It’s been a long while since I felt part of a family.”

“Do you think of us as family, then?” Honor asked.

“I’d like to. I know it must be awful for you, what with your father so ill, and me turning up out of the blue, but I will look after you both.”

“Will you?” Honor said, and her relief was palpable.

“Of course I will. As the head of the family, it will be my sacred duty.”

Honor beamed at him, but Geneva’s stomach soured at Jesse’s turn of phrase. The head of the family. That implied power and control. Not only of the purse strings but of their personal choices, and ultimately their very futures.

“So, what should I try?” Jesse asked as he perused the menu. “I don’t recognize half these dishes.”

“I thought you’d spent time in England,” Geneva said.

Jesse shrugged. “I ate at the mess, and we didn’t really eat when we hit the pubs. It was all warm beer and cold women.”

“I would think the ladies were very impressed by you,” Honor said. “You must have looked so handsome in your uniform. Do you have any photos?”

“I didn’t think to bring them with me.”

“Was it terrifying? The war, I mean.”

“It was, but also exhilarating. I haven’t felt so alive since. I suppose fear of imminent death will do that.”

“I wonder if Father feels more alive,” Honor mused.

“I seriously doubt that,” Geneva snapped. “It’s hardly a similar situation.”

“I don’t think he felt that way during the war either,” Honor replied. “And then when Jack died…”

They all became somber then, thinking of the people they had lost and the legacies they had left behind. Jesse didn’t mention his parents, but he was obviously sad to have been left alone in the world.

“I’m very sorry about your brother,” he said. “He should have been the one to inherit. Not me. I don’t even know what I’m doing here. It all feels so strange.”

“That’s British inheritance laws for you,” Geneva said. “Unfair and unapologetically archaic.”

Jesse fixed her with his serious gaze. “You are right. It is unfair. You should be the one to take over. I’m a stranger, to you, and to this way of life.”

You can leave me in charge and go back, Geneva thought but didn’t voice her wish. Maybe he would come to it on his own and she wouldn’t have to beg. That would be the best possible outcome, at least for her and Honor, but she didn’t think it would be that easy. Jesse may not have expected to come into this inheritance, but that didn’t mean he was ready to walk away.

“I think we should go home and play the new records for Uncle Douglas,” Jesse said once they’d finished and he’d paid the bill.

“He doesn’t like jazz,” Honor said.

“It might cheer him up.”

“It’s worth a try,” she conceded. “Will you join us, Genny, or do you have plans with Rory?” She fixed Geneva with a pointed stare. “Geneva is in love.”

“Are you?” Jesse asked. “Who’s the lucky fellow?”

“Our estate manager. He’s Irish,” Honor supplied.

“The Irish are not treated very well in New York,” Jesse said.

“They’re not treated well here either. I don’t know why Father hired him,” Honor said.

“Because he was the best person for the job,” Geneva said defensively. “He’s a good man.”

“He’s an opportunist,” Honor retorted. “I bet now that he knows you won’t inherit, his interest will begin to cool.”

Geneva almost let it slip that Rory had given her a promise ring but stopped herself just in time. Her relationship with Rory was private, and Honor had no right to expose her secrets to Jesse, not when their very livelihood would depend on him in the future.

“I think you should follow your heart,” Jesse said. “I always do. It hasn’t steered me wrong yet.”

“I always follow my heart too,” Honor said, and the way she smiled at Jesse nearly stilled Geneva’s breath.

It wasn’t the expression of an innocent young girl but a knowing, seductive smile that wordlessly showcased what was on offer. There was a reason Honor had brought up Rory. She was trying to discredit her sister so that she could have Jesse all to herself.

They left the pub and walked back to the car in silence. Without saying a word, Geneva climbed into the back seat next to the parcels, leaving Honor to ride shotgun, which clearly delighted her.

Geneva was glad there was no opportunity for conversation on the way back. She had nothing to say to her sister, and little desire to speak to Jesse either. As soon as they reached the house, she excused herself and went straight up to her room, relieved to finally be alone. Suddenly exhausted, she stretched out on the bed, and fell asleep within moments.

A song she had heard that afternoon played on and on in her mind, though the melody sounded tinny and distorted. She dreamed that the three of them were laughing and holding hands as they stepped cautiously onto a frozen pond. Their new skates slipped and slid across the ice, and they nearly fell more than once before finally finding the courage to let go of one another.

Feeling braver, they skated in a widening circle, and then Honor began to twirl, her arms outstretched, her face lifted to the sky as fat snowflakes settled on her nose and cheeks. She laughed, and Jesse caught her around the waist and spun her round, the blades of their skates slicing into the ice and sending shards flying. The fragments glittered briefly in the light before

scattering across the frozen surface of the pond. Geneva fixed a smile on her face to prove she was enjoying herself and everything was just tickety-boo, but she felt unsteady and didn't dare twirl, afraid she might lose her footing and fall. Jesse set Honor down and reached for Geneva's hand, pulling her along to the strange, unsettling music. She was frightened but exhilarated, and she laughed with the sheer joy of being alive and trying something new and wonderful.

She was still laughing when the ice began to crack.

THIRTY-FIVE

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

"Mum, we went to the spooky island," Mia exclaimed as soon as Gabe and the children rounded the side of the house and saw Quinn sitting on the deck.

"But Sam and Reggie said it isn't safe," Quinn replied, her gaze instantly going to Gabe, who deftly avoided answering as he followed Max, who had to pee, into the house. Alex and Mia went inside too.

"We didn't go into the ruin," Emma said. "The fish weren't biting, and Mia and Max got restless, so Dad rowed over to the island. There's a tumbledown chapel with a crypt." She looked excited. "There were still bodies in there until a few years ago. Of the nuns who lived on the island and were murdered by the men who sacked the abbey."

"How do you know that?"

"Sam told us. And the chapel was used to smuggle drugs."

"By the nuns?" Quinn asked.

"No, Mum. By a local drug gang. This was like two years ago, during the pandemic."

"And Sam told you all that?"

"Yeah, when we went to borrow some fishing poles."

"I didn't know you liked fishing."

"What else is there to do?" Emma exclaimed in frustration. "I can't talk to my friends or go on Insta."

"I got you that book."

"I'm done with it," Emma said.

"You finished it already?"

Emma nodded. "Last night. I needed something to take my mind off things."

It was only then that Quinn understood how worried Emma really was. She didn't know how to verbalize her fears, but they were bubbling just beneath the surface, and she needed answers. They all did.

"Where's my dad?" Max wailed. "I want my dad."

He'd come outside and was standing before Quinn, his face turned up to hers and his hands balled into fists. She thought he might be gearing up for a tantrum. Gabe appeared in the doorway but didn't try to reason with Max. Quinn thought he was probably worn out after spending hours with the kids and only wanted a few moments of quiet.

"He'll be back soon. But Uncle Jude is coming," Quinn announced brightly.

"He is?"

Some of the anger seemed to go out of Max's stance, and his hands relaxed. He looked to Emma for confirmation, and she smiled and nodded.

"He'll be here tomorrow," Quinn said.

"Will my dad be back by then?"

Quinn and Gabe shared a look over Max's head. Gabe's eyes asked if Quinn had learned anything at the police station, and she shook her head a little to let him know that she hadn't.

"This is such a nightmare!" Emma cried. She had intercepted the looks and had come to her own conclusions. She stomped off, and Quinn heard her slam the bedroom door.

"What's a nightmare?" Max asked, just as Alex and Mia appeared on either side of Gabe. They were watching their parents, their eyes wide and their faces tight with tension.

"When can we go home?" Alex asked.

"Sunday," Quinn replied.

"But what are we going to do until then?" Mia wailed. "This place is so boring."

"Enjoy each other's company," Gabe said. "How about we grab an early dinner and then go see a film?"

"At night?" Mia asked, her shock evident.

The children had never been to the cinema in the evening since they usually went to an afternoon showing and then out for pizza afterwards. To go see a film at night was sort of a big deal.

"Why not?" Gabe said. "It'll be fun. Now go play for a little while so I can speak to your mum. You too, Max."

Max looked torn between defiance and suppressed excitement, then decided to follow his cousins into the house. They heard the television go on, and the annoying voice of SpongeBob SquarePants drifted through the open door.

Gabe closed the door and sank into the deckchair beside Quinn's.

"Why did you take them to that island?" she asked accusingly.

"Because they were bored. When was the last time you tried to entertain four children without the use of devices? Taking them to the island was safer than letting them fish. They kept leaning over the side to look for fishies. I was afraid one of them would tumble into the water. So we gave up on fishing and decided to explore. We walked around for a bit, then came right back. No one was ever in any danger."

Quinn exhaled deeply in exasperation. "Gabe, you were alone on that island with nary a phone between you. What if someone got hurt, or the boat drifted away?"

"Quinn, we're fine. No one got hurt. And I can be trusted to tie up a boat. And we did have a phone." Gabe pulled a small black phone from his back pocket.

"Is that a burner?"

He nodded. "I bought it when we stopped at the petrol station to get snacks. Just in case. Sorry, I forgot to tell you. How did the interview with Malone go?"

"Not well. They found Logan's car," Quinn whispered, worried Max might overhear. "It was left in some empty lot and burned out."

"And the owner?" Gabe asked softly.

"No sign of him, thank God. Malone didn't know much else. He wasn't even in possession of basic facts. I'm surprised Sean asked him to take the case."

"I don't think Sean has much influence anymore," Gabe replied. "You know how it goes—he was forced to resign after the fiasco with Edie, and now there's someone new in charge. And the people who were once loyal to him see him as having been put out to pasture. He did what he could to help."

"I know, and I'm grateful. I rang Drew after I left the police station."

Gabe nodded. "That was good thinking. He's bound to find something out."

“Who’s Drew?” Max asked as he stepped outside. He came to stand before them, his gaze going from one adult to the other as he waited for an answer.

“Drew is my friend,” Quinn said.

“He *drew* you a picture?” Max asked and cackled at his own joke.

“He drew me several pictures of people I thought I knew,” Quinn replied sadly. “Now how about a snack? I’m starving.”

“Me too,” Max cried.

As they headed into the boathouse, Quinn reflected that thankfully she could still distract three out of the four children with the promise of entertainment and food. And just then, that was the only arsenal she had at her disposal.

THIRTY-SIX

Taking the children to see a film had been a great idea. They were happy and tired by the time they returned to the boathouse, and ready to go to bed. Even Emma went off without complaint. Gabe had just poured Quinn a glass of wine when her mobile vibrated.

"It's Drew," she said. "I'm going to take it outside."

She didn't answer the call until she was halfway down the dock. Sound tended to carry over the open water, though, so she still spoke softly so the children would not overhear the conversation.

"Do you have something for me already?" she asked urgently.

"Nothing definitive, but I was able to rule out a few possibilities," Drew said. "Chrissy, whose full name was Kristina Blažek, did not return to the Czech Republic just after Max was born as Logan believed. She remained in the UK, and until January 2021 she lived on a houseboat in Chelsea with her boyfriend and worked at a nail bar nearby."

"And then?" Quinn asked when Drew suddenly went quiet. She could sense his hesitation. "What happened to her, Drew?"

"One day, Chrissy became ill at work. She was in terrible abdominal pain and hemorrhaging badly. One of her coworkers called an ambulance. She never came back to work. Her boss assumed she had been ill for a while and returned to the Czech Republic, where her parents could look after her. As far as I can tell, she never came back to the UK."

"Poor Chrissy. I hope she's all right," Quinn said. "What about her boyfriend?"

"Chrissy's coworkers had never met him, but they said she was always talking about the nice things he did for her. She met him at her previous job, when he came in to get a haircut. I will see if I can get a lead on him."

Quinn waited, since she sensed Drew wasn't finished. She was right.

"I also looked into Rafe's movements over the past few days. On the night Logan was followed, Rafe was at work until a quarter to six. He went to dinner at an Asian fusion restaurant down the street from his office with a

group of coworkers. The following day, he had a date that turned into a sleepover."

Quinn didn't ask how Drew knew that. It wasn't important. What mattered was that neither Chrissy nor Rafe was to blame. It was a relief to know that two people Logan had trusted didn't have anything to do with whatever was happening, but it was also disheartening. If neither of them had any designs on Max, then who was the man who'd followed Logan, and who was the woman who'd tried to kidnap Max? And why? There had to be a reason Max had been singled out. If someone wanted to snatch a child, sadly, there were easier ways to accomplish that. Children were taken every day, mostly out in the open. To brazenly show up at Max's nursery school with a fake ID and try to take him spoke to premeditation and serious intent. This woman didn't want any child. She wanted Max.

"What now?" Quinn asked. "We know who it wasn't, but we're no closer to finding out who it was."

"I'm going to take a peek at Logan's call register," Drew said. "I know someone who can hack into his mobile provider's data."

Not surprising, Quinn thought. "What do you expect to find?"

"I don't for one moment think that what happened was random. How could it when the woman tried to impersonate you? Logan had to have known the man who followed him, and he likely also knew the woman. Unless he was using a burner phone to communicate with them, there would be some record of their contact."

"But how would you know just by looking at the call register?"

"I'm hoping they communicated by text. If they didn't, then I will have to weed through all his calls, try to eliminate the numbers of known associates and his workplace, and see if I can isolate any possible suspects."

"That sounds like a long shot," Quinn said.

"It is, but still worth checking. I'll let you know if I find anything," Drew said. He preferred to deal in facts rather than speculation, which was what made him so good at his job. "I'll ring you tomorrow with an update."

"Thanks, Drew."

"Don't mention it. And try to get some rest. You must be knackered."

"I am," Quinn admitted. *And extremely scared*, she added inwardly.

She remained on the dock for a few more minutes. The lake was as still and black as spilled tar, and the sky above was overcast, the moon just a faint glow behind the clouds. The island was eerie and silent, the ruin just

a dark outline hovering behind the trees. The very air seemed to vibrate with menace, and Quinn hurried inside, desperate to be behind closed doors, where there was light and love, and the people she cared about most in the world.

THIRTY-SEVEN

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Geneva's hand went to her hair just as her gaze slid to Honor, whose own hair was pulled back and tied with a velvet ribbon. She and Honor had come outside to welcome their guests when they saw the motor passing through the gates. Grady stopped the car, then got out and held the door for Aunt Clarissa and Rose before walking round the back to unfasten their cases from the luggage rack. The ladies looked tired and a bit rumpled after the long train journey, and Aunt Clarissa smiled uncertainly, clearly not sure what to expect. But Rose grinned happily when she saw her cousins, and went directly to Honor. The two girls were the same age and had always been close.

"It's so good to see you both," Geneva said once she had exchanged air kisses with her aunt and cousin and they were ready to come inside.

"I have so much to tell you," she heard Honor whisper to Rose as they followed Clarissa and Geneva into the foyer. "A lot has happened since I saw you at your father's funeral."

Rose, who looked wan in her dark-gray coat and hat, nodded eagerly, likely thrilled to be away from London and around people her own age. Or any people, really. Clarissa had barely left the house since her husband died and had made certain that Rose adhered to the mourning etiquette with the same zeal.

"You're looking well," Aunt Clarissa said. There was an edge to her voice that instantly put Geneva on her guard.

Aunt Clarissa was still a Bellamy, since she had married a cousin, and had always been extremely protective of her older brother and the family name. She had been fully apprised of the latest happenings and knew all about Jesse's arrival and Douglas's illness. She was not happy and needed

Geneva to share her outrage at the situation. To look well was to wordlessly admit that she wasn't sufficiently distressed for her aunt's liking.

"It's unthinkable," Clarissa said to Geneva as soon as they were ensconced in the drawing room with a pot of tea and fresh scones. Although present, Honor was not included in the conversation, since, like Rose, who was silently sipping her tea, she was still thought of as a child. "To think that this stranger, this *American*," she said with a disbelieving shake of the head, "is going to inherit my family home. And poor Douglas. His heart must be broken. I hope he is at least properly looked after."

"Nurse Jeffries has been taking good care of him. She sits with Father for hours and reads to him, or they listen to music together."

Clarissa glared at her. "I wasn't speaking of the nurse. I hear you spent the day with this Jesseph individual. You should be ashamed of yourselves." This time, Honor was included in the tirade. "Thinking of your own amusement while your poor father is fighting for every breath."

Geneva bowed her head. Her aunt was right. There was no excuse.

"And what would you have us do?" Honor retorted. "This is no longer your home, Aunt Clarissa, but it is ours. You and Rose are well provided for, but Geneva and I might find ourselves destitute a few weeks from now. And speaking of amusements, Father wishes to throw a New Year's Eve party to celebrate his imminent demise."

Rose looked at Honor in silent admiration, but Honor was crying now, angry tears sliding down her cheeks. "So, we were on his errand when we spent the day with Jesse. We bought records to play at the party and new frocks. We must make Father proud, mustn't we? Uphold the family honor and present a united front."

Clarissa's mouth fell open, her cheeks turning a mottled red at this unspeakable insolence from one who should be seen but not heard, but Honor didn't wait to hear what she had to say. She set down her teacup with a clatter and strode from the room, slamming the drawing room door behind her in wordless punctuation.

"The situation is considerably worse than I expected," Clarissa said under her breath. "Rose, go to your room."

"But, Mama," Rose protested.

Her mother glared at her in a way that left no room for argument, and Rose nodded and quietly left. She closed the door softly behind her, as if to underline the difference between herself and Honor.

“So, what’s he like, this usurper?” Aunt Clarissa demanded as soon as she and Geneva were alone.

“He’s actually rather charming.”

“How innocent you are. All Americans are common and sly by their very nature.”

“He’s doing his best to fit in, Aunt,” Geneva protested.

“Oh, I just bet he is. Imagine what a boon it must be to come into such a fortune. And to become the head of an ancient and noble family. I wager his mother’s people were scraping by in some mining town before Alan came along. The fool,” she hissed under her breath. “To go and marry some trollop instead of doing his duty to his family. And now here we are, over a barrel.”

“I don’t think Jesse cares about the title.”

“That’s what he wants you to believe,” Aunt Clarissa huffed. “I expect Honor is taken with him?”

She’s smitten, Geneva wanted to say, but thought it would be disloyal to her sister. “She likes him well enough,” she said instead.

“Well, she had better get her silly infatuation under control. There can be no future for the two of them. As the eldest, you must marry the interloper and rescue the family from utter ruin.”

Geneva had no desire to discuss marriage, especially with Clarissa. Her aunt was a woman ruled by duty and an unshakable conviction of her own importance. She had likely never acted on impulse in her life. Douglas had once remarked that Uncle Gerald had probably died simply to escape her. Despite the unkindness of the observation, Geneva could easily imagine how life with Clarissa might have been utterly devoid of hope or joy. She was a dry old stick who, now that her husband was gone, devoted all her energies to browbeating her daughter.

Rose, unlike her mother, was lively and curious, genuinely interested in the world around her. The last time they had all been together—just days before Uncle Gerald had died suddenly of a heart attack—Rose had tried to share her fascination with the recent discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb. She had read every article she could find, and her excitement had been both sincere and rather endearing. Clarissa had shut her down before she could even finish, declaring that no one wished to hear details of the unchristian burial or a culture she considered to be beneath her notice. Geneva had

wanted to hear what Rose had to say, and Douglas had been following the story himself, but no one had dared contradict Aunt Clarissa.

Uncle Gerald had remained silent and offered no support to his daughter. It was a pattern that had governed their household for as long as Geneva could remember. She suspected poor Rose could hardly wait to marry and live a life of her own, far from her domineering mother and that stifling, joyless house where one was expected to apologize for laughing too loud or daring to make a joke.

"At least Honor still looks respectable," Clarissa said when Geneva did not respond to her earlier statement.

"But I don't?"

"Your hair is a disgrace. You should pin it up."

"I will not. And it's too short anyway."

"This fad will quickly pass. Mark my words. Resembling an orphan after a bout of typhoid fever is not a fashion trend that will endure."

"Is that what you think I look like?" Geneva asked, aghast.

"You look more like some debauched French artist's model."

She of course had to specify that the model was French, making her that much more disreputable.

"Much better, then," Geneva said tartly.

"Next thing you'll be putting your bare arms and knees on display. These newfangled fashions make women look no more respectable than ladies of the evening. What's next, I ask you? Already some younger women are abandoning the corset. They may as well go out naked. As long as I'm alive, Rose will maintain decorum. No giving in to vulgar modern trends on my watch."

"Times are changing, Aunt," Geneva said. She was tired of her aunt already, and she'd been there only an hour.

"Perhaps. But there is still such a thing as propriety. A woman must not go chasing modern ideals, for they will inevitably lead her to ruin. Honor, duty, family—those are the things that matter. But I suppose if you marry that American, you will no longer trouble yourself with such considerations. He will corrupt you with his uncivilized ways."

"Jesse has lovely manners," Geneva protested, but Aunt Clarissa shook her head, as if such a thing simply weren't possible. He was American, after all, one step up from a barbarian with matted hair and rotted teeth, dressed in nothing but animal skins.

“I do hope he doesn’t decide to indulge Honor’s whims. She must attend a finishing school if she has any hope of finding a suitable husband.”

“Father offered to send Honor to a finishing school in Switzerland, but she refused to go.”

“Of course she did, which is why Douglas should never have offered her the choice. Rose will be off to Geneva in the summer. She would have started school this year, but with her father passing there was the period of mourning to observe.”

“Lengthy mourning periods are positively Victorian,” Geneva said. “And Rose is a young girl. She needs to spend time with people her own age.”

“One must show proper respect. And there’s no greater sorrow than the loss of a parent.” Her aunt shot her a sly look. “Which is why you must marry while you can.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“You don’t have much time, Geneva. Once your father passes, you will have to wait a year, and who knows what that upstart will think up during that time. He could marry some cheap tease, and then where will you and Honor be? You must ensure that the title and the estate remain in the family.”

“Aunt, even if Jesse and I were to announce our engagement tonight, we would not be able to marry for a month, since the banns would need to be read.”

“These things can be expedited,” Aunt Clarissa said with a dismissive wave of the hand. “Many a marriage has been rushed due to a time constraint. And your father can always ask for special dispensation. Under the circumstances, the bishopric would happily agree.”

“We’re not under a time constraint,” Geneva protested. “And I will not be rushed.”

“We’ll see,” Clarissa said under her breath. “I mean to have a word with Douglas as soon as he’s awake.”

“Please excuse me,” Geneva said when she heard Honor and Rose in the foyer, and opened the door. Their excited voices and happy giggles carried through to the drawing room.

The two girls were smiling, but Rose wilted like her namesake in hot sun as soon as her mother’s disapproving scowl settled on her.

“We’re just going for a walk,” Rose said.

Clarissa nodded. “You’ll never hear me disparage fresh air and exercise, Rose. But do maintain decorum. You are, after all, still in mourning. And your uncle is gravely ill.”

Honor looked at Geneva, and her gaze seemed to say, *Well, this is going to be a jolly Christmas.*

“I will see you all at dinner,” Geneva said and practically sprinted from the room. She’d been chastised enough for one afternoon.

THIRTY-EIGHT

Geneva decided she could use a walk herself but made certain to head in a different direction than Honor and Rose. The girls hadn't seen each other since last November, and she wanted to give them an opportunity to talk and share their troubles without judgment or constraint. She was halfway to the estate manager's office when she encountered Rory. He wore his heavy overcoat and a trilby, and a scowl worthy of Aunt Clarissa. His expression was replaced by one of surprise, then cautious optimism when he spotted Geneva on the path.

"I was just coming to see you. Can we speak privately?" he asked.

"Of course. Is something wrong?"

"No," he said, but it was obvious that something was on his mind. "Let's go for a walk."

They walked away from the house and towards the old well. No one knew exactly how old it was or when it had last been in use, but the water was brackish and smelled of rotting vegetation. Some said it went back to Roman times and had once supplied fresh water to the villa that had occupied the spot where Bellamy Hall now stood. Douglas thought the well dated to the Carvetii tribe that had inhabited that part of Cumbria before the Roman occupation and had served a coastal settlement that had become extinct. Or maybe it hadn't been a well at all, but some sort of storage space or underground shelter that had filled with water over time and trapped falling leaves and careless animals until the contents turned into a smelly, peaty sludge.

Douglas had ordered a snug-fitting wooden cover for the opening after Geneva's puppy had fallen in and nearly drowned. Buckey had been rescued but had never gone near the well again, and the children had been forbidden to play nearby. The birch saplings that had taken root near the well were now fully grown trees, and the stone stump was green with moss and barely distinguishable from the bracken and fallen leaves that blanketed the ground.

Geneva leaned against a tree, and Rory stood with one foot on the ledge of the well. With the two of them silent, the sounds of the wind and sea and the cawing of birds filled the air. It would have been peaceful if not for the sinister hush that always seemed to hang over the well, as if ancient spirits hovered nearby, silent but listening.

"Ye must be glad to see yer aunt and cousin," Rory said at last.

"I'm happy to see Rose, but Aunt Clarissa is already trying to take charge."

"Charge of what?"

Geneva didn't want to talk about Aunt Clarissa or her plans for her and Jesse. She was glad to see Rory and enjoyed the feeling of being away from prying eyes and unfair judgments, even for a short while. Dinner would be a drawn-out, tense affair, especially if her father wasn't up to joining them. She briefly wondered where Jesse had gone. She hadn't seen him yet today, but perhaps he had decided to stay out of the way while they caught up with Clarissa and Rose, figuring they'd have much to discuss. Contrary to what Clarissa had said, Geneva thought Jesse was a fine judge of character and respectful to the feelings of others without intentionally drawing attention to his own awareness of the situation. He simply melted away and reappeared when he thought it was time, the exact opposite of the brashness Aunt Clarissa had accused him of.

"My aunt likes to order people about," Geneva said vaguely. "Why were you coming to find me?"

Rory's jaw tightened, as if he were about to deliver bad news. "I applied for several jobs as soon as ye told me about the situation."

Geneva gaped at him. "You were going to leave, after we…?" She couldn't finish the sentence and felt her cheeks grow warm despite the chill wind. But she could hardly blame him. She had intentionally shut him out and tried to avoid him as much as possible despite his declaration of love and the promise of a future. Rory was just hedging his bets, as any sane person would.

"Genny, it takes time to secure a new position. I couldn't afford to wait around until I was informed of my fate. If I were to be dismissed, I had to have something lined up."

"You might not be dismissed. Jesse will need an estate manager."

Rory sighed heavily. "Yer cousin is not going to keep me on."

"How do you know?" Geneva asked.

“He came to see me yesterday. He asked to look at the books, and he had lots of questions about the running of the estate, the value of the land, and the various sellable assets. I don’t think he was overly impressed with what he heard.”

“Does he intend to sell the estate?” Geneva asked, her voice cracking with the strain.

“He didn’t say, but it’s only natural that he should consider the options. He suggested I should explore mine.”

“Did he give you a timeframe?”

“No, but he made it clear that I should look to my future. And I need to work, Genny. I don’t have family money to fall back on,” Rory said, and Geneva thought he was embarrassed to admit it, even though his lack of funds didn’t come as a surprise to her.

“Where did you apply?”

“I applied for a half dozen positions, everywhere from Suffolk to County Clare.”

“County Clare?” Geneva cried.

Rory nodded. “There’s also an opportunity in Pennsylvania.”

“As in America?”

He nodded, and his gaze slid towards the tips of his boots and eventually back to her. Geneva got the distinct feeling that this was something Rory had been considering long before she’d told him of the entailment and that he was only now telling her about his plans.

“I have a cousin in Pittsburgh,” he said. “Fion and a mate are opening a brewery. They need a manager, but Fion said there will be an opportunity for me to buy into the business if the brewery does well. I told him I was interested.”

“When was this?” Geneva asked. The wave of emotion had passed, leaving her feeling strangely indifferent towards Rory’s scheme.

“October.” Rory looked apologetic. “I received a letter from Fion today. He and Connor have found suitable premises and signed the lease. They have already installed the equipment and will brew their first batch at the start of the year. Fion invited me to come over. He has a room where I can stay until I find a place of my own.”

“And what about me? Only a few days ago, you said you would wait for me,” Geneva reproached him.

“And I meant it, Genny, but I have to make plans for our future. I can’t afford to sit on my hands, not if I want to get in at the start and become a partner in the business. I want ye to come with me.”

“I can’t leave Honor,” Geneva said.

“Except that maybe ye should,” Rory snapped.

“What on earth do you mean?”

“Only that relationships between siblings can be complicated.” Rory’s expression was pained. “Honor looks up to ye. She worships ye, but, because she admires ye so, she wants everything ye have.”

“Are you suggesting that Honor wants you?” Geneva asked. A sudden chill stole over her, and it had nothing to do with the wind. Something in Rory’s eyes unsettled her, and she knew he was about to shatter the fragile balance she’d been fighting to maintain.

“Honor came to see me last night.”

“What did she want?”

“She brought me a Christmas present.”

“What was it?” Geneva asked dispassionately.

“A bottle of Scotch. I expect she pilfered it from your father’s stock. She suggested we open it and have a drink. Get to know one another better.”

“And what did you say to that?”

“I told her to take the bottle and go home.”

“And did she?”

Geneva wasn’t just cold. She was trembling and could barely feel her hands and feet as the magnitude of Honor’s disloyalty began to penetrate the shield of denial she had erected about herself.

Rory didn’t reply, and Geneva could see in his eyes that something had happened between them.

“I need you to tell me.” She sounded imperious even to her own ears, but she was done with allowing other people to toy with her emotions or attempt to manipulate her life choices.

“Honor kissed me. She asked if she could stay.”

“And what did you do?”

“I asked her to leave.”

“I don’t believe you,” Geneva said coldly.

“Why would I lie?”

“Maybe because you want to drive a wedge between us so that I will go with you and not feel guilty about leaving Honor behind.”

“Is that what ye really think?”

Geneva felt the pricking of tears. “I don’t know what to think, or who to trust. I feel like my whole existence is coming apart at the seams. A few more weeks and I might lose my home.”

Rory scoffed. “Deep down ye know exactly whom ye can trust. Just as ye know what the people ye care so much about are capable of. There’s more to life than a moldering pile of stone, Geneva. There’s a whole world out there, full of people, and opportunities, and new experiences. And maybe it’s time ye expanded yer horizons.”

“When will you go?” Geneva asked coolly.

“The first of the year.”

“I will return your ring.”

“I will not accept it. My feelings for ye haven’t changed. I must leave if I’m to seize this opportunity. Ye can join me when ye’re ready.”

“And what am I to do about Honor, especially if what you say is true?” Geneva demanded.

“She’s nearly of age. Ye can’t mother her forever.”

Geneva glanced at the house, just visible through the trees, its weathered walls mellow in the gentle light of the setting sun, and imagined walking away from her childhood home forever. She felt an ache in her heart, but she supposed that was natural, given that this was the only home she’d ever known. Running away to America could be exciting, liberating even, but did she want to go there with Rory, and could she see herself living as the wife of a brewer in some mean flat in Pittsburgh, which in her mind was exactly like Barrow-in-Furness?

She supposed she would welcome the opportunity if she truly loved him, but, even as uncertain as she was of what was to come, Geneva knew in her heart that this didn’t feel right, and everything inside her rebelled at the thought of leaving. And as she gazed into Rory’s serious face, she thought that he had doubts as well.

“I must book my ticket in the next few days,” he said.

Geneva nodded. Rory seemed to think she was nodding in agreement, and reached for her, but released her just as suddenly when a shadowy figure stepped through the trees.

“There you are, Genny. I was looking for you,” Jesse said. “Mr. Sullivan.”

“Mr. Bellamy,” Rory ground out.

Geneva wondered just how much Jesse had heard and if he had interrupted them on purpose. He glanced about, and then his gaze fell on the well.

“What’s that?” He cocked his head to the side as he studied the ancient structure.

“It’s a well,” Rory replied curtly.

“Looks old.”

“It is. It’s been covered for the purposes of safety.”

“Did you need something, Jesse?” Geneva asked in an effort to dispel the tension.

The dislike between the two men was palpable, their animosity crackling like live electricity. Jesse looked from a stone-faced Rory to Geneva, who wanted nothing more than to break this deadlock and leave this place.

“I’m clearly interrupting,” Jesse said, but his gaze searched her face, his eyes asking if she was all right. “I’ll see you back at the house. Unless you were on your way back?”

Jesse was offering her a way to extricate herself, and she accepted his help, mostly because he had offered her a reprieve.

“Thank you. I’ll walk back with you. Good evening, Mr. Sullivan,” she said to Rory, who, after looking uncertain for a moment, tipped his trilby and stalked off into the trees.

“Are you all right?” Jesse asked.

Geneva nodded and turned up her face, eager to catch the last rays of the setting sun. The bare branches of the birch trees formed a stark latticework against the crimson sky, making her feel as if she were looking at the heavens through a barred window. It was a clear evening, the colors of the winter sunset breathtakingly dramatic, but, as Geneva accepted Jesse’s arm and they fell into step, she couldn’t quite shake the foreboding that settled on her shoulders like a heavy mantle.

THIRTY-NINE

Geneva and Jesse parted in the foyer. He went up to his room to have a bath before dinner, and she went in search of Honor. She found her sister and Rose in the library, sitting close to the fire and talking quietly, their heads close together.

"Jesse was looking for you," Honor said when she noticed Geneva standing in the doorway. "Where were you?"

"By the old well."

"What were you doing there?" Honor's eyes glinted with suspicion.

"Taking a walk."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

Geneva suddenly recalled what Rory had said about her sister, and her stomach soured with resentment. Honor looked so sweet and innocent sitting there, hardly more than a child. But she had grown up, and Geneva hadn't noticed. No one had. And now she was working for herself and trying to assure her own future, free of her sister's shadow.

"Where's Jesse now?" Rose asked.

"He thought he'd have a bath before dinner."

Rose nodded. "He's so handsome. Looks just like Rudolph Valentino, don't you think? And such lovely manners. I thought all Americans were brutes."

"Why would you think that?" Geneva asked irritably. She'd never realized what snobs everyone was until now.

Rose shrugged, and Geneva supposed she was simply repeating what her mother had said. She could be childish at times, and unlike Honor, who had grown into a beautiful young woman, Rose was rather plain and at times quite awkward. Aunt Clarissa had been dramatically beautiful at that age, but Rose had taken after her father. She had wide blue eyes, but her light brown hair was pin straight, and her nose and mouth were too wide to conform to modern standards of beauty. She was also a bit overweight,

thick through both the shoulders and the waist, and had hands and feet that were unusually large. Geneva was certain Aunt Clarissa tormented her daily, but Rose was the sort of person who turned to food when she was angry or disappointed. And this past year, it must have been her only source of comfort.

"I hadn't realized you two had met," she said to her cousin.

"We ran into him earlier," Rose replied but didn't mention where. Geneva supposed they had met Jesse while out walking.

"Won't you join us?" Honor asked. "It's hours yet until dinner."

Geneva would have preferred to go up to her room, but she had been spending a lot of time on her own, so she pulled up a chair and sat down next to the girls. It was warm by the fire, and, since no other lamps had been lit, the library felt cozy and safe.

"I'm starving," Honor said.

"Me too," Rose chimed in. "Maybe we should ring for tea."

Geneva wasn't very hungry and would have happily forgone dinner, but a cup of tea would be just the thing.

"I'd rather have chocolate," Honor said. She walked over to the bellpull and gave it a tug. "We'd like a pot of chocolate, and some scones if there are any left over," she informed the parlormaid.

"Can you please bring me a cup of tea, Sally?" Geneva asked the woman before she retreated.

"Of course, my lady."

The girls chatted easily, but Geneva stared into the leaping flames, suddenly too worn-out to participate. She kept going over her conversation with Rory, and felt torn between sadness and relief. Perhaps in a different world they might have been happy, but she could see now that their relationship had been doomed from the start, just as Honor had predicted. That hadn't stopped her from making a play for Rory herself, but Geneva had the feeling that Honor probably wanted something quite different from the handsome Irishman. She wasn't looking for a future, or even love. Perhaps she'd simply wanted to know what it was like to be kissed. If she craved anything beyond that, Geneva wasn't prepared to dwell on it. Rory would be gone in less than a fortnight, so she'd have one less problem to occupy her mind.

Sally brought a loaded tray and set it on the low table. There was a pot of chocolate, four scones, clotted cream, and jam, and a smaller pot of tea

for Geneva. Cook had also sent up a plate of ginger biscuits. The tea was wonderfully hot and strong, and Geneva helped herself to a biscuit. She felt queasy, and her head was beginning to ache, probably the result of the tension she had felt earlier. Honor and Rose paid her no mind as they fixed their scones and sipped on the chocolate.

"What ship did Jesse arrive on?" Rose asked as she brushed the crumbs from her fingers.

"The RMS *Olympic*," Honor replied.

"He must have met the passenger who died on the crossing."

"What passenger?" Geneva asked.

Rose leaned in closer, her voice conspiratorial. "Mother doesn't like me to read the papers, but I sometimes purchase a copy of the *Telegraph* when I go out for a walk and read it in my room. Then I throw it on the fire, so she doesn't find out. I've been so isolated, it makes me feel a little better to know what's going on in the world."

"So, what happened on the *Olympic*?" Honor hurried her.

"A passenger died the night before the ship was due to arrive in Southampton. The ship's surgeon thought his death was suspicious, so the captain radioed to shore, and the police came aboard before the ship docked."

"And?" Honor pressed, her eyes round with curiosity.

Rose looked distinctly disappointed. "The police surgeon carried out a postmortem. Natural causes, I'm afraid. It seems he came into contact with something that caused him to go into anaphylactic shock."

"Can that really happen?" Honor exclaimed. Rose nodded wisely. "But wouldn't he know if he was fatally allergic to something?"

"Maybe he'd never encountered it before," Rose speculated. "And perhaps it was his first time traveling first-class."

"He must have enjoyed some fancy dinners.

"And cocktails," Honor said. "I'd never had a gin fizz before. Imagine if it killed me."

"It happens very rarely," Rose said.

"How do you know?"

"It said so in the paper. The article said that a bee sting, shellfish, or even strawberries can cause anaphylaxis. Little chance of getting stung by a bee in December, but he might have had a bite of lobster or shrimp without

realizing it. It could have been in the soup," Rose mused. "Or maybe someone dropped a sliver of strawberry into his cocktail."

"The poor man," Geneva said. "And how ghastly for his traveling companions."

"He was traveling alone," Rose said.

"What was his name?" Honor asked.

"William Heller. There was a photo of him in the paper."

"I'd have loved to see it."

"I still have the newspaper," Rose replied. "I used it to wrap Mother's Christmas gift, so it wouldn't shatter in my case."

"Can we see it?" Honor asked.

"I'll be right back."

Rose hastened upstairs and returned a few minutes later with a crumpled page. She smoothed it out on her knee, then instantly snatched it up so the ink didn't smudge her skirt. She handed the page to Geneva. She and Honor bent over the page, staring at a grainy photograph that must have come from the man's passport. He looked to be in his thirties, and had dark hair that was parted on the side and brushed back, dark eyes, and a pencil moustache that brought attention to his prominent nose and narrow face. It wasn't an attractive face, but there was something arresting about it.

"He looks like he had a short fuse," Rose said.

"What do you mean?" Honor asked.

"Just like someone who'd easily lose their temper over something silly."

"He does," Honor agreed. "Looks like a right sod."

"Honor, the man is dead," Geneva reminded her. "And neither of you knows anything about him."

Honor shrugged. "Will they send his body back to America?"

"They already have," Rose replied. "He was repatriated." She stumbled over the unfamiliar word. "At least his family will get to say goodbye. It's important to say goodbye," she added.

"Yes, it is," Geneva agreed, and Honor nodded.

They had not seen their mother before she died. She had been taken to hospital, and Geneva had not been able to attend the funeral. She had been ill with a fever. For the longest time, she'd thought she would see her mother walking down the street or at church. Sometimes she thought she heard her voice coming from the drawing room or from the sitting room,

where she used to discuss household matters and plan the menus with Cook. And sometimes Geneva dreamed of her. Her mother always chided her in her dreams, and she woke feeling tearful and sad. Jack had said that their mother was haunting her because she had been a disobedient daughter. She knew now that he had been teasing her, but at the time she had believed him, and had prayed for forgiveness every Sunday at church. She hadn't got to say goodbye to Jack either, since his body had not been shipped home. He had been buried in a mass grave somewhere in Belgium. And she had been only twelve years old when Edwin died. She had not been allowed in the sick room for fear of catching smallpox.

The clock chimed the hour, and Geneva stood. She needed to rest before dinner. A headache was building behind her eyes, and she'd have to endure hours of banal conversation dominated by Aunt Clarissa, but she couldn't cry off. Her father rarely came downstairs during the day, but he intended to come down to dinner tonight. And how many more dinners would they have together? Geneva preferred not to think about that as she mounted the stairs and entered her room. Before she lay down, she selected the gown she was going to wear, a dusky blue silk, then walked over to her dressing table. She was going to wear her mother's sapphire earrings tonight.

In memoriam, she thought as she opened her jewelry case and lifted out the earrings. They sparkled in the light, and Geneva's eyes blurred with tears when she recalled the last time her mother had worn them. She didn't want to wear them, she decided. It was too painful. When she went to replace the earrings in the case, her gaze settled on the box that held the claddagh ring, and she was suddenly sure it had been moved.

Someone had been in her room and had rifled through her things. What had they been looking for?

FORTY

Everyone was already downstairs, enjoying a pre-dinner cocktail in the drawing room, when Dennison stepped into the room. He looked deeply uncomfortable, and his eyes darted around until his gaze settled on Geneva. She nodded at him encouragingly, but he faltered, unable to speak for a moment, especially when Aunt Clarissa nailed him with her imperious stare.

"Well, what is it, man? Speak up."

"His lordship is not feeling quite himself and won't be coming down to dinner," Dennison finally managed. "He sends his apologies."

"I'll ask Cook to send up a tray," Geneva said.

"Just some soup, my lady," Dennison said. "And maybe a piece of roast fowl. He can't manage much more."

"Of course. I'll see to it," she promised.

She could have let Dennison speak to the cook, but she wanted to make certain her father was able to eat something, and went to the kitchen herself. By the time she walked into the dining room, everyone was already seated. Clarissa was at the head of the table, which infuriated Geneva beyond all measure. Douglas was still alive, but already everyone was beginning to move on, behaving as if he were gone and they had to snatch whatever they could before someone else could stake their claim. It was mercenary and crass, and she hated to see this side of the people she'd known all her life.

Geneva didn't say anything to her aunt but sat as far from her as possible so she wouldn't have to speak to her all evening. Honor followed her progress around the table, and Geneva could tell that her sister was annoyed as well but wasn't about to remark on it. And what was the point? Regardless of where she sat, Clarissa had no say in anything that happened. None of them did.

Once the first course was served and everyone had sampled the smoked salmon canapés, Rose turned to Jesse.

“Cousin Jesse, did you happen to meet the man who died aboard the *Olympic*?”

Jesse looked momentarily confused, then seemed to grasp what Rose was asking and nodded. “Yes, I did. I know it’s unkind to speak ill of the dead, but he was an unpleasant fellow.”

“Really?” Rose asked, her eagerness obvious. “Did he insult someone, or take liberties with their wife or daughter?”

“No, nothing like that.” Jesse seemed put off by Rose’s interest in the stranger.

“So, why was he unpleasant?” Honor asked.

Jesse had no choice but to answer the question. “He spent most evenings in the card room. He drank heavily, gambled recklessly, and became rather belligerent when he lost a great deal of money on the night he died. He was asked to leave.”

“Perhaps someone caught him cheating at cards, went to his cabin, and murdered him in his sleep,” Rose suggested. She leaned forward in her eagerness, and her eyes shone with malicious curiosity. “Was anything taken? What happened to his things?”

“I really don’t know, Rose, but I wouldn’t have thought he was murdered,” Jesse said.

“Why not?” Honor asked. “They said it was anaphylactic shock, but perhaps he was intentionally poisoned.”

“Why would you think that?” Jesse looked at Honor in surprise. “And how do you know it was anaphylactic shock?”

“The police said so. Rose brought a newspaper,” Honor said and instantly looked guilty since she realized that she had betrayed Rose to her mother, who was looking angrier by the moment. Her expression was pinched, and her nostrils flared with every intake of breath.

“I doubt the police would have allowed the rest of us to disembark if they thought Heller was murdered,” Jesse said. “I think, at the time, the ship’s doctor was probably more worried about possible contagion.”

“Really? Why?” Rose pressed as Sally silently served the consommé.

“Because of the influenza epidemic, silly,” Honor said. “If the deceased died of a contagious disease, they would have no choice but to quarantine the ship, like in the old days when they were afraid of the plague.”

Rose turned to Jesse. “Did he have pus-filled boils or an angry rash? How could they tell it was anaphylaxis?”

“I wouldn’t know,” Jesse replied. “I never saw the body. It was left in his cabin until the rest of the passengers could disembark.”

Aunt Clarissa, who clearly had not wanted to censor Jesse for fear of causing offense, had finally had enough.

“Rose, be quiet this instant,” she barked, then turned to Jesse. She was breathing heavily, her bosom rising and falling with every labored breath. “Perhaps this is an appropriate topic of conversation where you come from, Mr. Bellamy, but here in England we have better manners.” She suddenly seemed to regret her outburst, probably because she recalled that Jesse would henceforth hold the purse strings, and smiled apologetically. “Forgive me. I didn’t mean to be rude.”

Yes, you did, Geneva wanted to say. *You resent him with every fiber of your being and want to remind him that he’s beneath you. And he wasn’t the one to bring up the topic—Rose was.*

“Perhaps you can introduce a more worthy topic,” Jesse said, and Geneva could see that, beneath the mask of politeness, he was incandescently angry.

“Well, speculating about a possible murder is a sight more interesting than talking about the London Season and what so-and-so wore to some boring ball,” Rose protested.

“Rose, I’m warning you,” Clarissa hissed. “Murders are not discussed in polite society.”

“On the contrary, Mother,” Rose said. “Everyone is talking about Dorothy L. Sayers’ book, *Whose Body?* It’s a cracking read. You should try it.”

She seemed to be goading her mother on purpose, but Clarissa wasn’t about to give in to another outburst. “There’s nothing wrong with discussing a work of fiction, but it’s quite vulgar to speculate about a real case, especially when the poor man died of natural causes and deserves your sympathy,” she retorted.

“Why? Cousin Jesse says he was a disagreeable man. Why should I feel any sympathy towards him?”

Clarissa looked like she would have liked to wring Rose’s neck, or at the very least gag her with her own napkin, but she was saved from

resorting to an act of violence by the arrival of Sally, who cleared away the soup plates.

"Ah, sole Véronique," Clarissa exclaimed when the next course was delivered to the table. "I simply adore sole. Are you partial to fish, Mr. Bellamy?"

"Not very, but I enjoy shellfish," Jesse said.

"What sort of shellfish?"

"Oysters Rockefeller is a favorite," Jesse said. "And I do love clam chowder."

"Perhaps you can explain to Cook how to make these American delicacies so that we can sample them," Clarissa said and smiled at Jesse in a manner Geneva found sickeningly ingratiating. She was clearly trying to make up for her bad behavior. "We would so love to learn more about your culture. Wouldn't we, Rose?"

Rose nodded solemnly. "Have you ever been out West? Is it full of lawless gunslingers?"

"I don't know, Rose," Jesse replied with a chuckle.

"Didn't you used to live in Montana?" Geneva asked, speaking up for the first time.

Jesse looked blank. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Mr. Lefferts told Father that your mother married a rancher from Montana."

He nodded then, his expression growing sad. "My mother and I were estranged. I didn't get on with my stepfather."

"So you went to New York?" Honor asked.

"Yes."

"How old were you at the time?"

"Stop interrogating Mr. Bellamy," Clarissa admonished them. "It's impolite."

"We're just making conversation, Mother," Rose said. "How else can we get to know him better?"

"Do you have any favorite holiday traditions?" Honor asked. "What did you do at Christmas if you were estranged from your family?"

"Last year I was invited to a coworker's home for Christmas." Jesse smiled self-deprecatingly. "He took pity on me because I was alone. And then, on New Year's Eve, I went to Times Square to see the ball drop."

"What ball? Who dropped it?" Rose cried.

“It doesn’t actually fall,” Jesse explained. “It’s a beautiful lighted iron sphere that’s slowly lowered down a flagpole. The ball reaches the bottom precisely at midnight, and everyone cheers, claps, and sings. It’s quite a sight. But why don’t you tell me about you?” he suggested, turning his smile on Aunt Clarissa, who was clearly forgiven. “How do you pass the time in London?”

This was the opening she had been waiting for, and she began to regale Jesse with tales of London society. Clarissa peppered the conversation with the names of titled, influential people, but Jesse was clearly unimpressed, since he had likely never heard of any of them, though he nodded and asked questions when Clarissa paused for breath.

“Once you’re the Earl of Gosforth, you will move in the highest levels of society,” Clarissa said. “Unless you decide to bury yourself in the country, like my brother. But you’re young and would benefit from the connections you can make. I wager if you took a house in London for the Season, you would be on every hostess’s guest list.”

“And that could be more perilous than the missions you flew during the war,” Geneva said, but her attempt at a joke fell flat.

Clarissa had stopped talking rather abruptly, probably because she had realized that if Jesse didn’t marry Geneva, he would be introduced to eligible young women of his own class and might marry elsewhere, which wouldn’t benefit any of them.

“You would, of course, need to observe a period of mourning, and then take your cousins to London with you,” she said when the silence stretched on. “So they can meet eligible young men. It would be up to you to see them advantageously wed and negotiate a marriage settlement.”

“Yes, of course,” Jesse muttered, then fell silent.

For the remainder of the meal, they alternated between awkward silence and banal observations, and Geneva was relieved when dinner finally came to an end and she could escape to her bedroom.

FORTY-ONE

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn woke with a start and grabbed for her ringing mobile. She had lost hope of hearing from Logan, but she thought the call might be from Jude, who might want to find out if there were any new developments and confirm that he was on his way. She was surprised to discover that Gabe was up, and Max was no longer in his cot. She could hear them chatting in the other room as Max inquired about breakfast.

"Hey," Jude said when Quinn answered. He sounded unusually disgruntled, and she heard a lot of noise in the background, mostly people talking loudly.

"Hey, yourself. Are you on your way?"

"Not exactly. There is a power outage at the airport at Stuttgart."

"Any foul play suspected?" Quinn asked, instantly alert. These days, one's mind immediately went to bad actors rather than some more innocent explanation.

"Doesn't look like it, but all flights are canceled. I will try again tomorrow. Power ought to be restored by then." It got a little quieter as Jude must have exited the waiting area. "I'm heading back to base. Have you heard from the police?"

"Nothing since yesterday."

"And Drew? Was he able to make any headway?"

"More than DI Malone had," Quinn replied. "He was able to rule out Chrissy and Rafe, but he didn't identify any new leads. It seems Chrissy was seriously ill. She returned to the Czech Republic to be with her family," she said sadly.

"So she hasn't come back to the UK?" Jude asked.

"Doesn't look like it. I'm almost glad she wasn't part of Max's life," Quinn mused. "It would have been traumatic for him to lose his mother as

well as Rafe," she said. *And now he might lose his dad*, she thought miserably but didn't voice the thought. She didn't want to say the words aloud.

"It will be all right," Jude said.

"Will it?" Quinn asked. She wasn't convinced.

"It has to be. Max has a family that loves him. We'll see him through whatever happens."

And us? Will we be all right? Quinn wanted to ask, but that wasn't a question either of them could answer.

She heard Jude speaking to someone, maybe an Uber driver, and then he came back to her. "I'll ring you tomorrow, but do let me know if there are any new developments."

"I will," she promised.

Quinn had just set her phone down on the bedside table when there was another incoming call. Drew. She snatched up the phone.

"Drew, hi. Anything?"

"I'm not sure yet. I was able to obtain Logan's call register for the past three months. No illuminating texts. Certain numbers repeat at regular intervals, yours among them. There are calls from Jude, from a few friends, and from the hospital, presumably work-related. Then, about two weeks ago, a new number crops up."

"Whose number?" Quinn asked.

"It's from a pay-as-you-go number, but given the length of the calls, I'd say that a conversation took place, unless this person left very long voicemails. The last call was on the day Logan disappeared. In the afternoon."

"What do you think this means?"

"This is just a working theory at this stage, but I think Logan got involved in something dodgy, realized he was in danger, and tried to lead whoever had come after him away from Max."

"Did Logan make any calls after that day?" Quinn asked.

"No. He did not make any calls or log into any apps. I'm waiting for my guy to provide me with Logan's banking data."

Quinn didn't bother to ask how Drew's *guy* was able to obtain records that would require a warrant to access. She didn't really care. At least Drew was doing something, unlike DI Malone, who'd gone silent.

"What do you hope to find?" she asked.

“Anything outside the normal pattern that might give insight into what he was up to. If Logan didn’t take out a large sum of money to see him through, then he would need to use his credit card or take out cash. If he’s made no transactions over the past few days, chances are he is either lying low or he’s unable to.”

She appreciated the euphemism, but she knew precisely what Drew was getting at. If Logan had no money on him and hadn’t used his cards, he was most likely dead.

“Quinn, I will do everything in my power to find Logan, but you have to prepare yourself for the possibility that whoever followed him to his house killed him, loaded his body in the boot of his car, then disposed of the body and torched the car to destroy any traces of Logan’s DNA.”

A sob tore from her chest. “He can’t be gone. I’ve lost so many people, Drew.”

“I know, and I’m sorry, love, but there’s no celestial scale of justice that says you can’t lose more than you can handle. Sometimes bad things happen. And sometimes, people make decisions that bring untold trouble into their lives.”

“And you think that’s what happened with Logan?” Quinn asked through tears.

“It’s too soon to say. He doesn’t have a record and has never been in any trouble with the law, but desperate people do desperate things. Perhaps he got into debt, or maybe he was being blackmailed. I will know more once I look at his bank statements.”

“OK. Thanks, Drew.”

Quinn must have looked despondent when she came out of the bedroom, since Gabe silently pulled her into his arms and held her.

“Are you OK, Aunt Quinn?” Max asked. His gaze was as penetrating as that of any police detective.

She nodded. “I’m fine, Max. Thank you. I just have a headache.” And she did. It was throbbing behind her eyes and radiating into her temples, no doubt brought on by stress.

“You should go for a walk,” Max said wisely. “Dad says fresh air is good for a headache.”

“That’s an excellent idea,” Gabe said. “Why don’t you have some breakfast, then take a nice, long walk around the lake. It will help you to clear your mind.”

He poured her a cup of coffee, fixed it the way she liked, and handed her the mug. Quinn took a grateful sip. Fresh air might be good, but caffeine was better.

"And then, before you know it, Jude will be here," he added, no doubt hoping to cheer her up.

"He just rang. His flight was canceled. There's a power outage at the airport."

Gabe's gaze slid to Max, who was clearly listening, his face set in lines of concentration.

"Is everything all right?" Gabe asked in a tone that was entirely too casual.

That was parent-speak for *Should we be worried?* And also frustration with his inability to go online and see for himself what was happening. A day without the internet and they both felt completely cut off. It was as if the world beyond the boathouse had gone dark, the people and places they knew suddenly beyond their reach.

"Jude wasn't concerned. He'll try again tomorrow."

"Good. In the meantime, I can take the kids out," Gabe offered. "Keep them occupied."

"Out where?"

"Well, fishing turned out to be a terrible idea, but Reggie mentioned that there are several entertainment centers in Barrow-in-Furness. There are arcades, bouncy castles, and maybe even go-karts. That should keep them happy for a few hours."

"Isn't that awfully far? And how will you get there if you can't use your satnav?" Quinn asked.

"I'll do it the old-fashioned way and use a map."

"Maybe I should come with you."

"Or maybe you should work on the new episode of *Echoes*. It will take your mind off things."

"Are you sure you don't mind?" Quinn asked.

"It's my pleasure."

She was enormously grateful, but she also knew her husband well enough to understand that he needed to keep busy, and, in the way of alpha males everywhere, he needed to do something to fix the situation. It made him feel better to be able to offer a solution, even if it involved taking the kids to an arcade and giving her the space to work.

“Emma will help me,” Gabe said. “She can keep an eye on Mia and Alex so that I can devote myself to looking after Max.”

“I love you,” Quinn said simply. “And thank you.”

“No thanks required.”

Quinn nodded. She felt a bit guilty, but the prospect of spending a few hours on her own won out. She was worried and, despite a full night of sleep, felt tired and emotionally drained. And she had to ring back Rhys, who’d left several messages. She couldn’t keep putting him off, not when he had to put out a casting call for actors, scout a location, begin the process of designing sets and costumes, and do all the other myriad things that went into the production of an hour-long episode.

She took a quiet, solitary walk after breakfast, but when she got back she popped over to the guesthouse and asked Sam to print out directions to the amusement centers, then made sure Gabe and the children had everything they needed before setting off. Once they were finally on their way, she settled in a deckchair and gazed out over the tranquil surface of the lake. The water sparkled in the midday sun, and even the island that had seemed so dark and menacing last night now looked charming and picturesque. Quinn drank in the peaceful silence, then reluctantly pulled out her mobile and phoned Rhys.

FORTY-TWO

“Where the bloody hell have you been?” Rhys exclaimed as soon as he answered the call. “I’ve been trying to reach you for two days. I was beginning to think something happened to you too.”

“I’m all right. We had to get away for a few days.”

“Why? What’s happened?”

“I’d rather not go into it.”

“Is it to do with Logan?” Rhys asked.

“Yes.”

Quinn was acutely aware of the pain and the sense of defeat in her voice and hated how low she had been brought in only a few days. The human psyche was remarkably resilient, yet the very mechanisms that allowed it to adapt to unforeseen circumstances could also lull one into a false sense of security. When everything seemed to be going well, it was easy to believe one was safe and that nothing truly dreadful could happen. And yet terrible, painful things occurred all the time, often lying in wait just around the corner, ready to strike when least expected.

She had found her footing again after the events of the past few years. Though she still grieved for those she had lost, she had begun to make her peace with it. But now, once again, the unthinkable had happened, and this time she didn’t even know what it was, which made it all the more difficult to process.

“Tell me when you feel ready,” Rhys said and immediately moved on, having understood that she needed to talk of something else. “I have a call in to Andie Parke’s agent. I think she would be perfect as Geneva.”

“Yes, I can see the resemblance,” Quinn said, her mind instantly going to the last role she’d seen Andie Parke in. She had portrayed a young Agatha Christie in a film adaptation of the author’s life. Few women’s looks were enhanced by shingled hair plastered to the scalp, eyebrows plucked into nearly invisible lines, and dresses that resembled shapeless sacks,

flattering only to the thinnest and most boyish of figures, but Andie had managed to look lovely, nonetheless, and would do Geneva justice.

"Any thoughts for Honor?" Quinn asked.

"We'll have to tap a lesser-known actress," Rhys replied. "We don't have the budget for a high-profile cast. And we still need to find our male leads. Have you learned anything new since we last talked?" he asked carefully.

"Yes, I've traveled to 1923 several times," Quinn said. "Mostly to escape."

"And?" Rhys instantly perked up.

"Geneva had some difficult decisions to make, and she was understandably conflicted."

"Do tell."

Quinn could almost hear Rhys shifting into a more comfortable position as he settled in to hear the story. That was the bitter reality of history: for those who lived through it, events were often heartbreaking and life-altering, but, for those who came after, even the most heinous acts were transformed into entertainment. To this day, films and novels about the world wars dominated the bestseller charts and the box offices, proof that people enjoyed immersing themselves in another's suffering, however unsettling parts of it might be. Murder mysteries, true crime especially, remained bestselling genres. What did that say about mankind? Was it cathartic, a way of empathizing with the victims and making sense of the horror, or was it simply a diversion—a few hours spent exploring someone else's misery while sitting comfortably on the sofa, snacks to hand?

"Well, go on, then," Rhys urged.

And Quinn had to admit that she would much rather discuss Geneva's tragedy than focus on the one unfolding in her own life.

"Geneva had become involved with the estate manager, Rory Sullivan."

"Typical," Rhys remarked. "Was she playing Lady Chatterley to her working-class lover?"

"She was," Quinn admitted, though she resented Rhys's callous tone.

But, of course, to him Geneva was just an idea, not a real young woman in whose head he'd spent countless hours, thinking her thoughts and feeling her emotional pain.

“Rory was Geneva’s first romantic experience, and she was unhappy and confused.”

“So not exploring her budding sexuality, then?”

“Not quite.”

“Shame, that. First love is always precious, even if it’s all wrong,” Rhys said wistfully. “The highs and the lows, the greedy exploration of each other’s bodies and minds. The exquisite agony of parting, and then the ecstasy of coming together again.”

“Are you quite finished, Shakespeare?” Quinn asked with a chuckle.

“I take it you don’t have bittersweet memories of your first love?”

“No. He was an absolute wanker. And, if Facebook is anything to go by, still is.”

“Oh, dear.”

“Do you mind if we get back to Geneva now?”

“Not in the least,” Rhys replied.

Despite her annoyance, Quinn couldn’t help but be amused. That was the thing about Rhys, he always knew how to distract her from her problems and make her feel better without relying on patronizing platitudes and empty promises. Whatever happened happened, and at the end of it all Rhys was still there, steadfast in his friendship.

“Rory asked Geneva to marry him, but she had serious reservations about the relationship.”

“She didn’t love him?”

“Geneva was an inexperienced young woman whose only points of reference were the novels and films she had seen. And she and Rory had some very real differences that became more pronounced as they got to know each other. Rory was Catholic, which would make life difficult for them both, especially if they remained in England. He gave Geneva the claddagh ring she was wearing at the time of her death.”

“So, she accepted his proposal, then?” Rhys asked.

“She must have,” Quinn mused, although, from what she had seen, it didn’t seem likely that Geneva would have changed her mind. And she had clearly not worn Rory’s ring for any length of time, since Quinn had been unable to see even the briefest of memories.

“Just before Christmas, Rory told Geneva that he had a job offer in Pennsylvania. It was an opportunity not to be missed, and he was going to

leave at the start of the new year. He asked her to come with him or join him when she was able, but I don't think she ever seriously considered it."

"Why not?" Rhys asked. "It would have been a way out for them."

"She felt guilty about leaving Honor and dashing her father's hopes. If she married Jesse, she wouldn't have to give anything up. And I think she was genuinely attracted to him."

"What was he like?"

Quinn considered the question. The truth was that Jesse Bellamy had come as a surprise even to her. He was attractive, charming, and brave. The aircraft he would have flown during the war would have been little more than wood, wire, and stiffened canvas, the contraption held together by skill and nerve. And he must have volunteered in England if he had flown with the Royal Flying Corps out of Kent. Jesse had made no promises about the future, but he appeared to be fond of Geneva, and, all things considered, the situation could have been far worse.

"He was rather dazzling, actually—a fine prospect for Geneva," Quinn said. "I have yet to find out more about him, but I think he exceeded anyone's hopes."

"That must have put a spanner in the works for the estate manager," Rhys mused. "He must have expected someone old and unpleasant, and in walked this Prince Charming."

"Geneva thought Rory might have been trying to sow seeds of conflict between her and Honor."

"In what way?"

"Rory made it clear that Honor was jealous and would gladly stab Geneva in the back if that got her what she wanted. He told Geneva that her sister had made a play for him."

"And what do you think? Would Honor betray Geneva in that way?" Rhys sounded hopeful, since romantic rivalry always made for good television and offered a credible motive for murder.

"I'm the wrong person to ask."

Quinn could barely suppress the bitterness that had taken root in her soul. It wasn't so long ago that her own sister had tried to seduce Gabe, and knowing that her husband's betrayal would cause Quinn unbearable pain had probably been an added incentive.

"I'm sorry," Rhys said softly. "That was insensitive."

“It’s not your fault Jo tried to destroy my life. But I didn’t sense malice from Honor. I think she loved Geneva and looked up to more than envied her.”

She hadn’t sensed malice from Jo either, but she had been dead wrong to trust her sister. Perhaps Honor was just as good at keeping her true feelings to herself.

“Did Rory Sullivan know about the well?” Rhys asked in an obvious attempt to steer the conversation away from Jo and the deadly consequences of her choices.

“He did, but so did Jesse. He came upon Rory and Geneva having a heart-to-heart by the well and even asked about it.”

“Would he have had reason to murder Geneva? Perhaps he found out about her and Rory and saw it as a betrayal?”

“I really can’t answer that, not yet. Our only real clue is the ring.”

“Which points to Rory Sullivan, since he never reported her missing and presumably continued with his plans.”

“But why would he leave such an obvious clue? Surely, if he had been responsible, he would have removed the ring.”

“Maybe he didn’t realize she was wearing it,” Rhys suggested.

“Or maybe the real killer wanted to frame him. Geneva thought someone had gone through her jewelry box. If they had, they would have known about the ring.”

“What do we know about Rory Sullivan?” Rhys asked. “Did he go to America as he planned?”

“I’ve been advised not to access the internet, so I haven’t been able to research any of the players.”

“When are you back?”

“Tomorrow night. Jude was meant to come today, but there was a power outage at Stuttgart.”

“Yeah, I saw on the news. All flights are grounded. It seems a transformer blew. It shouldn’t take long to repair, but I doubt Jude will be flying out today.”

“No, he won’t,” Quinn agreed.

“I’m sorry for what you’re going through. It’s unfair that one person should have so much to contend with.”

“Drew said there’s no such thing as a celestial scale that measures out pain in equal doses.”

“No, but some people sure seem to be born under a lucky star,” Rhys said dreamily.

“Like who?”

“I’ll let you know when I meet them,” he teased. “I consider myself lucky, though. I never imagined I would get to be this happy. I had given up on the idea of meeting my soulmate, and then love walked into my life when I least expected it. All thanks to you.”

“It wasn’t me, it was destiny,” Quinn joked.

“I don’t believe in destiny. I believe in mathematics.”

“Sorry, you lost me.”

“We’re all a statistic, Quinn. The only question is which column you wind up in.”

“That’s rather a cynical view.”

“It’s not cynical, it’s realistic. No one knows what’s meant for any of us, but, if we try to be good people and make reasonably well-informed choices, we might avoid becoming a cautionary tale.”

“Every choice we make leads us down a particular path,” Quinn said. “And Geneva must have made a decision that resulted in her death. The only questions that remain are what that decision was and who made the choice to end her life.”

“Whoever it was, this promises to be a riveting episode,” Rhys said. “A young woman caught between two very different men, a fortune at stake, and a sister who may have had an agenda of her own. That’s television gold.”

“If you say so,” Quinn said with a soft chuckle. “Now, let me see what I can learn before Gabe and the kids get back.”

“Go to it. And I hope you hear from Logan soon.”

“Thank you. So do I.”

Quinn set aside her mobile and pulled out the case with the earring from her pocket.

FORTY-THREE

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Geneva tried to dismiss what Rory had said about Honor, but doubt had already taken root, and as she lay awake that night, she viewed the events of the past few weeks through a different lens. Was Honor really envious of her? And would she betray her in the most vicious way one woman could betray another? Geneva had her doubts about Rory, but Honor didn't know that, and if she had been the one to go through Geneva's jewelry case, she'd know that Rory had given her a ring. And if it was her, what had she been looking for?

Perhaps Honor felt slighted that Geneva had inherited some of their mother's most valuable pieces of jewelry, but their father had handed her their mother's jewelry case without thinking, and simply because she was the oldest. That wasn't fair, and she would ask Honor if there were any items she wanted and offer them to her. But was it possible that what Honor wanted most was Rory? She had made such passionate arguments against Geneva's relationship with him, but could that have been just so that she could pursue him for herself?

And what about Jesse? She had never seen Honor behave in such a coy, playful manner before, and Geneva had to concede that her sister was no longer a little girl. She was on the cusp of womanhood, and perhaps she had crossed that line already, while no one had been watching. Did Honor think that if Geneva chose Rory, she herself might have a chance with Jesse? That would certainly solve all Honor's problems. She wouldn't have to leave her home, go off to finishing school, or look for work once she came of age. She would be Lady Bellamy, the beautiful young countess she could only become if Geneva were no longer in the way.

But was her little sister capable of such devious deeds? Had she really offered herself to Rory, or had he embroidered the facts in order to nudge

Geneva into making a decision? It was possible, of course, but deep down Geneva knew Rory to be on the level. He was a grown man, not an adolescent boy bent on playing games, and she'd never before caught him in a lie. She would have to keep a close eye on Honor in the coming days. Her sister didn't know that Rory meant to leave, so perhaps she would try again and see if this time he might be amenable to her advances, but, handsome as Rory was, he wasn't the ultimate prize. He had nothing to offer Honor besides a sexual experience, and, as exciting as that might be, it was Jesse who held her world in the palm of his hand.

Geneva turned onto her stomach and punched her pillow. She couldn't believe she was thinking these awful, disloyal thoughts. Perhaps that was precisely what Rory had intended, to give her reason to question Honor's integrity and see if she could find the evidence she needed to support her suspicions. Well, she wouldn't play into his hands. Honor could be selfish and immature, but she was seventeen. What seventeen-year-old girl wasn't a bit of a handful? Honor was just testing the waters. It was only natural. She was taking the measure of the men around her in order to understand their very natures.

In a few short years, Honor would be in a position to make decisions about her own future. She was searching for a role model—that was all, Geneva reasoned. Perhaps she had been testing Rory, trying to decide whether he was worthy of her sister's love, just as she was observing Jesse to determine whether he could be trusted. Now that Rose was there, Honor had a friend her own age to confide in and finally had the support and companionship she craved. Geneva was no longer enough. Honor needed friends who could understand her on her own level, and Lord knew poor Rose had plenty of angst of her own. She was cooped up in that house with a mother who watched her like a hawk and refused to let her spread her wings, even a little.

Geneva was glad Rose would be leaving for Switzerland in a few months. At least she would have the chance to make friends and have experiences of her own. Perhaps it wouldn't be such a dreadful idea to send Honor to the same school. The two girls could look out for one another, and by the time Honor returned she would be of age, ready to step into a life of her own.

Geneva would speak to Honor tomorrow. And if she was willing, then maybe Douglas could charge Mr. Lefferts with making the arrangements

and paying the school fees in advance, so they wouldn't have to rely on Jesse's goodwill. Having settled on a plan of action, Geneva felt a little more at peace.

Eventually, she slept.

FORTY-FOUR

When Geneva woke, the house smelled of pine, roasting meat, mince pies, and nutmeg. One of the farmhands had probably already delivered the tree and set it up in the foyer, where boughs of pine had been woven through the balusters of the grand staircase. The Bellamys always decorated the tree on Christmas Eve and left it up until Twelfth Night, and Geneva was glad that this year Rose and Jesse would be there to help them decorate. Since the war, Christmas had been a sad affair that only served to remind them of the people who were missing from the table. But this year, they would try to make today fun and would ask Cook to send up a few mince pies for them to enjoy. And then tonight, the carolers would come from the village, and they would have a lovely supper, followed by the midnight service at St. Michael's.

Geneva wondered if Rory would attend Christmas Mass and hoped that he wouldn't be lonely on Christmas. But he had to be. He was on his own, and, though he took his meals at the hall, he wasn't really one to socialize with other members of staff. Now, in the light of a new day, she felt bad about the way she'd run off last night, and resolved to go see Rory after tea. He would be finished working by then, and she would be back in time for the carolers, so no one would miss her. Geneva thought she should return his ring, but it seemed cruel to reject him so completely on Christmas and throw his love back in his face. She would wait until New Year's Eve and give back the ring then, just before he left for America. That way she wouldn't have to deal with his anger and disappointment every time they saw each other, and he would know that he was free to move forward without hesitation, since there would be no unresolved feelings between them.

Geneva ran a brush through her hair, still marveling at the ease of maintaining her new hairstyle, then walked over to the wardrobe. She chose a white Jacquette blouse and paired it with a navy blue skirt and a matching cardigan. She pulled on her stockings, got dressed, then buttoned her

favorite Mary Janes before heading downstairs. The wonderful smell of the freshly chopped tree filled the house, and boxes of ornaments had been brought down from the attic, and the baubles within sparkled in the winter sunshine that filtered through the tall windows.

Despite the upheaval of the past weeks, Geneva felt her heart lift. It was Christmas Eve, one of the most festive days of the year, and, as she gazed upon the still-undecorated tree, she promised herself that this year she wouldn't get sad as she recalled Christmases past when she had known nothing of the losses that were to come and had felt nothing but joyful anticipation. Whatever happened, next year everything would change, and, whether she remained at Bellamy Hall or was forced to leave, she wanted to savor this last Christmas with her father and permit herself to enjoy the New Year's Eve party that seemed so important to him.

Geneva was surprised to discover that she was the first one down to breakfast. Aunt Clarrisa was an early riser and normally already on her second cup of tea by the time anyone came down, and Rose loved breakfast at the hall since there was a variety of dishes and she could have second helpings if she was still hungry. Clarissa didn't hold with waste and had the same breakfast prepared every morning for both herself and Rose: a soft-boiled egg, two pieces of toast, and minuscule serving dishes of butter and marmalade.

The half dozen chafing dishes on the sideboard were still untouched, and the butter in the dish was beginning to soften. Geneva had just helped herself to sausages, a fried egg, grilled tomato, and a spoonful of mushrooms when Sally arrived with a rack of toast and a pot of tea. She must have spied her coming down.

"Good morning, my lady," Sally said with forced cheerfulness as Geneva assumed her customary seat.

"Good morning, Sally. How are you today?"

"I'm well, ma'am."

As a rule, the servants looked forward to Boxing Day, when Douglas rewarded them generously for their service, but this year they were sure to have misgivings about what was to come. In the way of servants, they knew what was going on, but no one had taken the time to properly explain the situation or address their concerns. Geneva would have to speak to her father once he was up. Perhaps he could offer the staff a word of reassurance on this of all days, or ask Mr. Lefferts to step in if he himself

wasn't up to the task. Of course, although it was possible that he'd spoken with Jesse in private and they had come to an understanding, it was just as likely that her father was as much in the dark as the staff and just as uncertain about his heir's intentions, since Jesse had yet to openly commit to remaining in England.

Aunt Clarissa swept into the room. Her period of mourning was officially over, but she still wore black or very dark gray. Today's dress was adorned with black lace, and she wore jet beads and matching earrings. The jewelry had been in the family for decades and had been worn since a Victorian ancestor, who had been influenced by Queen Victoria's devotion to her dead husband, had ordered a set while in mourning for her spouse.

"Good morning, Geneva," Clarissa said as she absentmindedly fingered the beads.

"Good morning, Aunt."

Clarissa took a seat across from Geneva and reached for the teapot, but, as she glanced at her niece, her expression was oddly calculating.

"Can I get you anything, madam?" Sally asked.

"Toast and a soft-boiled egg," Clarissa stated imperiously. "I can't abide a heavy breakfast. And be quick about it, girl. Or my tea will get cold."

"Yes, ma'am."

Clarissa added a splash of milk to her tea. She never took sugar, for fear of gaining weight, and only permitted herself one tiny spoonful of marmalade on her toast. "What are your plans for the day?" she asked at last.

"There's the house to decorate, the menu for Christmas dinner to finalize, and the presents to wrap," Geneva replied airily.

Clarissa was happiest when annoyed. It was her natural state of being, but today Geneva wasn't going to allow her aunt to spoil her hard-won good mood. If she found something to be unhappy about, she could keep it to herself.

"Your father would like a word when you're finished your breakfast." Clarissa peered at Geneva's plate with obvious disapproval, but Geneva ignored her.

"Is Father all right?"

Clarissa shot her a scathing look. "I highly doubt my brother will ever be *all right* again, Geneva, but he is in possession of his faculties, and as

long as he is still the master of this house he has a duty to us all. As do you."

That was rather a harsh response to a fairly simple question, but Clarissa was clearly on edge, and Geneva had no wish to either antagonize her or encourage further conversation that touched on anything other than the weather.

"It's a lovely day," she said.

"Too cold for my liking."

"It is the end of December," Geneva reminded her.

"It's milder in London."

"No doubt."

Geneva finished her breakfast, drank the last of her tea, and wished her aunt a good morning. Honor and Rose were just on their way down to breakfast. Their faces shone with anticipation when they spotted the tree, and Geneva reminded herself that, despite their protestations to the contrary, when it came to Christmas, they were still children and deserved to be happy, even if only for a day or two. Real life would reassert itself soon enough.

"Good morning," Geneva said cheerfully.

"Good morning," Rose replied. "Can we go ice-skating after we decorate the tree?"

Geneva felt a chill when she recalled her dream, but refused to give in to baseless fear. It was only natural that she would have bad dreams, given the turmoil of recent weeks. There was no reason to think anyone would get hurt, and it was cold enough for the pond to be frozen solid since it was hardly more than a shallow pool.

"There are skates in the mudroom. I think Jack's skates should fit you, Rose."

"Won't you come with us?" Rose asked.

"I don't think so. I have too much to do."

"We can ask Jesse to join us," Honor suggested slyly. "He wears about the same size as Father."

"I bet he can skate beautifully," Rose said. "He's so fit."

"Yes, of course you should invite him," Geneva said. "I'm sure he would enjoy it."

Honor looked a bit deflated, and Geneva thought her sister had been intentionally trying to bait her. She supposed she should be grateful Honor

hadn’t mentioned Rory. That would have made Geneva angry, but she once again reminded herself that she intended to remain in good spirits.

Not today, she thought as she started up the stairs. *Not today*, *Honor*, she repeated as she knocked on her father’s door.

FORTY-FIVE

Her father was in bed, his gaunt face ashen against the snow-white linen of the pillowcases and his body strangely childlike in the vast four-poster. Dennison was nowhere to be seen, presumably since Douglas wouldn't be getting up and didn't need help getting dressed. Nurse Jeffries sat by the bed, her pale fingers loosely wrapped around Douglas's wrist as she took his pulse. Her father looked so ill and diminished, Geneva's heart swelled with sorrow and love for this man, who, even in his final weeks, couldn't enjoy the peace of mind afforded by the knowledge that his children would be safe and well provided for. He was trying desperately to hold on until he could be sure, when another man would have let go by now.

"Can I get you anything, Father?" Geneva asked. "You should eat," she added when she noticed that the breakfast tray had yet to be brought up.

"I will. But first, I would like to speak to you." He turned to the nurse, who had retreated into a corner to give them a few moments of privacy.

"If you would please excuse us, Gladys," he said and tried to smile. "I'd like to speak to my daughter."

The nurse got to her feet and smiled back. She was pretty when she allowed her stern façade to crack even a little. "Of course. I'll just nip down to the kitchen and fetch your breakfast, my lord."

"Thank you, Gladys. You're very kind. Please, have some breakfast yourself. I am really not that hungry, and am happy to wait."

Nurse Jeffries nodded and left the room without another word. Douglas patted the side of the bed, and Geneva sat down. He reached for her hand, and when he wrapped his fingers around hers his skin was cool and papery, the hand as insubstantial as that of a specter. Geneva recalled a time when her father had been healthy and strong, and when she had felt safe and reassured at the touch of his hand. Now he sought reassurance from her.

"Genny, please hear me out before you say anything," Douglas began.

His voice was so soft, she had to move a little closer to hear what he was about to say.

"I don't have much time, and trying to hold on will only prolong everyone's suffering."

"Father," Geneva began, but he shook his head, and she went silent.

"Please, let me finish." Geneva nodded, and he went on. "I need to know that you will be looked after once I'm gone. Both of you. I have instructed Mr. Lefferts to make arrangements for Honor. She will join Rose at Château Mont-Choisi for two years, and then, once she leaves school, she will reside with Clarissa in London, where she will be introduced to society. Clarissa promised to chaperone Honor until she is married."

"I have been thinking exactly the same thing about sending Honor to school with Rose, but why leave her with Clarissa?" Geneva cried. "Surely I can be trusted to look after my own sister."

"Of course you can," Douglas said soothingly, "but the reason I asked Clarissa is because I expect you will be otherwise engaged."

"But Father—"

Douglas released her hand and raised his in a gesture meant to silence her. "Geneva, it would make me very happy if you and Jesse were to announce your engagement at the New Year's party. I have spoken to him at length, and he understands where his duty lies. As should you. This is the best possible solution for all involved. Clarissa agrees."

"But I barely know him," Geneva protested. "We've been acquainted less than a fortnight."

"Time is of the essence. It would please me if you were to marry as soon as the banns are read, but if I leave you before then, you will need to observe a period of mourning. It is my wish that you limit full mourning to six months. Three months in half-mourning, no more. If you both commit to this course of action, you will forge the bond necessary for a successful marriage in no time."

"But what if we don't?" Geneva asked, but she knew it was pointless to argue. This was the solution everyone was hoping for, and she couldn't afford to refuse. Jesse was perfect on paper, but he was equally suitable in real life, a sentiment her father hurried to express.

"He's a good man, Genny. He's intelligent, and kind, and handsome enough to appeal to any young woman. And he gave me his word that he will provide for you all."

“You mean the staff?”

“How he manages the staff will be up to him. I mean Clarissa and Rose. Gerald had debts, and, although Clarissa managed to pay off the creditors, she will not be able to hold on to her house and maintain the lifestyle she’s accustomed to without a steady income. And Rose will benefit from her time at the finishing school. She’s a good girl, but she can be gauche, and if she’s to make a good match she must acquire polish.” Douglas sighed heavily and patted Geneva’s hand. “I know you have feelings for Rory Sullivan, but he is not the one for you, Geneva. He’s a fine man, but you two come from vastly different worlds, and his faith, which is incompatible with your own, would make it difficult to build a solid foundation.”

“I’ve considered all that, Father,” she said quietly.

“I know you have. You’re a clever girl, but what you don’t realize is that infatuation evaporates very quickly when it comes up against hardship and discrimination. And you will be discriminated against, even in America.”

“How did you—?”

“Sullivan asked me for a reference, and he mentioned his desire to go abroad. I can only assume he’s asked you to go with him.”

Geneva looked away, but not before her father saw the confirmation in her eyes.

“You can’t go, even if you think you can make it work,” Douglas said. “You have a duty to me, to your sister, and to this ancient, noble family. And Honor will need your guidance and support in the coming years.”

“Then why have you made arrangements for her to live with Clarissa?”

“Because by the time she returns from Switzerland, you will hopefully have a child of your own to focus on. You must provide Jesse with a male heir, so that the estate will not pass out of the family when the time comes.”

“And if I refuse?” Geneva asked, her voice flat. But she knew she was just being contrary. She couldn’t refuse, not when her father was practically begging her to say yes, and when she had every reason to agree.

“Geneva, people like us have never married for love. We have a responsibility to both past and future generations. My parents chose your mother, and I proposed to her after a brief courtship. We barely knew each other, but we were committed to the marriage and we were happy. Just as you can be happy with Jesse.”

“The world is changing, Father. Since the war, more people are choosing to forge their own paths.”

Douglas gave her a pitying look. “For a noblewoman, there’s only ever one path. To marry and have children. You can marry an earl and assure your place in society, or you can marry an Irish peasant and spend the rest of your life scrounging for both money and respect.”

“Why would we have to scrounge for money? Rory can work.”

“Yes, he can, and he will, because you will get no money from me if you marry him. Not even a nominal sum. You will be cut off without a penny. And I have a feeling your beau will lose interest very quickly when he finds out you will bring no money to the marriage and he will not have anything to invest in whatever venture he thinks he will establish.”

“I never knew you to be cruel, Father,” Geneva said. If before she’d felt sad and trapped by her responsibilities, now she felt angry.

Her father’s gaze softened. “Genny, I love you with all my heart, and I only want the best for you. You’re young and idealistic, and you think you can overcome any obstacle. But life is hard and unforgiving. And once you abandon your childish fantasies and come around to the idea of marrying Jesse, you will be happy. You will learn to love each other, and you will have a wonderful life and raise beautiful children, who will walk through life with their heads held high.”

“Do I have any say in my life at all?” Geneva asked warily. She had no idea why she was still fighting, but something inside her refused to surrender. If she married Jesse, it had to be on her own terms, not because she was ordered to do so.

“Yes, you do,” her father replied. “You can refuse, but if you do, Honor will marry Jesse as soon as she turns eighteen.”

“And what if she doesn’t want to marry Jesse?”

“Oh, she will,” Douglas replied confidently. “As much as she might like to go to Switzerland with Rose, she would much rather be the lady of the house with a handsome husband on her arm.” He smiled mirthlessly. “Your sister is more pragmatic than you realize.”

As much as Geneva wanted to deny it, she knew Douglas was right. Honor would jump at the chance to marry Jesse and would see the match as the ultimate triumph, since she would become a countess at eighteen and completely bypass the uncertainty and humiliation of a London Season, where she would be paraded in front of men who would judge her on the

size of her fortune. Geneva had never had a Season, since she had turned eighteen right after the armistice and, having so recently lost his wife and son, Douglas's mind hadn't been on parties. She had been relieved at the time, but now she wished she'd had a Season after all. She might have been married by now, with a son to inherit the estate. How much simpler life would have been.

"Will you do it, Geneva? Will you take your rightful place as the Countess of Gosforth, or will you become some grubby housewife?" Douglas asked.

Geneva felt as if brick by brick her father had just torn down the wall she had built to protect herself. In theory, she had free will, but in reality there was little choice. She could say yes to Rory and run off to Pittsburgh with not a penny to her name, or she could retain the position she had always assumed would be hers. And if she didn't, everything would pass to Honor, who would welcome the opportunity. Why go to finishing school and endure years of being molded into someone one wasn't when one could skip all that and become a countess? The choice was obvious.

"Have you spoken to Honor?" she asked.

"Not yet. I thought it was only right that I speak to you first. Once I put this to your sister, there will be no taking it back, and if you decide to do the right thing after all, she will feel nothing but resentment towards you. I would never wish to drive a wedge between you."

"Thank you for that," Geneva said. She could hear the bitterness in her voice, and so could her father, but she wasn't going to pretend she didn't feel cornered or manipulated, even if Douglas believed he was doing what was best for her. "Can I have some time to consider?"

"You have until tomorrow night. If you refuse to see sense by then, I will put the proposition to Honor."

"And does Jesse not care whom he marries?" Geneva asked. "Are we interchangeable?"

"You are not. He admires *you*, but few men can resist a girl who looks at them adoringly and hangs on their every word. He's flattered by Honor's obvious attention, and he will learn to love her, or at least like her, if he hopes to make a place for himself in British society. And if he craves something else, we both know he will have ample opportunity to find it."

"And you would condone his infidelity?"

“I don’t condone adultery, but we both know it’s as common as drawing room gossip. In both men and women. People have a right to search for happiness, as long as they are discreet. And it’s not as if I will be here to censure any of you.”

“Are you suggesting I marry Jesse and take a lover?”

“Once you’ve produced the requisite heir, you can do as you please.”

Disgust bubbled in Geneva’s belly, but she wasn’t going to debate the issue any longer. Her father had made his position clear. He was going to strongarm everyone into doing his bidding before he died, and, if they refused, there would be consequences. For everyone except Jesse, because Douglas had no hold over him. He could refuse and marry where he pleased. Jesse was doing a kindness by acquiescing to the wishes of a dying man. And perhaps he would change his mind once Douglas was gone. But so could she, Geneva realized as she stepped out into the corridor. Her choices were limited, but she still had the final word.

Unable to face Honor or her scheming aunt, Geneva fetched her coat and hat and left the house. She wanted to be on her own.

FORTY-SIX

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn put away the earring, reached for her mobile, and stared at it for several long moments before setting it aside. She desperately wanted to look up the individuals in her visions, but couldn't afford to take the risk in case someone was tracking her online activity. After less than three days without access to the internet, she felt frustrated and cut off, the urge to go online so strong it made her realize just how addicted she was to both her phone and the immediate, uncensored access to data she usually took for granted. The information she sought was within her reach and would probably help her to fill in some of the blanks, but she would have to wait until it was safe to log on.

She had to admit that, as much as she had resisted doing another episode of *Echoes*, the case had got under her skin, and she now had to know what had happened to Geneva. Well, she knew what had happened, she reminded herself, but she needed to understand why. There were several potential suspects, but none of the people she had seen so far had any reason to murder Geneva and dump her in the well. As she gazed out over the peaceful lake, Quinn considered every person she'd seen for a killer, but none of them quite fit the profile. The members of staff had nothing to gain by Geneva's death, and all the retainers seemed fairly ordinary, except for the valet, Dennison, who clearly suffered from PTSD and had a soft spot for her.

But what would be his motive? Might he have tried it on and been rebuffed? Could he have lashed out in anger and then tried to cover his tracks? Quinn had not seen anything to support this theory, and set it aside. She supposed Rory could have lost his temper when Geneva refused his proposal and tried to return his ring. He was a scorned lover who knew

about the well and was about to leave the country, meaning he would escape all consequences. It was a plausible possibility.

Then there was Jesse. He was amenable to marrying Geneva, and it looked like she would agree as well despite her reservations. She might feel rushed and managed, but her feelings for Rory were not all that strong, and at the end of the day, she was a dutiful daughter who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Could things have turned ugly between her and Jesse? Perhaps he had found out about his bride's indiscretion with Rory and killed her in a fit of jealous anger. Jesse seemed like a nice bloke, but what did any of them really know about him? He had been part of the family for two weeks, and it wasn't beyond the realm of possibility that behind the charming demeanor lay a nasty, violent temper.

But what if the killer wasn't a man? Honor appeared to love her sister, but her life was about to irrevocably change. While her sister would get to marry the lovely Jesse, Honor would be shipped off to finishing school, then forced to live with her haughty aunt until she was passed on to a suitable husband. With Geneva out of the way, Honor would get the man, the home, and the clout that came with being the Countess of Gosforth. It seemed hard to imagine that a teenage girl would commit such a heinous crime against the sister who loved her, but people had killed for less.

Quinn couldn't see that anyone else had anything to gain by Geneva's death. Perhaps she had yet to meet the killer, or perhaps she had been a victim of a random act of violence. It would help if Quinn could look up the key players and see how their lives had been affected by Geneva's death. Perhaps she could use a computer at the library, where she could do a search without logging on or revealing her IP address. She glanced at her watch, and her frustration mounted. Gabe wouldn't be back for several hours yet, and she couldn't get to the library without a car. She couldn't use her Uber app either because that would require going online and inputting her address.

And tomorrow was Sunday; the library would be closed. She could probably ask Sam and Reggie if she could use their computer—but then she thought better of it. What if she unwittingly gave away their location? It wasn't very likely, and no one except Lynn Michaels knew that she was looking into the past owners of Lynn's new hotel, but it was still risky. Quinn would have to wait until she got the all-clear from DI Malone or

Drew Camden. Which made her wonder what the DI had been up to since they'd spoken last.

She selected his number and made the call. She was about to give up when he finally answered.

"Quinn," he said, and she could hear the hesitation in his voice. "What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to ask if there's any progress on the case."

"I can't discuss an ongoing investigation with you."

"But surely you can give me an update," Quinn protested. He had to know how worried she was about Logan, and how concerned for Max's safety.

DI Malone exhaled heavily, and Quinn knew that whatever he said next wasn't going to make her feel any better. "Look, we've had to prioritize another case. A child abduction."

"But—"

Malone didn't allow her to finish. "We have no evidence to suggest that Logan didn't leave of his own free will. The burned-out car might be an insurance job."

"But you found blood in his house."

"The blood could have been his. Perhaps he cut himself."

"You don't really believe that," Quinn exploded. "And someone tried to abduct Max. Do you only investigate the case if the abduction is successful?"

Malone's voice vibrated with irritation. "What I believe is irrelevant. I must work with the facts. We know that some bloke appeared to be following Logan, but we don't know who he is or if the two had previously met. We also have no evidence that Logan let him into the house."

"Did you dust for prints?" Quinn demanded.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't authorize the expense of a SOCO team when I have no proof that a crime has been committed."

"But my brother is still missing."

"Logan is not answering his mobile, which could be by choice."

"And what about the woman who tried to take Max? Is that not a crime?"

“Tried,” DI Malone said. “She did not succeed, for which we are very grateful. But we can’t charge people with trying. And we have no idea who this woman is and have no way to identify her,” he admitted.

“So, what do you suggest we do?” Quinn was almost screaming now, her fear and frustration finally boiling over.

“I suggest you get back to your life. We’re treating Logan as a missing person, but I must warn you that these cases are rarely solved quickly. Unless the individual comes back on their own or a body turns up, the case might remain open for several years. Quinn, I’m really sorry,” Malone said, his voice softening across the miles, “but my hands are tied. I must prioritize my cases, and right now a grown man who texted you after he left is probably not in as much danger as a twelve-year-old who was snatched on her way to school. I’m sure you understand.”

Angry as she was, Quinn had to admit that the detective made a fair point. From a procedural standpoint, they had nothing to go on and had to prioritize the more pressing cases. She suspected that the police had run out of road, and, unless Drew found out something pertinent by tomorrow afternoon, they would have to take their chances and go back home.

FORTY-SEVEN

Quinn retreated inside. She was going to tidy up and get started on dinner, but she couldn't get the conversation with DI Malone out of her mind. Now that he had admitted he wasn't actively working the case, she felt even more frightened. She needed to talk to someone, and, since Gabe wasn't there, she decided to ring Drew. He might not have anything new to tell her, but his confident, reassuring manner always put her in a better frame of mind. He may not have the answers, but he intended to get them, and he wouldn't quit until he either got to the truth or hit a wall he couldn't scale.

The call went directly to voicemail. Quinn tried again in a half hour with the same result. Then again a third time. Drew always picked up, or, if he was busy, he rang back as soon as he was able. He knew how desperate his clients were for information and spent nearly as much time handholding as he did investigating.

The house was tidy. The chicken and potatoes were ready. And the sky outside was beginning to turn that delicate shade of orchid before dusk settled over the silent lake. Gabe had turned off his tracking, so Quinn couldn't see where he was, and Drew had not called back. She tried Gabe, but the call went to voicemail. Same with Jude. For a moment she considered calling Jill, but she didn't want to alarm her cousin when she was miles away and couldn't do anything to help. Desperate to hear a human voice, she was about to ring Nicole, but decided that she didn't really want to talk about either Logan or Geneva. She would have to find a way to distract herself until someone phoned her back.

Quinn tried listening to a podcast she had downloaded last week, but couldn't concentrate on the words. What she needed was to walk, so she grabbed her jacket, phone, and keys and stepped outside. The trail that wound around the lake was deserted, and deep shadows were beginning to pool between the trees, the path vanishing into the darkness beyond. She wouldn't go far. And as long as she remained within view of the boathouse, she would be safe.

Quinn walked briskly until the boathouse roof disappeared from view, then turned back and stomped up the path, her anxiety getting the better of her. Where was Logan? Where was Gabe? Where was Drew? And where was Jude? She hadn't heard from him since this morning, and she was beginning to worry about him as well. What the bloody hell was going on? With night settling in, she suddenly felt as if she were the only person left in the world.

A translucent crescent moon hovered above the lake, and the dusky sky was strewn with stars, by the time someone finally deigned to call her back. Quinn thought it might be Gabe, but the call was from Drew. An announcement came over a loudspeaker in the background, and she realized it wasn't in English. She thought Drew was at a train station or an airport, but why would he leave the country?

"Sorry I couldn't ring you back," he said. "I didn't have service."

"Where are you?" Quinn asked as soon as he moved into a quiet corner and was able to hear her.

"Prague. Something you said to me didn't add up, so I decided to do a little digging."

"What are you referring to exactly?"

"Chrissy told Logan and Rafe and her friends in London that she would be returning to the Czech Republic after the baby was born, but she didn't go home. And she had also mentioned to her coworkers that she'd become a surrogate for Logan to help her family, but they're quite well-to-do."

"Maybe she needed the money and was too embarrassed to tell people. It sounds better when you say you're doing it for your family."

"Maybe, but I thought it was suspect and decided to find out more about her life."

Quinn sighed, exasperated. "Drew, if Chrissy left the UK, then she's clearly not a suspect, so what difference could her life in the Czech Republic possibly make?"

"It's not as if I have any other leads," Drew reminded her.

"What about the bloke she was living with? Might he know something?"

"I'm sure he might, but no one seems to remember his name. And without a name I have no hope of tracking him down. Look, I've got to go. I'll ring you tomorrow."

“Drew, DI Malone is no longer working the case. He thinks Logan left of his own free will and will turn up if he feels like it.”

“And Max?”

“And Max is our responsibility. They don’t know who the woman is and have no way to identify her. The police won’t waste resources on searching for a needle in a London-sized haystack.”

“She could have left London by now,” Drew pointed out.

“Yes, I suppose she could have.”

“I’ll call you back,” he said when someone addressed him in Czech.

Quinn was about to slide her mobile into her pocket when it rang again. She hoped it was Gabe, but it was Colin. She wished she could tell him about Logan and share her concerns for his wellbeing, but her brother was no longer Colin’s problem, and, although kind and helpful, he couldn’t do anything to help.

“I’m sorry to bother you on a Saturday, but there was a fatal stabbing in Westminster, and the victim is on his way to the lab. I need to make arrangements for the bog body. Rhys advised me to check with you.”

“What about, exactly?” Quinn asked. Her mind wasn’t really on Geneva’s remains at the moment.

“Do you wish to donate our girl to science, or do you intend to see her buried?”

“I really haven’t thought about it. Can I give you an answer on Monday? Surely you can find space for her until then.”

“You sound distracted,” Colin observed.

“It’s been an awful few days,” Quinn admitted, despite her better judgment.

“Anything I can do to help?”

“I doubt it. Logan is missing, Colin. And someone tried to take Max.” The words had come out unbidden, but it felt good to talk to Colin, who had loved Logan and, on some level, probably still did. “The woman was brazen enough to walk into his nursery school. She pretended to be me.”

“What?” Colin exclaimed. “Is Max safe?”

“He is, but the police have no idea who is behind the abduction attempt, and we can’t hide out forever.”

“Where are you?”

“I’d rather not say.”

“Of course. I quite understand. What will you do?”

“I have Drew Camden working on it. But he’s in Prague of all places, so, as you can see, we’re grasping at straws.”

“Maybe not,” Colin said. “Drew Camden is very good at what he does.”

“He’s my only hope of finding Logan and keeping Max safe.”

“Please, keep me posted. Logan is and always will be…” Colin’s voice cracked, and he couldn’t finish the sentence, but Quinn thought she knew what he had been about to say. *The love of my life*.

“I will.”

Colin’s declaration made her feel even sadder for her brother. He had forsaken the one person who truly loved him, but if he hadn’t, he wouldn’t have Max. So she supposed he had exchanged one love for another, and Max meant everything to him.

Quinn felt so dispirited, she picked up a stone and hurled it into the lake, and watched with satisfaction as ripples spread outward from the point of impact. She was so angry. What was Logan playing at? Surely he realized she was frantic and that Max would be missing him and asking endless questions. What was she supposed to say when she had no idea what was going on or if Logan would ever come back?

And how was she meant to keep Max safe and also remain emotionally present for her own children?

FORTY-EIGHT

Quinn breathed a sigh of relief when the car finally pulled up and kids spilled from within. When Gabe got out, he looked like he'd been wrestling alligators and lost. Their children hurried into the house, already arguing about who would get the TV and who could have the last bag of crisps, but Max made a beeline for Quinn and wrapped his arms around her legs. She lifted the little boy into her arms and held him close until he calmed down.

"Well, I'm never doing that again," Gabe said over Max's head. "The place was absolute chaos, and even with Emma's help, to keep all of them in my line of sight at all times would have required four heads."

"Did you have fun?" Quinn asked Max, who was now looking at her, his eyes pleading for attention.

He nodded, but he didn't look like a child who'd had a good day. "I want to go home," he whispered. "Please."

Quinn's heart broke for him. He was so small and vulnerable and confused. And she had no idea what to tell him. She ran a gentle hand over his black locks, so like Logan's, and looked into his eyes. He needed to know that she had heard him and she understood and respected his feelings.

"We'll go home soon. I promise."

"My home," Max said. "Where's my dad?" he cried. "I want to speak to him."

"So do I, sweet pea. So do I," Quinn muttered.

"Mum, we're hungry," Emma called out from the doorway. "And Mia and Alex are fighting over the TV."

"Are you hungry?" Quinn asked Max, and he shrugged.

"I'm tired," he said, and his eyes filled with tears. Quinn knew he wasn't just physically tired. He was emotionally overwrought, and, although he was too young to effectively verbalize his feeling, he probably thought that the adults in his life were letting him down.

"I know you are," Quinn said. "You can go to bed right after dinner if you like."

“No bath?”

“Not unless you want one.”

Max shook his head, then buried his face in Quinn’s shoulder, and his suffering brought tears to her own eyes. She met Gabe’s gaze and saw the misery reflected in his face. They were failing Max, but they were powerless to help him. And what would happen if Logan didn’t come back? The answer was obvious—they would take Max in and raise him as one of their own—but the lack of understanding and closure would haunt him for the rest of his life, and the search for answers could take him to dangerous places.

Quinn set Max down and took him by the hand. His fingers felt tiny and fragile, and his skin was clammy and warm. He walked alongside her as if he were being marched to the gallows. Gabe grabbed his wallet and phone from the car and followed them.

It was just as they walked into the house that they heard Alex scream.

FORTY-NINE

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

After her conversation with her father, all the pleasure had drained from the day, and Geneva found herself walking towards the sea. The slate-colored water was capped with white, the mudflats stretching before her, their damp surface rippled and uneven. A gusty wind tore at her hat and scarf, scouring her face with grains of sand, but she pressed on. She needed time to think—and to rage.

She was so angry, she could have kicked something, but instead she screamed into the wind, the sound of her fury ripped from her mouth the instant it escaped. At present, there were three men in her life, and every one of them was trying to manage her. Her father was determined to force her into a marriage of convenience. Rory was asking her to abandon everything and everyone she loved and move halfway across the world, on the vague promise that he might, or might not, buy into his cousin's business venture. And Jesse was perfectly willing to marry her—or Honor, should she refuse—simply to smooth his passage into society. Did he not have a life in New York to return to? Surely he had left someone behind, someone who missed him and thought he was coming back.

And then there was her aunt, conspiring with her brother, eager to corner Geneva because she too stood to gain. Clarissa's connection to the Earl and Countess of Gosforth was not to be underestimated, particularly with a daughter soon to be of marriageable age. With so many young men lost to the war, finding a suitable match for Rose would be harder than ever. She was sweet enough but inclined to fade into the background, and her fortune was hardly substantial enough to lure some impoverished aristocrat.

Geneva hated herself for thinking in such terms, but she knew how her aunt's mind worked. In her own way, Clarissa wanted what was best for Rose, just as her father believed he wanted what was best for Geneva and

Honor. Yet the manner in which their elders went about arranging their lives felt nothing short of medieval. Geneva shivered in the chill wind, and, despite her gloves and leather ankle boots, her extremities were numb, and her feet were cold and damp. She had no choice but to turn back, but as she set off towards the house she spotted Jesse hurrying towards her, his hand on his hat to keep it from flying away. He called out to her, but his words were stolen by the wind, and he had to wait to try again until the two of them were almost face-to-face.

"Genny, are you all right?" he asked. He looked so concerned, Geneva could almost believe he really cared.

"Why wouldn't I be?" she replied haughtily.

"You spoke to your father just before you left. I thought you might be upset."

"I am upset. And I also feel hurt and betrayed."

She had not meant to be so frank, but, once they'd touched upon what had until now remained unsaid, she could not seem to stop herself.

"Why, Jesse? Why did you agree to marry me? You hardly know me. And it's not as if that's a condition of the entailment."

Jesse met her gaze with an uncertain smile, and, for the first time since they'd first met, she realized that he was not entirely sure of himself and might even be a little insecure, despite his confident demeanor.

"I've never met anyone quite like you," he confessed.

"I'm sure you've met women you found attractive before," Geneva countered.

"Of course I have, and in some cases the feeling was mutual," Jesse replied. "But they were never special to me. I felt no urge to better myself to impress them, and the thought of losing them caused me no real pain. They came and went, and though I may have enjoyed their company for a time I never imagined a future with any of them."

"And you imagine one with me?" Geneva asked, taken aback by his candor.

"I dream of a future with you, Geneva," he said quietly, "though I know you have little reason to feel the same. I'm not the sort of man you were brought up to marry. I'm not university educated, nor particularly sophisticated, and I would never quite belong among your set. But I aspire to be worthy of you. I want you to have all the things you believed would be yours when you grew up in this house, on this land."

“I… I don’t know what to say,” Geneva faltered.

“Say you’ll think about it.”

“Jesse, the New Year’s Eve party is a week away. That’s not a lot of time to make such a weighty decision about my future.”

He nodded. “I realize that. But think how happy it would make your father. He would die easy knowing you were loved and cared for, and that your children would carry on his legacy. And if, at any point in the coming months, you felt you had made a mistake, you could always change your mind. I would understand and release you from your promise.”

“How do I know you wouldn’t try to manipulate me?” Geneva asked.

Jesse sighed, as if she had wounded him deeply with her mistrust. “I’ve made an appointment with Mr. Lefferts. He’ll be in his office on the twenty-seventh, and I’d like you to come with me.”

“What for?”

“I intend to draw up a document settling an allowance on both you and Honor, so that you may be entirely independent of me, should you wish it. You would never have to see me again after your father is gone.”

“Would you go back to New York, then?” Geneva asked. She could not bring herself to voice the question at the forefront of her mind: whether he would marry Honor if Geneva refused.

Jesse smiled, though there was sadness in it. “I suppose so. If you cannot see your way to loving me, then there is nothing here for me. I would have no choice but to sell the estate.”

“You would sell Bellamy Hall?” Geneva exclaimed.

“What alternative would I have? If I’m not staying in England, I have no use for any of it. The proceeds would purchase a sizable house on Long Island, a place where my future family might live. And I do intend to have a family, Geneva,” he added quietly. “I’ve been alone for far too long, and after the horrors I witnessed during the war I’ve learned that the only thing that truly matters is having someone who loves you—and loving them in return.”

Geneva nodded, finding herself unable to speak. She had not expected Jesse to offer her any reason to seriously consider her father’s proposal, but his honesty—so raw and unguarded—gave her pause.

“Genny,” he said gently, “will you think about it? Please?”

“Yes. I will. But I really must go back now. I’m freezing.”

“It is rather arctic out here,” Jesse said with a grin. “I can’t feel my face.”

“Neither can I,” Geneva replied and realized she was smiling.

FIFTY

Although in considerably better spirits than when she'd left, Geneva was no less conflicted when she returned to the house and joined Honor and Rose, who were trimming the tree. The two girls chatted like magpies and oohed and aahed over every bauble that came out of the box, and Geneva realized that they truly were happy. Rose was thrilled to have broken out of the prison that was the house in London, and Honor, although deeply saddened by their father's illness, was still a child at heart and believed that the adults would figure things out and her life wouldn't be affected overmuch with the changing of the guard. Which put all the more pressure on Geneva.

For years, she'd gone without any hint of romance on the horizon, and suddenly there were two men who cared for her and needed an answer from her by the end of the year. Geneva supposed it made it easier to know that Honor would be provided for either way, but the choice she made would affect her sister regardless. Why did this all have to happen now? Geneva thought as she lifted a silver star out of the box and held it up to the light. The ornament glowed in the weak winter sunlight and reminded her of Edwin, who had chosen the star when he'd spotted it in a shop in London. He had been gone by the following Christmas, but the star was still there, a stark reminder of the brevity of life and the importance of seizing the moment.

Geneva hung the ornament on the tree and retreated to the drawing room, Honor and Rose's excited voices the background noise to her thoughts. If only she had more time. In the novels she read, the heroines were always so certain of their feelings and ready to sacrifice all for love. Was she a cold fish, or was real life not as straightforward and it was natural to consider the pros and the cons and ask the really difficult questions?

And there was so much to consider, since she would be the one to make all the sacrifices whatever she chose. Rory would have a new life in America, and maybe, in time, become his own boss. If Geneva refused to go with him, there would be no shortage of women happy to share his life,

and perhaps they would be better suited for him in both their beliefs and their expectations. And Jesse wasn't bound to this place in any emotional way. He'd sell the estate and move on; the proceeds would enable him to live comfortably on Long Island, wherever that was. He would find someone to love him the way he wanted to be loved. He'd forget her sooner than he imagined and build a family of his own far away from Bellamy Hall, which would probably not even be called that anymore once it was sold.

Jesse had said he would settle an allowance on her, which presented Geneva with a third option. She could leave this place and create her own life, but the prospect of being out in the world on her own was even more frightening, since she would no longer truly belong anywhere or be able to count on protection from anyone. As much as she wanted to believe that she was a strong, independent woman, deep down she thought she was quite conventional and wanted the things she had been taught to desire—a home, a husband, children, and the freedom not to worry about money. But what she desired above all was to love and be loved in return.

"Genny, we're finished trimming the tree. Do you want to go ice-skating?" Honor asked as she poked her head into the room. "Jesse is game. He said he'll meet us at the pond."

"Go on without me," Geneva said.

She had no idea why, but she was frightened.

FIFTY-ONE

Alex was in the kitchen, his hands balled into fists and his shoulders hunched with tension. His face was contorted with fear, his mouth still open in a scream, and his eyes were staring, but Quinn was certain he couldn't see his parents. Max began to shriek in terror, while Mia stood frozen, her back pressed to the fridge. Silent tears rolled down her cheeks as she stared at her brother, petrified. Emma came running from the bedroom, her headphones hanging around her neck.

"Mia, what happened?" Gabe cried.

"I… I don't know," Mia whispered. "He just started screaming."

"Alex, son, can you hear me?" Gabe tried, but it was obvious Alex couldn't hear anything. His hand went to his chest, and he began to make choking noises that quickly turned to wheezing.

Quinn stood rooted to the spot, unable to move as blind panic seized her and refused to let go. Seeing her reaction, Emma grabbed a shaking and whimpering Max and held him tight as the little boy buried his face in her midriff. Mia raced past Alex and disappeared into the bathroom, unable to watch.

Gabe sank to his knees. He took Alex gently by the arms and tried to get him to look at him. Alex had suffered from night terrors when he was small, so perhaps this was the same—a waking nightmare. And then, as she looked into her son's eyes, Quinn knew, and she was filled with purpose. She hurled herself at Alex and tried to pry open his fist. He resisted at first, but then his fingers went slack, and he opened his hand.

Inside, slick with sweat, was the amethyst earring. Instantly understanding what had occurred, Gabe grabbed the earring before Quinn could touch it with her bare hands and shoved it into the front pocket of his shirt. Alex stopped screaming and looked at his parents in confusion. His mouth opened in incomprehension when his gaze alighted on Emma, who was quietly weeping.

"What happened?" he asked. "Mum, why is Emma crying?"

Quinn shook her head and momentarily shut her eyes. She wanted to shake Alex and berate him for touching the earring, but it was her fault. She'd thought she'd returned the container to her bag, but she must have left it on the worktop when she'd come inside. And what curious little boy wouldn't check to see what it was? Alex should have known better. He was aware that certain objects could hurl him into the past, but, like Quinn, sometimes he couldn't resist. To him it was like watching a film. Alex didn't quite understand that what he was seeing was someone's actual life. Or death. Was that what he had seen? He had been gasping and struggling to breathe. Was it possible that he had experienced Geneva's final moments?

Mia slithered out of the bathroom and ran to Emma, who was cradling Max. He wasn't crying, but he was still trembling and whimpering softly.

"Would you like to watch some funny videos?" Emma asked him. "Don't worry, Mum, I'm not going on Insta. I have them downloaded," she explained before Quinn could argue.

Max nodded, and the three children went into the bedroom and shut the door. For a moment, all was silent and still.

"Alex, what did you see?" Gabe asked once they heard Max giggling through the closed door, the incident already forgotten.

Alex shook his head. He didn't want to talk about or relive whatever horror he'd just witnessed. It had never occurred to Quinn that such a thing could be possible, but what if he was able to see an alternative version of events? Or maybe the object had taken him to a different point in the same timeline. If what she suspected was true, then he had skipped directly to the murder and bypassed everything that had come before. But she had to be sure.

"Alex," she said gently as she came to stand before him. "What did you see?"

The child was calmer now, and the bright lights of the kitchen and his parents' presence obviously made him feel safe, but he still seemed a bit shaky. Gabe went to the fridge, poured a glass of orange juice, and handed it to Alex, who gulped it down and handed the glass back to Gabe.

"Better?" Quinn asked.

Alex nodded. The color had come back into his face, and the trembling had stopped.

“Alex, what did you see?” she asked again gently. “I know it was frightening, but you need to tell us, so that we understand.”

Alex nodded and sighed so deeply his shoulders drooped with the weight of his sadness. “I saw a lady.”

“What happened to her?” Gabe asked.

“It was dark,” Alex said, his voice very quiet. “And cold. The metal pressed against her shoulder blades and the backs of her legs as the wheels of the cart bumped over uneven ground. The sky looked so big, and it was full of stars. The moon was nearly full, and so bright. And there was snow on the ground.”

Alex’s voice was different, deeper, and the words were that of an adult, not an eight-year-old boy. Quinn found that strange since, as far as she knew, she’d never channeled anyone else once she’d come out of her trance, but she didn’t dare interrupt. Alex needed to tell the story in his own way.

“There was a well. The wooden cover had been tossed aside, and the moon’s reflection danced on the water. The lady tried to scream, but someone clamped a hand over her mouth. They were wearing gloves.”

“What happened then?” Quinn asked.

Gabe shot her a look of warning, since whatever had come after wasn’t suitable for a child’s innocent eyes, but she had to know, if only to better understand how to help Alex process the horror.

“The lady struggled, but she was too weak to fight. After a few moments, she went still. The person grabbed her beneath the arms and dragged her towards the well. She wore nothing but a short slip, and her heels made tracks in the snow. They pushed her in, feet first, and she dropped into the freezing water. It closed over her head. The cold revived her, and she tried to scream, but the filthy water got into her nose and mouth, and she gagged. She tried to find something to grab on to.” Alex was crying again, but softly this time, with compassion, not naked fear. “She was terrified. Her heart beat wildly, and her arms flapped as she tried to get her head above the water. She managed to suck in a few quick breaths, but then the person put their hand on her head and pushed her under. They held her down until she could no longer fight, and then they stood at the edge, looking down for a few moments until they fitted the cover into place.”

“So, she was still alive,” Quinn whispered. “The poor girl was still alive.”

Alex nodded, and she pulled him into her arms and held him. She could hear his heart beating against her chest and wished she could protect him from anything that had the power to hurt him, but they would not be able to put this episode to rest until she asked one final question.

"Alex, who was it? Who threw her into the well?"

"I don't know," Alex muttered. His voice shook with emotion as he looked into Quinn's worried face. "Was it real, Mum?"

"It was real a long time ago," Gabe said. "The lady you saw is past her suffering."

"That's good," Alex said. "But why did I see that?"

"You saw a memory," Quinn explained.

"Is it like the Pensieve in *Harry Potter*?"

"Yes," Quinn said, grateful for the lifeline Alex had thrown her. It was much easier to explain if he could place what he had experienced into the context of a story he already knew and understood. "We can use the memories to figure out who did that to her."

"Will they get punished?" Alex asked, and looked from Quinn to Gabe. "Will they go to jail?"

"Maybe."

"What do you mean maybe?" he demanded.

"This happened a long time ago. They might be long gone. But it's still important to find the truth. She had family, a sister."

Alex's gaze slid to the bedroom door, where his own sisters were talking softly to Max.

"Was it a man or a woman you saw?" Quinn asked.

Alex shook his head. "I don't know. It was dark, and the person I saw wore a dark coat and a hat. I couldn't see their face."

"How big were their hands?"

The boy's gaze went from Quinn's hands to Gabe's, assessing. "More like Dad's."

"So it had to have been a man," Gabe said.

"Can I go now?" Alex asked. He bolted from the kitchen and went straight to the bedroom, then shut the door.

"I reckon that was bound to happen sooner or later," Gabe said wearily.

"I'm sorry. I thought I had put the earring away. I must have left the container on the worktop."

“The world is full of objects that belonged to the dead. Alex will have to learn to be careful what he touches.”

“He’s just a little boy,” Quinn said miserably. “This is too much for him to handle.”

“Yes, but we won’t be there to protect him every minute of every day. He should have known better than to open the container and take out the earring.”

“I wish there was something we could do to turn off his visions.”

“But there isn’t, so all we can do is tell him again and again not to touch things he’s not sure about.”

“Easier said than done,” Quinn replied. She suddenly felt very tired and sad.

Gabe took her by the shoulders and looked down into her face. “You look done in. Why don’t you rest for a few minutes, and I’ll come get you when the kids are ready to eat.”

Quinn nodded, but, just as she was about to leave, Alex emerged from the bedroom. He walked up to her and took her by the hand.

“What is it, darling? Are you still afraid?”

Alex shook his head. “No, but I remembered something.”

“What?” Quinn and Gabe asked in unison.

“I think there were two of them.”

FIFTY-TWO

Quinn tried to calm down, but, after what had just happened, she realized that she was truly frightened for her son. Since she was a child, she had been able to see through the eyes of the people who had died and learn their stories, but, although frequently shocked and heartbroken for the victims, she had never experienced their pain physically. Alex had been flailing his arms and gasping for breath. At one point, his fingers had gone to his temple, the same spot where Colin had found a contusion on Geneva. Was Alex's response a form of sympathetic reflex, or had he been in pain and felt like he couldn't breathe? What would have happened had she not pulled the earring from his grasp?

And who could she talk to about this? She could hardly explain to a medical doctor that her psychic eight-year-old had experienced the agony of a woman who had died a hundred years before. The doctor might suggest psychotropic drugs or some form of shock treatment. Barbaric as that was, it was still in use when treating psychiatric patients, and she never wanted Alex to be labeled mentally unstable. She prayed that, as he got older, he would learn to self-govern and know when not to touch something, as she had. And if he picked up something by mistake, he'd know to drop it immediately, before the transference had the chance to do him any real harm.

But Alex's vision, although clearly terrifying, had served to narrow down the list of suspects. Alex had said that the hand he'd seen was bigger than Quinn's and more like Gabe's, which had to mean that the killer was a man. And given that Geneva had been wearing Rory's ring at the time of her death, it had to be Jesse, since Rory would have little cause to murder her if she had accepted his proposal. But why would Jesse kill her? If Geneva had refused to kowtow to her father's demands, he could have married Honor, or no one at all. His future had not depended on either sister, and he could have disposed of his inheritance as he pleased. So, what had happened that had resulted in Geneva's brutal death at the age of

twenty-one? And who was the other person whose presence Alex had sensed? Was it a man or a woman? And what was their role in Geneva's death? Could it have been Honor?

Quinn sighed and sank deeper into the mattress. She was so tired and so unsettled by everything that had taken place over the past few days. And she felt woefully cut off from the world without access to the internet. There was another option, but, in the midst of a family crisis, she could hardly hare off to the retirement village where Dinah Wilson resided. She'd speak to the woman in due course, but for now any active research into the case would have to wait.

She had her family to focus on.

FIFTY-THREE

Gabe

The house was quiet, the children in bed. Gabe suspected Quinn was still awake, the earring loosely clasped in her hand as she slipped into another vision. Unable to settle, he stepped outside and lowered himself into a deckchair. The lake mirrored the night sky, the moon and stars reflected in its dark surface. On any other evening, he would have found the sight beautiful and welcomed a few moments of solitude, but tonight he was thrumming with tension. He had not smoked since his early twenties, yet he found himself craving a cigarette, imagining it might steady his nerves. It wouldn't. Neither nicotine nor alcohol could fix what ailed him.

When Quinn had first confessed her gift to him, he had felt a flicker of envy. For a historian, the chance to bear witness—to truly see the past—was the greatest gift nature could bestow. But after what had happened that night, Gabe wanted no part of his wife's Besson legacy, passed down through the centuries from Quinn's Trinidadian ancestors. Watching Alex gasp for breath, clutching his chest, had been more than he could bear. If there were any way to strip his son of this unwanted inheritance, he would do it without hesitation, provided it caused Alex no pain or harm. But there was nothing to be done.

When they had first realized that Alex could see into the past, Gabe had conducted discreet research, hoping to stumble upon a specialist or a neuro-blocker that might target the visual cortex and extinguish the visions. What had surprised him most was not that there was no cure but how incontrovertible the science was. Controlled studies of alleged psychic phenomena had failed to produce replicable results. Brain imaging of people claiming such abilities showed entirely normal activity, and no structure had ever been identified that could receive information from the past or future, access hidden knowledge, or circumvent the senses.

There was nothing Gabe could do for his son beyond impressing upon him that he must never touch anything whose origins he did not know. But Alex was only eight. Like most boys his age, he explored the world with his hands. Gabe remembered the thrill of being allowed to hold a Civil War flintlock pistol that had belonged to some long-dead ancestor, or playing chess with his grandfather, using an antique board with pieces carved from bone. The knights, bishops, and kings had been so lifelike, he had been almost able to see them as real people as he held him in his hands and ran a gentle finger over their features. Gabe had never once hesitated to handle the artifacts uncovered during his own digs. It was instinctive to pick something up, examine it, date it, and record its story.

For Alex, every unknown object was as dangerous as an unexploded mine. What would have happened if they had not reached him in time? What if the visions manifested physically in the present? And how was a child meant to process repeated encounters with death—people who, in the moment, would feel utterly real? No child psychologist would take them seriously, nor would they be equipped to help even if they did. Instead, they might recommend anti-anxiety medication or some experimental drug that might harm Alex in different ways.

Gabe supposed he should be grateful that Mia had been spared. But Alex was such a sweet, sensitive boy. Gabe was terrified that this might break his son before he learned to control his impulses and avoid anything that might cause him real pain.

FIFTY-FOUR

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Geneva had known it would be a sad Christmas from the moment her father had imparted his news, but it proved even harder than she had anticipated. Douglas was so weak that Dennison had to help him down the stairs and settle him in the drawing room. She could not remember ever seeing her father without a suit and tie on a festive occasion, but now he sat hunched in a pair of corduroys and a knitted cardigan, a rug drawn over his legs. He had lost weight and was so pale that his skin resembled melting wax. His eyes shone dully in the firelight.

His hands trembled as he accepted the gift that Geneva and Honor had bought for him—a first edition of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, one of his all-time favorite novels, ordered specially from a London bookseller. It had taken them some time to settle on a present; nearly everything they had considered had felt like a cruel reminder of all the things he would never do again. A book seemed the safest choice. He still enjoyed reading, or, if it became too much for him, someone could always read to him.

Geneva met her father's gaze over the rim of her glass and saw the question in his eyes. He needed her answer.

"Douglas, are you sure you still want to have the New Year's Eve party?" Clarissa asked. "Surely it will be too much for you."

Douglas smiled sadly. "I do. I would like to say goodbye to my friends, and I would like to see this year out in style."

"I do hope you realize that Rose and I cannot attend," Clarissa said. "We're still in half-mourning, so we will keep to our rooms." Rose's eyes filled with angry tears. "We will leave on the first train on January the first. If you would instruct Grady to take us to the station."

"Of course," Douglas said. "But I do wish you would reconsider, Clarissa. Surely it's no disrespect to Gerald's memory if you join us for

supper. It would mean a lot to me if you were there."

"Oh, please, Mother," Rose pleaded. "Can we?"

Clarissa lifted her chin and pulled back her shoulders, and Geneva was certain she would refuse. It must have been the sight of her brother, who was so diminished by his illness and desperate to enjoy one last happy evening, that made her relent.

"All right," she said. "We will join you for supper, but we will retire to our rooms before the dancing begins."

Rose still looked mutinous, but she had to take the victory. "Thank you, Mama," she said meekly.

Clarissa nodded, and her eyes filled with tears. "When I accepted your invitation to come for Christmas, I never thought it would be to say goodbye. Had I known…" Her voice trailed off, and Geneva wondered what her aunt had been about to say.

Would she have refused the invitation to spare herself the pain of seeing her brother for the last time? Would she have been better prepared for what was to come? Or might she have tried to negotiate a financial settlement before he died?

"Goodbyes are important," Douglas said. "I never got to say goodbye to either of my boys." He set the book aside with a trembling hand. "It wouldn't have changed what happened, but I would have liked the chance to tell them that I loved them and I was very proud of them both." His gaze settled on Geneva. "Just as I'm proud of my girls. They were raised to be selfless, dutiful women who understand the importance of family. Especially when our family has grown so small and dependent on the goodwill of others."

Douglas raised his glass. "Jesse, I would like to thank you for accepting my invitation to come to England and to continue the Bellamys' legacy. I know it's a lot to ask, and I'm sure you have an exciting life back in New York, but I think you will learn to love this place. And I know you will take good care of my girls. I'm putting my faith in you."

"Thank you, sir. I won't let you down," Jesse said somberly.

Sadness mingled with anger in Geneva's heart as everyone drank their sherry in silence. Douglas Bellamy was issuing his final orders, and he expected them all to obey, even Clarissa, who should have been allowed to come out of mourning on her own terms. No one had the right to tell someone when to stop grieving, and, although Rose was clearly desperate to

rejoin the living, Clarissa's mind was just as obviously still very much on the dead.

"Jesse, did your family have any Christmas traditions?" Douglas asked as he set down his glass with a trembling hand.

Jesse smiled ruefully. "We didn't have any traditions."

"But surely you celebrated the blessed day of our Lord's birth, Mr. Bellamy?" Clarissa inquired with her usual haughtiness.

"We went to church and had a roast dinner afterwards."

"Were there any unique customs in Montana when you were growing up?" Rose asked.

"Not that I can recall."

"But surely Americans celebrate Christmas differently," she pressed.

"I really can't speak for all Americans, Rose. Every family has its own customs."

"What would you have done today if you weren't here?" Honor asked. "Would you have gone to your coworker's house again?"

Jesse was beginning to look distinctly uncomfortable. "I was invited to my employer's home for Christmas this year."

"A sure sign of respect," Douglas said and nodded his approval.

"My boss has two unmarried sisters. I suspect that was the real reason I was to be included."

"It would seem you have become an even greater catch," Aunt Clarissa said spitefully. "You will no longer be expected to pay court to dried-up old spinsters."

"I didn't seek this out, Mrs. Bellamy," Jesse said. It was evident he was affronted by Clarissa's insinuation that he would romance his employer's sister to get ahead.

Geneva could not help but feel a measure of sympathy for him. Everyone behaved as though Jesse had been handed a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but perhaps he did not welcome the responsibility that came with his inheritance and was simply too polite to admit that he had little interest in the Bellamy legacy. Her father had placed him in an impossible position, attempting to extract a promise by hook or by crook, when Jesse might have been far happier had he been allowed to make his own choices and select his own bride.

He had sounded sincere when he'd declared himself to her on the beach, but it was equally possible that he had been doing what he believed

was his duty to the family. Geneva desperately longed to shrug off her own obligations and live life on her own terms, or at the very least on her own schedule, but it seemed that was not to be. Not when her father's gaze bored into her, his need to know that she would capitulate blatantly obvious.

Geneva gave a small nod, then turned away. She couldn't bear to see the elation that came over his face.

FIFTY-FIVE

Geneva was relieved when Christmas dinner was finally at an end and she could escape to her room. These days, it was the only place she could be alone and examine her feelings. She was nearly at her door when she encountered Dennison, who appeared to be waiting for her. He looked angry and agitated, and brandished the watch she had collected from the jeweler.

"Are you quite all right?" Geneva asked as she stopped a few feet from him. Something in his demeanor frightened her, and she didn't dare come closer.

"Your father gave me this," Dennison replied.

"Do you not like it?"

She was confused by his reaction, since any employee would be happy to receive such a beautiful and valuable gift. It was a mark of her father's regard for his valet, a show of gratitude for his excellent service.

"Oh, it's a fine watch, my lady," Dennison said furiously. "But I know what it means."

"What does it mean?"

"I'm to be dismissed. Made redundant."

Geneva stared at the man, unsure how to reply. "Perhaps I can speak to Mr. Bellamy. Surely he will require a valet if…"

She didn't finish, but Dennison knew what she meant.

"He won't," Dennison snarled. "He has no intentions of staying here. He'll be gone the minute his lordship breathes his last. All of us put out without notice."

Geneva balked at this announcement. "Did Mr. Bellamy tell you this?" she asked quietly. Surely Jesse wouldn't have told his valet of his intentions.

"He didn't have to. It's obvious to anyone who cares to look. He's just biding his time until he can get his hands on the inheritance."

“I think you’re jumping to unfounded conclusions. It’s not common knowledge yet, but Mr. Bellamy has asked me to marry him. Things will go on as before,” Geneva said with more conviction than she felt. She didn’t want to admit to the valet that nothing had been decided and that his future was now in her hands.

Dennison shook his head. “It’s you who’s jumping to conclusions, my lady. Nothing will be the same, and by this time next month this house will be closed up, everyone gone.”

“I will have a word with Mr. Bellamy,” Geneva promised. “I’ll see that you retain your position.”

“You do that,” Dennison said, his voice low and menacing. “And don’t let me down, or I might have to find my own way to assure my future.”

He stalked off, leaving Geneva shaken. She had never seen this side of Tom Dennison before, and, now that she had, the last thing she wanted was to petition Jesse to allow the man to keep his position. She wanted him gone, dismissed for good. She assumed her father had made some provision for his valet, but she had no intention of asking. It pained her to speak to him of money, particularly now, when her own future and the livelihoods of the people she felt responsible for were still uncertain. At this moment, Tom Dennison was not among them.

Fearing he might return, Geneva hurried to her room and shut the door. She stepped away, hesitated, then turned back and locked it. She no longer felt safe in her room.

FIFTY-SIX

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn set the earring aside, the memory of Geneva's unease lingering in her mind. Her encounter with Tom Dennison had been as unexpected as it was distressing. It was understandable that the man would be anxious about his future and might interpret Douglas Bellamy's gift as a payoff rather than the gesture it was intended to be. He was clearly unbalanced. His war experiences had left him with lingering trauma, but did that mean he posed a real danger to Geneva? That remained to be seen. Still, Quinn could not ignore the possibility; Dennison now had to be added to the list of potential suspects.

She hoped he had not been the one to harm Geneva Bellamy. He had already suffered enough, and he seemed ill-equipped to manage the emotions that overwhelmed him. Yet it would be foolish to dismiss his anger. Murders were often driven by emotion, not reason, and a man who felt slighted, expendable, and afraid could all too easily cross that line, especially when he'd had to contend with nothing but mistrust and derision since he'd returned from the front. He was accustomed to people mocking him and dismissing his feelings, and if Geneva failed to acknowledge his volatility and decided not to champion his cause with Jesse, he just might snap.

Setting the valet's angry outburst aside, Quinn had to admit she felt a flicker of irritation towards Geneva herself. From Quinn's vantage point, Geneva's dilemma did not seem quite as insurmountable as she made it out to be. Had Quinn been in her position, she would have refused both men and gone off to London, free to live as she pleased. But that was the thinking of a twenty-first-century woman. A girl of twenty-one, born just after the turn of the twentieth century, would never have been encouraged to pursue independence. Geneva had never needed to fend for herself and, like

most women of her time, had been raised to believe that her sole purpose lay in marriage and motherhood. Striking out alone, with no safety net, would have been terrifying. The only skills available to her were those of a governess or paid companion, and that was hardly a life for a young woman.

Of course it would seem more appealing to become the next Countess of Gosforth, or even to run off to America and help Rory establish himself in his cousin's business. And then there was Honor. Even if she went away to finishing school and returned at nineteen, she would still need her sister. The girls were close; they wanted to remain together. Who could blame them? Quinn had not grown up with Jo, but she had mourned her deeply despite her betrayal, and still thought of her almost every day.

She was being unfair to Geneva and to Honor alike, she thought. They were products of a different generation, and she could not impose her own values upon them. Yet she could not stop wondering what had become of Honor after Geneva's death. Given her age, she would have lived through some of the most horrific events of the twentieth century and would surely have been shaped by them. She might have lived to see the end of the century, and it was likely that she had living descendants. Those descendants would be affected by the grim discovery on their family's land and might have strong opinions about the episode being aired, particularly if it cast one of their ancestors in an unflattering light.

FIFTY-SEVEN

Tired of speculating, Quinn reached for her mobile to call Rhys. He answered right away. “Quinn, are you all right? How’s Max?”

“We’re as well as can be expected,” Quinn said softly. Max was asleep in his cot, and she didn’t want to wake him. She was tempted to tell Rhys about Alex’s harrowing experience but realized she didn’t want to relive it. It had been awful enough the first time. “We’ll be back tomorrow evening. Were you able to learn anything?”

“I have, as it happens. Lynn had the well drained, and the workers found several items at the bottom. They were buried in the silt.”

“What sort of items?” Quinn asked, sitting up in her excitement.

“The second earring, a gold bangle, and a pair of white gloves.”

“White gloves? Ladies’ or men’s?”

“Men’s. The sort a footman might wear. Did you see a footman in your visions?” Rhys asked.

“The staff was greatly diminished since the war, but footmen might have been hired from the village to serve at the New Year’s Eve party. And then there was the butler and Lord Bellamy’s valet. He might have owned white gloves.”

“Might the butler have done it?” Rhys joked.

“I doubt it, but the valet confronted Geneva and was distressed about the possibility of losing his position. He’d had a hard time in the war and suffered from PTSD.”

“It could also be that one of the footmen who’d been hired for the party tried to force himself on Geneva and accidently murdered her when she tried to fight him off. Perhaps he was drunk and followed Geneva when she left the house to meet Rory Sullivan at the well.”

“They had met at the well before,” Quinn agreed, but she had not yet come to the story’s climax and preferred not to speculate. “I wonder what became of Honor after Geneva died.”

“Would you like me to do a search?” Rhys offered.

“No, not yet. But I would like to speak to Dinah Wilson. She must know something.”

“Do you think you could go see her before you leave?”

“I don’t think so,” Quinn replied wearily. “The visit to Dinah will have to wait.”

“Any word on Logan?”

“No. I was told that the police will not be actively investigating the case.”

“I’m sorry. That must have been difficult to hear. And Jude?”

“Nothing from him either. It suddenly feels as if people are just disappearing.”

Rhys chuckled. “We’ve become so accustomed to being able to reach people via phone or online anytime that it’s alarming when someone doesn’t respond immediately.”

“That’s because there’s usually a good reason they can’t,” Quinn said morosely.

“Quinn, if there’s anything you need, I’m here, you know that. And if you want to set this case aside for the time being, I completely understand.”

“I know, but I find it helpful to focus on someone else’s trials at the moment, tragic though they may be.”

“Few people are lucky enough to escape tragedy,” Rhys said. “What was it Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, ‘Into each life some rain must fall’?”

“But most people are not faced with the murder of a close family member.”

“We don’t know that they were. The body was never found or even properly buried, so maybe no one ever knew that Geneva had died.”

“You think they assumed she ran off?” Quinn asked.

“Possibly. Honor might have thought her sister was happily living in Pittsburgh. It’s not unheard of that people become estranged and don’t correspond.”

Quinn sighed. “I almost hope that’s the case. I would certainly prefer to believe that the person I love is somewhere out there, alive and well, rather than floating in a slimy well just a few feet away.”

“There is something to be said for closure,” Rhys remarked.

“Closure is overrated. I’ll take hope any day.”

“I’m sorry, that was insensitive,” Rhys replied. “Of course you should continue to hope.”

“I know you weren’t speaking about Logan, but thank you.”

“I’ll hold on to the items from the well until you can examine them,” Rhys offered. “In the meantime, stay safe, and I pray you get some answers soon.”

After she ended the call with Rhys, Quinn tried Drew and Jude, but neither one answered. It was only then that she realized Max wasn’t asleep. The little boy lay on his bed, his gaze fixed on the ceiling. He looked so dejected, he reminded Quinn of Emma when she’d first come to live with her and Gabe at the age of three and had kept asking about her mum. How awful it had to be to suddenly be torn away from the one person you relied on most in the world, and who was supposed to be there no matter what.

For the first time since Logan had vanished, Quinn felt a hollow feeling in her chest. It was as if a candle had suddenly gone out and the room had been plunged into darkness. She knew that feeling. She’d experienced it several times before, and she found herself trembling with fear.

“Quinn, what is it?” Gabe asked as he walked into the bedroom.

“Logan,” Quinn whispered and instantly realized she shouldn’t have said even that much in front of Max.

The vacant look was gone, and Max was watching her, his bottom lip quivering as he tried to hold back tears. “Dad?”

Quinn went to sit on his bed and gathered Max into her arms, stroking his hair gently. “Everything is going to be all right. I promise.”

But Max wriggled away from her and lay back down. He buried his face in the pillow, and his narrow shoulders shook with grief. Quinn made to reach for him, but Gabe shook his head.

“Let him be,” he said softly. “Anything we say will only belittle his feelings.”

Quinn nodded, then kissed the top of Max’s head and returned to her own bed.

FIFTY-EIGHT

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

On Boxing Day, the morning was cold and bright, the sky a pale winter blue. Frost-covered grass crunched underfoot as Geneva set off for Rory's cottage. Her heart was heavy, but her mind was made up. She would do her duty to her family. And after she spoke to Rory, she would share the news with Honor. Her sister shouldn't find out at the same time as everyone else at the New Year's Eve celebration. She deserved better than that.

Rory smiled in welcome when he opened the door. He must have just shaved because his face was pink and there was a dab of soap just beneath his chin. He was still in his shirtsleeves and wore a towel over his shoulder.

"Geneva," he said, his pleasure at seeing her evident. "I hope ye had a happy Christmas. Please, come in."

She stepped inside the cottage, glad of the warmth, but suddenly became aware just how small the space was and how close she was to Rory. He reached for her hand, but his arm fell to his side when she took a hasty step back, afraid he'd want to kiss her. A look of hurt passed over Rory's face but was instantly replaced with one of blank neutrality. He was too proud to force his attentions on any woman, and he had probably already realized that she might be there to deliver bad news.

"Make yerself comfortable," he said as he moved away. "Can I offer ye a cup of tea? The kettle's only just boiled."

Geneva was about to refuse, but realized she was shivering and a cup of tea would warm her and give her something to do with her hands.

"Thank you."

Rory took her coat, hat, and gloves, and she sat at the table while he fetched two cups and saucers from the cupboard and went about making the tea.

"Are ye hungry?" he asked. "There's bread and cheese."

“You go ahead. I’ve already eaten.”

She hadn’t been able to eat much at breakfast and had just nibbled on a triangle of toast before excusing herself. Rory was probably hungry, but he made no move to make himself breakfast. Instead, he sat across from her and, once it had steeped, poured them cups of tea. He passed Geneva the bottle of milk before making his own tea. She added a splash and was about to add sugar when she noticed that there were only two pieces left in the bowl. It seemed wrong to take them.

“One for you, one for me?” Rory asked when he peered inside.

“You have them.”

Rory added the sugar to his tea and stirred it slowly as he waited for her to speak. Geneva looked around the cottage. Rory didn’t have much in the way of personal possessions, but it seemed he had already started to pack, since the room was even more spartan than before.

“Did you have a nice Christmas?” she asked.

Rory shrugged. “I had supper at the servants’ hall, then came back here and read for a while before turning in.”

“I’m sorry. That sounds lonely.”

“I’m used to it. Besides, I won’t be alone for much longer.”

He gave her a searching look, and Geneva lowered her eyes and looked into her cup.

“Rory—” she began, but he interrupted her.

“I know what ye came to tell me. Ye’re not coming with me.”

Geneva looked up, glad he’d been the one to say it. “I’m sorry. I can’t.”

She’d expected Rory to look disappointed and sad, but she hadn’t expected the anger that flared in his eyes and twisted his features. He set his cup in its saucer with such force that tea spilled over the side.

“Can’t and won’t are two very different things.”

“All right, then. I won’t come with you,” she said, now angry herself.

What right did he have to judge her, when she had been given only a handful of days to ponder this new twist? The choice had never been simple, and now an entirely new layer of complexity had been piled on. It wasn’t as if they were speaking of moving to London or even Dublin, which was on the same continent. He was asking her to move to America, a place she’d never been.

“I didn’t think you would,” Rory snapped.

“This is a complicated situation.”

“Is it? Ye’d sell yerself to a man ye hardly know for a parcel of land and an old house. Or is it for the position? The Countess of Gosforth. I admit it has a nice ring to it. Much better than the wife of a poor Irishman.”

“It’s not as simple as that.”

“Oh, it’s very simple. Ye were just toying with me, passing the time of day. Ye were even willing to fuck me. What happened? Was it not to yer liking, yer ladyship? Did I fail to please?”

Geneva sprang to her feet, indignation roiling in her breast. “Willing to fuck you?” she hissed. The ugly word nearly got stuck in her throat, but she wasn’t about to stop now, not when he’d come at her, guns blazing. “I was never given the choice, was I? You took advantage of my vulnerability, and then you barely even took the time to make sure I was ready or willing. And I was neither.”

Rory looked like she’d slapped him, and she thought he might come at her. His hands were balled into fists, and his mouth twisted into a vicious scowl.

“Ye might have enjoyed it more if ye’d been a real woman, but ye’re still a child. A spoiled, whiny child, who doesn’t know what she wants.”

Geneva grabbed her things and was out the door before he could utter another word. She was shaking, and not just with the cold. She had known Rory would be upset, but she hadn’t expected the insults that had come spilling out the moment she had wounded his pride. Her father and even Honor had been right. Geneva and Rory came from different worlds, and, even if they had managed to come together and build a life, their happiness would have lasted until the first real fight, and until the first hateful words found their mark. She had hurt Rory, and he’d wasted no time in hurting her back.

As she hurried down the path, she began to calm down, and by the time she saw the house looming through the trees, she realized just how lucky she was to have dodged a bullet that had been aimed straight at her heart. She wished she didn’t have to see Rory ever again, but she couldn’t disinvite him from the party after he had been invited by her father. Geneva hoped he wouldn’t show, but even if he did they’d be surrounded by people, and she didn’t have to speak to him or even look in his direction.

She realized she was shaking with cold and pulled on her coat, and, as she pushed her freezing hands into the deep pockets, her fingers closed

around the ring box. She had meant to give it back, but now she'd have to wait until the party. She wasn't going back.

FIFTY-NINE

When Geneva returned to the house, no one seemed to be about. None of the servants had departed, but the house had felt emptier the past few weeks, the staff keeping to their quarters whenever there was a lull. Geneva thought they were probably scouring the classifieds and applying for jobs, just in case Jesse gave them the sack. Nothing had been officially announced, and they were understandably nervous, which made her feel guilty since much depended on her.

She found Honor in the library. Her sister had her nose in a book, but immediately shut the volume and pushed it between her thigh and the arm of the chair, then looked up at Geneva with feigned innocence.

"You're out early," she said.

"I went for a walk."

Honor gave her a curious look. "You do look rather wind-blown."

"What are you reading?"

"Oh, it's nothing."

Geneva held out her hand, and Honor reluctantly handed over the book. It was *Women in Love* by D.H. Lawrence, which was rather racy for a seventeen-year-old.

"Where did you get this?" Geneva asked as she handed back the volume.

"From Rose. She just finished it."

Geneva shook her head and smiled despite herself. "I expect Aunt Clarissa will have something to say about this."

"No, she won't, because you are not going to tell her," Honor warned. "Rose and I are seventeen, almost of age. We're treated like adults when it suits our parents and then berated like children when it doesn't. We're regarded as pieces of luggage to be moved from place to place without consideration or consent. Can you blame us for fighting back?"

"No, I can't," Geneva said. "Is this because Father decided to send you to finishing school?"

She couldn't help but wonder how Honor would react if she found out that their father planned to offer her to Jesse if Geneva refused. She was right; they were no better than chattel.

"What are you talking about?" Honor exclaimed. Angry spots of color bloomed in her cheeks. "When did he tell you that?"

"Christmas Eve."

"Well, he hasn't said anything to me, which just goes to prove my point. He could have asked me what I want."

"He thought you'd be happy. You'll be with Rose."

"And do you think Rose wants to go to finishing school?" Honor scoffed. "We're not clay to be molded into whatever our parents want us to be."

"Honor, Father wants what's best for you," Geneva said and sank into an armchair. It was hardly ten o'clock in the morning, but she was already emotionally drained. Who else would pick a fight with her today?

"No, Father wants what's best for himself," Honor replied.

"He's dying," Geneva exclaimed.

"Yes, he is, but before he goes he wants to make sure everyone does his bidding, because even in death he has to have the last word."

Geneva looked at her little sister. She understood perfectly well what this was about. Honor was grieving, and she was understandably anxious about the future. Seventeen was a difficult age, but so was twenty-one when one had yet to embark on a life of one's own.

"Father wants to announce my engagement to Jesse on New Year's Eve," she said quietly. "He wants us to marry as soon as possible."

Honor's eyes narrowed. "And how does Jesse feel about this?"

"He has agreed."

She decided not to tell her sister that Jesse had confessed his feelings for her. Honor would either belittle his affection or become angry and accuse him of scheming to get into their father's good graces in order to solidify his position.

"And you're happy to be sold into marriage like a prize cow?" she asked, and Geneva would have happily slapped the sneer off her face.

"Really, Honor," she exclaimed. "Why must you be so ugly?"

"Because I'm angry, Gen. I'm angry that Mother is gone, that our brothers are dead, and that our father is about to pop his clogs at the ripe old age of forty-six. I'm angry that no one has bothered to ask me how I feel or

what I might want. And I'm livid that you're going to marry Jesse, while I will be exiled to finishing school, where I will be disciplined and belittled until the powers-that-be feel that I am *finished* enough to be unleashed on society."

"I can understand all the other reasons, but why are you angry about Jesse? Surely this will make your life easier."

Honor inhaled deeply, opened her mouth to reply, closed it again, then let out a growl of frustration.

"What?" Geneva asked. "What am I missing?"

Honor slammed her fist on the armrest of the chair. "Every man we meet has eyes only for you. They dismiss me without a second thought. I'm only a few years younger, and just as pretty. I can be witty and amusing, and I like to dance."

"I like to dance."

"You can be a real stick-in-the-mud, you know that? You always play the wallflower, so they feel they have to coax you out."

"I have never in my life played the wallflower," Geneva protested. "And it's not my fault men find me more attractive. Maybe you shouldn't act too eager. You put them off."

"So, I'm easy, am I?" Honor roared.

"I didn't say that."

"I'm not going to bloody finishing school," Honor announced. "I will decide what I want to do with my life. Heck, I might go to Pittsburgh with Rory."

Her words hit Geneva like a steam engine, but she didn't get the chance to ask what Honor meant or how she even knew that Rory was going to Pittsburgh. Honor hurled the book at Geneva and stormed out of the library.

"Well, that went well," Geneva muttered to herself and ran her fingers over the cover. Perhaps she should read the book. She might learn something.

SIXTY

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn wasn't sure what had awoken her. The light seeping through the windows was a murky gray, so dawn couldn't be far off. She lay very still and listened, suddenly afraid someone might be outside, but the boathouse was silent. It had rained during the night, and raindrops slid down the windowpanes like silent tears. The two thick branches of the tree outside moved like the arms of a dancer. Perhaps what she had heard was the rowboat bumping against the dock as the wind whipped the surface of the lake. Harmless, ordinary sounds of nature that felt sinister only because of her fears.

Gabe was sprawled on his stomach, his cheek pressed into the pillow. He looked peaceful, and there was a faint smile on his face. He must be dreaming about something pleasant, Quinn thought, a little envious, since her own dreams had been dark and unsettling. It was too early to get up, so she shut her eyes and allowed herself to drift back to sleep. They had a long drive ahead, and she would need every ounce of patience to manage four restless, bored children who goaded one another and fought constantly.

Quinn woke again just before eight thirty and checked her phone. No calls or texts from anyone, which was disappointing and reassuring in equal measure. At least it meant there was no bad news. She could hear Mia humming softly in the other room. She often did that when she first woke. Alex and Emma were used to it and barely noticed anymore. Quinn sat up and glanced outside. The moisture had evaporated, the sky was a washed-out blue, and the branches were still. As soon as the children were awake, she would make breakfast and pack, and they would get on the road.

She reached for her dressing gown and padded towards the door on bare feet. As she passed Max's cot, she saw that it was empty. Her heart lurched. She hurried to the bathroom, but the door stood open, and Max

wasn't inside. He wasn't in the kitchen or the other bedroom. She checked the closets, then her gaze fell on the front door. She tried the knob, and let out a cry of anguish when she found it unlocked. She'd heard Gabe lock it before he went to bed.

"Gabe," she shrieked. "Oh, Gabe, wake up!"

Gabe exploded out of the bedroom, looking startled. His hair was tousled, and his jaw was covered with thick stubble, some of it ashy gray.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

Quinn's hands were shaking, and her throat had gone dry as blind panic overwhelmed her. "Max is gone," she croaked.

"Gone?"

"I looked everywhere. And the door was unlocked. Did you lock the door properly last night?" she asked accusingly.

"Of course I did."

Gabe went to the door and examined the door jamb and the lock, but it was impossible to tell if the lock had been tampered with. A professional wouldn't need to force it, only to use the right tool to engage the mechanism. Gabe tore through the house, searching for Max, while the children stood quietly in the doorway of their bedroom, their faces tense, and their silence almost more unnerving than their more usual endless questions.

"He couldn't have got far," Gabe said.

He pushed his feet into a pair of trainers and sprinted outside. Quinn caught sight of him through the window, racing along the lakeshore and calling for Max, but his voice was met with impenetrable silence. Terrified and suddenly weak, she slid to the floor and buried her face in her hands. She couldn't allow herself to imagine what might be happening to Max. She couldn't bear it.

Quinn remained like that for a long while, unable to summon the strength to rise. The children edged closer but stayed silent, likely wanting to voice their fears but afraid of distressing her further. Hearing Gabe's voice echo across the still lake, she knew she had to get up. She had to steady the children, and there were calls to make.

Only when she finally forced herself to stand did she notice the teddy bear. It lay beneath one of the kitchen chairs, and someone had torn out its eyes.

SIXTY-ONE

Gabe pulled a sobbing Quinn into his arms and held her close. “We will get him back,” he said softly. “I swear.”

He was in no position to make such a vow, but Quinn was ready to believe anything if it would bring Max back. Her heart was racing, and she felt as though all her bones had turned to rubber. If Gabe let her go, she doubted she could remain upright. He seemed to sense that and guided her to the sofa, then disappeared into the bedroom and returned with her mobile.

As soon as Quinn sat down, Mia climbed into her lap and buried her face in Quinn’s shoulder. Alex sprinted across the room and snatched up his teddy, but let out a sharp cry and dropped it at once when he saw the missing eyes. He ran to the sofa and pressed himself against Quinn’s other side, fitting himself to her the way he had when he was a toddler.

Gabe pressed the phone into Quinn’s hand. “Call the Keswick police. Report Max missing. Then ring DI Malone. He probably has more resources than the local station.”

“He’s in London,” Quinn moaned.

“He can still help. A child is missing. Quite possibly abducted. Malone will have no choice but to prioritize the case.” Gabe turned to go, and Quinn reared up.

“Where are you going?”

“I’m going to look for Max further afield. I need to get dressed.”

Gabe glanced at his frightened children. At any other time he would have tried to comfort them, but there was no time to waste, so he walked into the bedroom and shut the door. He reappeared a minute later, fully dressed, and ready to go.

“Dad, I’m coming with you,” Emma cried, but Gabe shook his head.

“You’re needed here. Lock the door behind me.” He walked out without another word.

Gabe's departure seemed to break the spell of shock. Emma and Alex immediately began firing questions at Quinn, while Mia burst into tears, no doubt frightened and unable to fully grasp what was happening.

"Emma, can you please make breakfast for your brother and sister?" Quinn asked. "I need to make a phone call."

She disentangled herself from Mia's arms and sat her down on the sofa, then went into the bedroom to call the police. It took much longer than seemed necessary to explain the situation and answer DS Coyle's questions. Quinn bristled at the woman's accusing tone when she asked how Max could have left or been taken without Quinn or Gabe noticing. It was a fair question, one Quinn had already tortured herself with. She could have kicked herself for not getting up to investigate when she had woken earlier that morning. But she'd had no reason to suspect anything was wrong. Max had appeared to be asleep in his cot, the blanket pulled over his head.

Oh God, Quinn groaned inwardly as she looked towards Max's bed. What she had seen had not been her nephew at all but a pillow and duvet arranged to resemble a sleeping child. Max had already been gone when she'd woken. As she continued answering the policewoman's questions, she hurried into the front room and checked by the door. Max's shoes were missing, as was his cagoule. Whoever had taken him must have grabbed them on the way out, but how had they kept him quiet? Max was a light sleeper and would certainly have stirred if someone lifted him from his bed.

Unless it had been his dad. But why would Logan feel the need to break in and kidnap his own son? He would never do that to her and Gabe. The momentary hope collapsed. It hadn't been Logan. More likely someone had pressed a chloroform-soaked cloth over Max's face. Had she smelled anything? She didn't think so, but she had been deeply asleep, dreaming about Geneva Bellamy.

Ignoring the children's questions, Quinn returned to the bedroom. For a moment she considered phoning Sean Cadogan, but quickly realized there was nothing more he could do for her. He was no longer in charge of the Metropolitan Police Service, and no one would take orders from him, not even Malone. Malone had his own bosses to answer to, but this time she would not allow him to dismiss her.

Quinn rang the detective and explained the situation. Malone listened without interruption, and when he spoke his tone was grim. This was no

longer a missing adult. The situation had changed, and every wasted minute took Max farther away from them.

"Do you have a close-up photo of Max?"

"Yes."

"Text it to me. I'll circulate the photo and issue a force-wide alert," Malone said. "Stay inside and keep an eye on the other children. And please contact me immediately if your husband finds Max." He paused, then added, "Did it rain there last night?"

"Yes."

"Can you step outside?"

"Yes, but why?" Quinn asked as she slid her feet into her shoes and stepped out the door.

"I want you to look around very carefully. Do you see any muddy footprints?"

"No."

"What about the car park? Any additional tire tracks?" Malone asked.

Quinn walked around the house to the narrow gravel strip, then towards the lane, where the gravel gave way to packed earth. She found only one set of tire tracks leading away from the house—almost certainly from their own minivan.

"I only see one set of tire tracks," she said. "I think they're from our car."

"Take some photographs and forward them to me. By the time the local police arrive, any footprints or tracks may be smudged."

"Yes, of course."

"I'll be in touch as soon as I know anything," Malone promised, and rang off.

Quinn took several photos, sent them to the detective, then went inside to wait for word of Max. She fought to keep her emotions in check so as not to frighten the children, but she felt as though her heart had shattered into a million pieces.

SIXTY-TWO

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

In the days leading up to the New Year's Eve party, the house was a hive of activity. It reminded Geneva of when her mother and brothers had still been alive. There had been such a sense of anticipation then, a hum of excitement that filled the house even if she and Honor weren't permitted to attend because they were too young. They would hide on the nursery landing, listening to the music and the murmured laughter drifting up from the drawing room, imagining what it would be like when they were old enough to join the festivities and eventually come out to society. It had all seemed so glamorous and magical then. Now she knew better.

The war to end all wars had altered the country in countless ways, but, for young women of breeding, very little had changed. They were still only a step above livestock, paraded through London's marriage markets until they found a suitable buyer. Geneva hadn't even had the fleeting thrill of a court presentation or a coming-out ball. Instead, she had been sold to the highest—and only—bidder, a human sacrifice to the gods of nobility and wealth.

Honor might envy Geneva's supposed good fortune, but her sister didn't yet grasp the price it carried. Geneva admitted that things could be worse and that, as far as bargains with the devil went, she was escaping lightly. But to have her future wrested from her at such a young age seemed unbearably unfair. She hadn't lived yet, hadn't done anything of note, and, if her father had his way, by this time next year she might already have a child. Her wishes seemed to matter to no one. She was simply a tool, a vessel to be filled as quickly as possible.

And what if Jesse proved a cruel or indifferent husband? Plenty of men kept mistresses and even secret families. What did she truly know of the man she was expected to wed, a month from now, if her father managed to

hold on? Jesse professed admiration, but he might simply be playing the smitten suitor to please Douglas. Once her father was gone, everything could change.

The more she thought on it, the more despondent she grew. Even though Jesse tried to coax her into Ravenglass for lunch or persuade her to go skating with him, Honor, and Rose, Geneva chose solitary walks or the refuge of her room or the library. She needed time to accept the changes barreling towards her and to tamp down the resentment she felt towards her father. She couldn't even speak to Rory. That door was closed forever, barred by their mutual anger and resentment.

It was fitting that Rory was heading to the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, and she would remain here—where she was neither free nor felt particularly brave.

SIXTY-THREE

When Geneva woke on the morning of December the thirty-first, she felt a tiny spark of optimism. The situation wasn't about to improve, but come tomorrow it would be a new year, and several people who had been instrumental in causing her agitation would be gone. Aunt Clarissa would return to London and stop dripping advice into her brother's ear, and Rory's departure would make things considerably less awkward. Tonight was a night to celebrate and see this year out with music, dancing, and champagne. Tomorrow, a new reality would set in, one Geneva would have to accept, no matter how uncertain she felt on the inside.

The guests weren't due to arrive until eight o'clock, but there was much to do, especially since Geneva would act as hostess for the first time and shoulder the responsibility for anything that might go wrong. She needed to check the food, oversee the decorations, tweak the seating plan, and bolster her father before he made his way downstairs in white tie and tails. Honor and Rose were in a frenzy of excitement, whispering to each other, before suddenly disappearing just before noon. Geneva saw the Austin 7 from the window, roaring towards the gates, her sister at the wheel. Where on earth were they going? And when had Honor learned to drive?

Sending up a fervent prayer that the silly things wouldn't get themselves killed, Geneva hurried to the kitchen, where Cook had reduced one of the maids to tears with her endless criticism of the girl's chopping skills. Geneva brokered peace, checked on the progress of the menu, examined the dining room, where the table for twenty was being set, made sure there were enough champagne glasses for the midnight toast, and placed the records Jesse had purchased beside the gramophone. She would ask the footmen who had been hired from the village to roll up the carpet and create a makeshift dance floor in the drawing room.

By the time she looked up, it was nearly three o'clock. Where the devil was Honor? Normally, Geneva would have taken her concerns to her father

or Rory, but, since she was meant to marry Jesse, she supposed she must now go to him. She hadn't seen him for some time and wondered what he might be doing.

She found him in her father's bedroom, reading aloud from the book she and Honor had given Douglas for Christmas. It sounded strange to hear Dickens narrated in an American accent, but there was something rather appealing about it as well. How handsome Jesse looked with his fair hair, blue eyes, and bronzed skin. Had he not been forced upon her, and had they met instead at a ball or supper party, she might have been very taken with him indeed.

Jesse stopped reading and smiled at her, his gaze warm with affection. Was it possible that he truly cared for her? And could she dare hope for a happy ending? She wouldn't find her answer tonight, and she was sick with worry over her feckless sister, but perhaps she could allow herself to fan that spark of optimism she had felt earlier and let it grow into a small, tenacious flame.

"I hope I'm not interrupting," Geneva said.

Douglas waved a dismissive hand. "I'm actually rather tired. Perhaps we can continue tomorrow."

"I hope my reading didn't bore you," Jesse joked.

"No, it was nice. Thank you. But I do need to sleep a while before the party, otherwise I will never last till midnight."

"I'll leave you to rest, then," Jesse said and followed Geneva out the door.

"I'm worried about Honor," she told him. "She took off with Rose hours ago. I had no idea she could drive."

Jesse smiled guiltily. "I've been teaching her."

"Without asking Father for permission?"

"You're right. I'm sorry. I should have asked. It's just that she's been so affected by all this, and she feels like no one cares what she wants. I thought it would be a nice thing to do. I didn't think she'd take the car for a joyride."

Geneva thought that was a fitting term. Honor had looked joyful as she had sped through the gates. Perhaps she needed this, and as long as the girls returned safely, she decided, she wouldn't berate them for going off like that. They deserved a bit of fun.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" Jesse asked.

“Everything is in hand,” Geneva replied, then smiled ruefully. “Actually, there is something.”

“I’m ready and able to do my part,” Jesse said.

“I’m sadly out of practice when it comes to dancing. And I don’t know any of the new dances.”

Jesse’s smile grew wide. “It would be my absolute pleasure to teach you. And we’ll begin with the Charleston. I don’t think it’s very popular in England, but it’s becoming all the rage in America. Can I show you?”

Geneva nodded happily. “Please.”

They headed downstairs and shut the door to the drawing room, and Jesse selected one of the records he had purchased and put it on.

“It starts with the footwork,” he said as he took his place.

“Doesn’t every dance?”

“Yes but when dancing the Charleston, you also have to swing your arms from side to side, like so.”

He demonstrated, and Geneva laughed. “You look like a chimp.”

“Come on, do it with me,” Jesse invited her. “One step forward, one step back. Don’t forget to swing those arms. Now bring your arms up, like this.”

Jesse lifted his hands and held them palms out. He was light on his feet, and the steps seemed to come naturally to him. He moved in time with the music without pausing or thinking, and his grin widened when Geneva finally caught the pattern and managed several seconds of true dancing before she became confused and nearly tripped over her own feet.

“This is harder than it looks,” she grumbled.

“It’s really not. Just have fun with it. No one will notice if you’re not doing it right. They’ve never seen it before. So even if you keep to only one basic step, you will be one step ahead of them,” he quipped. “Come on, from the top.”

He restarted the record, and Geneva managed to get through the whole thing with only a few missteps. Once she stopped paying so much attention to her feet, she realized that she was having a ball and found that she was laughing by the time the music came to a stop and Jesse performed an exaggerated bow.

“We’re going to knock them dead tonight,” he said.

Geneva’s smile slid off her face. She didn’t want to think about death, or about the immediate future. She just wanted to enjoy a few hours of

carefree fun.

"Did I say something wrong?" Jesse asked.

"I don't want to knock anyone dead," Geneva admitted. "It sounds too morbid."

"All right, then, you can be footloose and fancy-free. How's that?"

"I like the sound of that, especially if you will be the same."

"I might be footloose, but I'm not fancy-free," he said. His arm went around her waist, and he pulled her to him, his lips capturing hers in a sweet kiss as he molded himself to her body.

Geneva placed her hands on Jesse's chest, meaning to push him away, but found herself leaning closer instead. Her body thrummed with excitement, and something altogether new. She felt as though she were fizzing like a glass of freshly poured champagne, and she liked the unfamiliar sensation. For the first time in weeks, she felt truly alive, filled with a longing for excitement, adventure, and romance.

Before she could think better of it, she kissed Jesse back and kept kissing him until she was breathless with desire. She had never felt this way with Rory. His kisses had been pleasant, but they had never made her knees go weak or left her feeling so wonderfully bemused. With Jesse, the kiss felt spontaneous, a natural extension of the closeness they had shared—and perhaps a sign that, now that they were engaged, both were ready to take the next step. As they drew apart, Geneva realized she might welcome that, so long as Jesse was willing to go at her pace and didn't press her into anything she wasn't ready for, the way Rory had done.

It was then that Geneva heard the roar of the automobile and the shriek of the horn as the Austin 7 sped down the lane. She ran to the window, and her hand went to her mouth in both admiration and shock. Neither Honor nor Rose was wearing a hat, and their newly shorn hair whipped in the wind as they honked the horn and weaved their hats in the air in an act of pure adolescent glee.

Geneva had turned on her heel, determined to meet them in the foyer before Clarissa caught a glimpse of Rose, when she realized the door to the drawing room was ajar. Rory stood on the other side, and his expression warned Geneva that he had been there for some time.

SIXTY-FOUR

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn snatched up her mobile when it rang. She hoped it was the police, or Gabe, but it was neither of them; the call came from an unlisted number, one of a dozen she'd received over the past few days and that morning. She had answered the first few, thinking they might be from Logan or the police, only to be met with telemarketers' prerecorded messages about products or loans. Quinn declined the call and blocked the number.

She had tried not to frighten the children any more than they already were, but it was becoming impossible. After two cups of coffee, she was so jittery she found herself pacing the lounge, her mobile clutched tightly in her hand. By the time Gabe finally walked through the door, she was wrung out. He looked wretched, and, without saying a word, he gathered her into his arms and held her close.

"There's no sign of him," he said at last. "Sam and Reggie and all their guests came out to search, and several police officers were sent over from Keswick, but they have been recalled." He looked gutted. "Quinn, they don't believe Max is still in the area."

"No!" Quinn cried. "He has to be. They have to find him."

"No one has seen him. They're checking the traffic cameras to see if anyone was in the vicinity of the hotel this morning, but there are no CCTV cameras that capture the boathouse or the lane that leads towards the lake."

"What about the main house?"

Gabe nodded. "There is a camera by the front door that covers the car park and the drive up, but no one arrived this morning."

Quinn was crying again, and Gabe held her tight, his cheek resting on the top of her head. He didn't offer pointless clichés, and for that she was grateful. She didn't want to be lied to or soothed with empty reassurances. She knew bad things happened—perhaps better than most—after

everything she had witnessed in her visions and endured in real life. She would have given anything to turn back the clock to last week, when Logan and Max had been safe and her biggest worry had been meeting the deadline for the article she was writing. How could everything have changed so quickly and so catastrophically? What had happened to Logan, and where was Max? She prayed he was safe and that whoever had taken him meant him no harm.

"Are you hungry?" Gabe asked quietly.

Quinn shook her head. "I can't even think about food. The kids ate, though. Can I make you something?"

The idea of doing something normal helped steady her, and she pulled away from Gabe and went to the kitchen. She filled the electric kettle, turned it on, and set two slices of bread into the toaster. With a weary sigh, Gabe sank into a chair and looked down at the table. Quinn knew he felt he had failed her, but the only person she blamed was herself. She had heard something and chosen to go back to sleep. She could have saved Max, or maybe could have caught a glimpse of the person who took him through the window and given the police a description. Because he had to have been taken. If he'd left on his own, he would have been found by now, since he couldn't have got far. Now the police were working blind, and it was entirely her fault. And considering the statistics, it was all too possible that Max would never be seen again.

Quinn made Gabe a cup of coffee, buttered the toast, and set the plate in front of him. He nodded but didn't reach for the food. He wrapped his hands around the mug and looked out the window, his jaw tightening as his thoughts likely ran along the same painful path as hers. The children remained in the bedroom, too upset to come out, and she was grateful she didn't have to speak to them just yet. She had no strength left, so she slid into a chair and buried her face in her hands. Logan had trusted her with Max, and she had let him down.

A sharp knock jolted both her and Gabe out of their misery. Gabe was on his feet instantly and pulled the door open. DS Coyle stood on the threshold. She nodded to Gabe, but her eyes went straight to Quinn.

"We picked up Max on a traffic camera," she said. "He's with a man driving a rental car."

She held out her phone to show Quinn a grainy still. The man sat behind the wheel of a two-seater, and Max was beside him in the passenger

seat. The child's face barely cleared the dashboard, but he looked unhurt and was held in place by the seatbelt. The driver wore a cap that cast a shadow over the upper half of his face. All Quinn could make out was that he was white, unshaven, and married. A glint of light caught the wedding ring on his left hand.

"We've dispatched a patrol to intercept the vehicle," DS Coyle said.

"What can we do?" Quinn cried.

"Nothing. Sit tight."

SIXTY-FIVE

The next hour was spent on tenterhooks, waiting desperately for word that Max had been found and was safe. Quinn and Emma sat together on the sofa, Emma clutching her mother's hand for support. Quinn's heart lodged in her throat as her mind spun out terrible images of a police chase gone wrong—the car flipping, skidding off the road, tumbling down an embankment. She needed something to distract herself, anything, but now was not the time to retreat into her own thoughts. She had to remain present and alert, ready to go to Max the moment the call came.

Quinn clung to the hope that he would be returned unharmed and that the police would take over the investigation without pressing him for details. Max was only a little boy, and he was surely traumatized already. Perhaps he didn't even understand what was happening and thought he was going to see his dad, or that he would be brought back to Quinn and Gabe once the man got what he wanted from him.

Alex emerged from the kitchen, his teddy bear held to his chest. "I fixed it," he said proudly.

"How?" Emma replied.

"I used a packet of honey to stick on the eyes. Seemed right, given it's a bear," he said, but the joke nearly made Quinn cry.

"The honey will dry up, and the eyes will fall off," Emma said, unimpressed.

"They will hold long enough," Alex said, clearly offended by Emma's lack of faith in him. "Max will want his bear when he gets back."

The children fell silent, and Quinn got up for the hundredth time and went to the window, desperate to see an approaching police car. But all was quiet. Gabe came to stand behind her and wrapped his arms around her.

"You're trembling," he said.

"I can't bear this waiting."

"Go," Gabe whispered into her hair. "Escape for a little while. I will come and get you if there's any news."

It felt wrong to escape to the past, but Quinn was so tightly wound up, she thought she might crack if they didn't hear news of Max soon. She longed to step away from this terrible uncertainty for even a few minutes.

"Go," Gabe said again.

She nodded and headed to the bedroom. The earring was in its container on the bedside table, the gold and delicate gems winking in the bright light. How sad that the earrings and a bangle were all that was left of a beautiful young woman who'd still had so much living left to do.

"What happened to you, Geneva?" Quinn whispered as she reached for the container and opened the lid.

She sat on the bed, leaned against the headboard, and dropped the earring into her hand. The world around her fell away, and she was once again in 1923, on the night of the New Year's Eve celebration.

SIXTY-SIX

NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1923

Ravenglass

By six o'clock, the dining room glittered with silver and crystal, Cook had everything in hand, and the staff was just about to sit down to a cold supper so that they would have time to finish with the preparations before the guests began to arrive. Geneva hastened upstairs. It was time to get ready. She had never before worn anything except lipstick, but she had purchased several beauty products at the department store, and, after she had taken a quick bath and Lettie had helped her on with her frock and headed downstairs to get something to eat, Geneva took the little bag out of her vanity. She penciled in her eyebrows, tinted her lashes, then applied a little rouge to her cheeks. She was just about to put on lipstick when Honor burst into her room.

She looked excited and upset all at once. "These earrings don't go with my dress," she moaned.

Honor's dress was a deep violet, and she wore black pumps with a T-strap. A gold bracelet studded with what looked like real diamonds glittered on her wrist.

"Where did you get that?" Geneva asked.

"It's smashing, isn't it?" Honor said, and held out her arm. "Rose lent it to me."

"And where did she get it?"

Honor shrugged. "I think she might have borrowed it from Aunt Clarissa."

"Borrowed it?"

"Look, what does it matter?" Honor said with a huff. "It's gorgeous, she let me wear it, end of story. Now, can you lend me your earrings?"

"But—" Geneva began, but Honor didn't allow her to finish.

“They don’t go with your dress anyway. I’ll trade you for these.” She held out a pair of dangly crystal earrings that sparkled in the light from the lamps.

“Are these Rose’s as well?”

“So what if they are? She gets an allowance. She can spend it on what she likes.”

Geneva reached for the earrings and held one against her ear. She loved her amethyst earrings, but Honor was right. They didn’t really go with her dress, and the glittering crystals made her feel stylish and glamorous.

“All right,” she said and removed her earrings. “But I want these back tomorrow.”

“And you’ll get them,” Honor replied. She put them on and turned her head this way and that, admiring her reflection in the mirror. “They look fabulous. And I love my new hair,” she gushed. “It feels so…” She searched for the right word. “Liberating,” she said at last. “I’m going to wear it like this all the time from now on. Maybe I’ll go even shorter,” she mused as she patted the ends of her curling locks.

“I love it too,” Geneva admitted. “I was craving a change.”

Honor scoffed. “Haven’t you had enough changes with everything else that’s going on?”

“I meant a positive change, one of my own making.”

Geneva opened her jewelry case and took out the bangle she’d bought. Honor’s eyes widened at the sight of the elegant snake.

“That’s stunning,” she exclaimed.

“Want to borrow this too?” Geneva teased.

“Can I? Oh, please, Genny. I’ll give you this one.”

“I’m wearing it. I already lent you my earrings.”

“All right. Fine. But I’m borrowing it next time there’s a party.”

Geneva glanced at her sister in the mirror. Honor carried on as if nothing were about to change, and it both annoyed and saddened her. Honor still didn’t seem to grasp that in a few short weeks—a month or two at most—their father would be gone, and their lives would never be the same again. Geneva would be married to Jesse, and Honor would be on her way to Switzerland. When she returned, Aunt Clarissa would take over as her guardian. Perhaps there would be parties and pretty frocks and excuses to wear her jewelry, but the life they had known would be gone forever.

Unhappy to be denied the bracelet, Honor obviously decided to make her sister cross in turn. Her eyes narrowed as she met Geneva's gaze in the mirror. "What happened with Rory? He told me he's leaving, and he seems to be avoiding you like the plague."

Geneva stilled. "When did you see him?"

"I stopped by his cottage yesterday. I wanted to speak to him," Honor said, and a sly smile tugged at her mouth.

"What about?"

Honor shrugged. "Things."

"You can't go to an unmarried man's home, Honor. Think of what that will do to your reputation if anyone sees you."

"You went to his cottage. Several times."

"Nothing happened," Geneva protested and inwardly cringed at the lie.

"Nothing happened with us either."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Do you always tell me the truth?" Honor snapped. "You didn't tell me that he proposed or that he gave you a ring."

"Do you see me wearing it?"

"No, but you still have it."

"And how do you know that?" Geneva exclaimed. "Were you the one who went through my things?"

Honor looked taken aback. "No. If I did, I would have seen that gorgeous bracelet." She looked at the bangle enviously.

"Then how do you know about the ring?"

"Rory told me. I think it's only right that you should give it back to him now that you're to be the Countess of Gosforth."

"I am going to, tonight. Although I rather hope he doesn't come."

"Oh, he will, if only to ruin your evening. You hurt him, and he wants to hurt you back."

"Did he say that?" Geneva asked, a jolt of alarm shooting down her spine.

"He didn't have to, did he?" Honor cut her eyes at Geneva. "I'm not as naïve as you imagine me to be. I can read a man."

"Really? Can you?" Geneva retorted.

"I can, and cozying up to me will make him think he's getting back at you."

"What are you suggesting?"

“Let me wear the bracelet, and I’ll tell you.”

Geneva grabbed the bracelet off the vanity and handed it to her sister. “Here. Take it.”

Honor smiled happily and slid the bracelet over her hand, then held out her arm to admire the effect.

Geneva looked at her sister, and her expression in the mirror turned pleading. “Look, Honor, tonight is not going to be easy. Please, can we present a united front? I just want to have a nice memory for when…”

Her sister nodded. “All right. Tonight should be all about Father. And you, since this is to be your engagement party.”

“So you’ll try to keep Rory away from me?”

Honor nodded, but her gaze wasn’t on Geneva. It was on the tube of mulberry lipstick. She held out her hand, and Geneva passed it to her. Honor carefully outlined her mouth, then filled it in before smacking her lips.

“I look marvelous,” she purred. “Here, put some on. You’re pale as a ghost.”

They both turned at a knock on the door, and Rose came in. She was wearing an outmoded lavender gown, and her newly cut hair was pinned to her head. She looked deeply upset, and her eyes filled with tears when she saw Geneva and Honor in their beaded frocks and glittering jewels.

“Mother made me wear this and said I had to pin up my hair. I look dowdy and plain,” Rose said angrily. “It’s probably for the best that I can’t stay for the music. No one would ask me to dance anyway.”

“I would,” a male voice said from the corridor.

Jesse stepped into the doorway and smiled at the girls. He wore tails, and his hair was neatly brushed and held in place with pomade. He was clean-shaven, and his teeth looked very white in his tanned face.

“Ladies, you look stunning.”

“I don’t,” Rose whined.

“It’s not what you wear, Rose, but how you wear it,” Jesse said. “What makes a woman attractive is confidence.”

Honor instantly preened, and Rose looked at Jesse as if seeing him for the first time.

“You’re very confident,” she said.

“Tonight, I’m on top of the world.” Jesse’s gaze met Geneva’s, and he smiled a slow, intimate smile.

“So am I.”

Jesse stepped aside to reveal Douglas, who was also in his tails and looked better than he had in weeks. He smiled at the young people indulgently.

“I mean to see this year out on a positive note,” he said. “Now, finish getting ready and come downstairs. Our guests will be arriving shortly. Jesse, if you would help me down the stairs.”

“Of course, sir.”

After the two men and Rose left, Geneva took one last look at herself in the mirror, then turned to Honor.

“Give me Rose’s bracelet,” she said. “My wrist looks bare.”

Honor surrendered the bangle, and Geneva slid it onto her wrist. She was so nervous, her insides quivered like jelly, but it was as Jesse had said. It was all about confidence, and, even though she didn’t feel it, she had to project it, at least tonight.

“Come on. Let’s go downstairs,” Honor said.

“I’ll be down in a minute. You go on.”

Honor walked out of the room without another word. And then the image faded to black.

SIXTY-SEVEN

SEPTEMBER 2023

Keswick

Quinn opened her eyes and blinked in confusion. The vision had ended so abruptly that, for a moment, she wondered if she had dropped the earring. Then she understood. Honor had walked out of the room wearing the amethyst earrings. Geneva's memories had reached their end, and the next chapter would unfold through Honor's eyes once her memories had time to imprint. The events of that night were a century old, yet Quinn saw them play out in real time, and the shift in perspective required Honor to wear the earrings for a while.

Not that Quinn could spare much thought for any of that now. She was sick with worry about Max, and, as tempting as it was to escape into someone else's mind for the sake of her sanity, she had to face the present head-on. And a far more chilling realization had struck her: the woman in the well might be Honor, not Geneva. They looked enough alike to make positive identification problematic.

Of course, she had no way of knowing when the victim had died, or whether Honor had ever returned the earrings to her sister. But after years of witnessing strangers' final moments, she could sense when a story was building towards a tragic conclusion. One clue was the claddagh ring. Rory was due to leave on January the first, and it seemed unlikely that either Honor or Geneva had worn the ring after that, unless Rory had changed his mind and stayed, and something dramatic had occurred between them that had put him back in play with either sister.

Right now, none of that mattered. All Quinn cared about was Max. She put the earring away and stepped into the lounge. Gabe sat on the sofa with Mia curled on his lap, her head on his shoulder, clutching the teddy bear with its now slightly lopsided eyes. Alex sat beside him, absorbed in a game on Gabe's mobile. Emma, headphones on, wore a faraway expression.

Quinn guessed she was listening to her music. To a stranger, the tableau might have looked peaceful, almost domestic, but Quinn knew better. They were all taut with fear, each processing the situation in their own way.

A wave of guilt washed over her. Leaving them, even briefly, had been selfish. Her children came first, and she needed to reassure them, to remind them, and Gabe, that she was here and would not falter.

Gabe patted the cushion beside him, and Quinn sat down, resting her head on his other shoulder. They stayed like that until, sometime later, a knock sounded at the door.

SIXTY-EIGHT

DS Coyle stood outside, and her smile was radiant. “We got him. Max is safe.”

“And the man who took him?” Quinn asked.

The smile slid off the detective’s face, and she suddenly looked uncertain. “Detained. Quinn, we’d like you to come down to the station, if you don’t mind.”

“To collect Max?”

“We’d like to ask you a few questions before you can take Max home.”

“What about?”

DS Coyle smiled apologetically. “Let’s talk at the station, shall we?”

“We’ll all go,” Gabe said as he joined Quinn at the door.

“There’s really no need,” the policewoman replied. “I’ll take Quinn to the station and bring her and Max back as soon as we’re finished. It shouldn’t take long.”

Quinn turned and looked up at Gabe. “The children have been through enough these past few days. There’s no need to drag them to the police station.”

Gabe nodded. “We’ll be right here, waiting for you.”

Quinn grabbed her bag and followed DS Coyle to the car. “Was Max upset when you got to him?” she asked as the policewoman maneuvered the car down the narrow lane.

“He was subdued, but he seemed all right. He told us quite the story, so we wanted to verify a few things before we released him to you.”

That sounded ominous. “Are you sure he’s all right?” Quinn asked. “Does he need to be checked out by a doctor?”

“We’ve arranged for him to meet with a child psychologist. She should be with him now.”

“Should I not be present?”

“DI Alice Sherman, who’s been put in charge of this case, has requested that an appropriate adult be present during the interview. Don’t

worry, Mrs. Asif is a trained social worker and a very kind woman who has small children of her own."

Quinn nodded. She knew the law required an appropriate adult to be present for any interview involving a child under eighteen or a vulnerable adult, to safeguard their rights during questioning. Max wasn't being questioned by the police, but he still required someone to be with him during his talk with the psychologist. Mrs. Asif was likely the better choice; Quinn doubted she could keep her composure. Even so, she wished she had been consulted, as Max's guardian. But it seemed DI Sherman was following protocol, which was all she could ask for in this situation.

Max wasn't prone to telling wild stories, but he had endured so much that he was undoubtedly internalizing far more than he could express. He was too young to articulate what he was feeling or make sense of it all. Quinn could barely process her own emotions in the wake of Logan's disappearance and Max's abduction. If Max managed to open up to the psychologist, perhaps she could help him sort through the past few days and offer Quinn guidance on how to talk to him about what had happened.

When they entered the station, Quinn was met by DI Sherman. She smiled at Quinn warmly and gestured towards an interview room.

"Max is still with the child psychologist, and I would like to speak to you."

"Is he all right?" Quinn asked, her anxiety spiking once again.

"He's absolutely fine."

"He must be hungry."

"He's had breakfast."

"Has he?"

DI Sherman nodded. "Bacon butty and milk."

"Here at the station?"

"No, with the man he was with," the detective replied. "He said he enjoyed the butty, but he doesn't care for milk and would have preferred orange juice."

Quinn followed the DI into the room and accepted a seat.

"Would you like some tea or coffee before we begin?" the policewoman asked.

"I'm fine. Let's get this over with."

DI Sherman set a thin folder on the table but didn't open it. Instead she studied Quinn, as if assessing her mental state. "Max told us that he made the decision to leave."

"He's five."

The policewoman smiled. "He's very articulate and seems to have had a definite plan."

"A plan to do what?" Quinn asked. She hadn't expected this and was a little confused.

"Max said he got up, dressed, and left the house before sunrise. He walked down the lane and was heading towards the motorway. He was going to hitchhike to London."

"What?" Quinn exclaimed.

"He was going to look for his dad."

"Someone took him. They even tore the eyes from the teddy bear Max had been sleeping with."

"Max did that," DI Sherman said.

Quinn stared at her in disbelief. That didn't sound like Max at all. He was such a sweet, gentle boy who suffered from separation anxiety. He would never leave on his own and walk in the dark down a deserted lane with the intention of hitchhiking to London. The very idea was mad.

"He said he was angry that you took him away from London and weren't looking for his dad, so he was going to do it himself."

"So ripping out the eyes was a big sod you?" Quinn asked.

"It would seem so. He was sending you a clear message. He wasn't happy, and he didn't care to be treated like a baby."

"The poor boy," Quinn said. She had tried to keep him safe and prevent him from worrying, but it seemed he hadn't trusted her or believed her when she'd said that all would be well. He'd needed to take action, since he'd felt no one was doing anything to help him. "I feel awful," she admitted.

"You did nothing wrong," the policewoman said. "But some things are not easy to explain to a five-year-old. Sometimes adults let children down without meaning to. And sometimes they pursue their own agenda without considering the feelings of their kids."

Quinn realized she was speaking about Logan and was about to protest, but something stopped her. She needed to tread carefully, since the

psychologist had the power to have Max removed from their care and placed in a foster home.

"So, the man he was with picked him up?" she asked. She refused to contemplate what could have happened to Max if the police hadn't been able to retrieve him. Unspeakable things were done to children, who were usually never seen again once they'd been taken, at least not alive.

"Max told us that the man he was with is his uncle. We thought that perhaps he was told to say that."

"Who is this person? Did you not verify his identity?"

"We did," DI Sherman said. "And he checks out. But we needed to be sure since Max disappeared under such unusual circumstances."

She opened the file, took out two sheets of paper, and slid them across the table. Quinn picked them up. She was looking at photocopies of Jude's passport and his military ID.

"B-but how?" she stammered.

"Captain Wyatt said he flew into Heathrow late last night. It was the first flight he could get once the situation at the airport at Stuttgart was resolved. He rented a car and was on his way to see you. It was very early in the morning, so there were hardly any cars on the road. When he took the exit off the A66, he spotted Max walking along the slip road. He picked him up, got him some breakfast, and was on his way to you when he was pulled over by a patrol car."

Quinn opened her mouth, thought better of saying anything, and shut it again. None of this made sense, and she had so many questions, but before she said anything more to DI Sherman, she needed to speak to Jude. There had to be a reason he hadn't called her. She could understand him not phoning in the middle of the night to tell her he was flying out, but why wouldn't he have let her know that he had Max? Surely he must have realized how frantic she was and that the police would be out in full force looking for the little boy. Jude had picked up Max, bought him breakfast, and got back on the road. Had he really been coming to see them, or had he been planning to take Max to London?

"Can I see my brother?" Quinn asked.

"I expect you have much to talk about," DI Sherman said as she replaced the photocopies in the folder and stood. She opened the door and smiled brightly. "Ah, and there's Max. Hello. Are you all finished, love?"

Max nodded solemnly, then looked away guiltily when he spotted Quinn.

"Max," she called out to him, but the child turned around and ran towards Jude, who was walking down the corridor. He threw himself into his uncle's arms and buried his face in his chest when Jude picked him up.

"Leave it for now," Jude said as he approached. "Are we free to go?" he asked DI Sherman.

"Yes, but you can't drive with Max without a child seat. You can ask someone to bring one, or purchase a seat before you leave. There's a shop just down the road." She pointed in the direction of the place she meant. "Have a peaceful day," the policewoman said, somewhat caustically.

She could have given Jude a fine for driving without a car seat earlier, but, since he had never expected to be driving with Max, he could hardly be held accountable.

Quinn trailed after Jude as he walked out of the station and made his way to the shop. Once they were ready to go, Jude strapped Max into the car seat and they got on their way. Quinn and Jude had much to talk about, but they would have to wait until they were alone. Nothing they had to say was suitable for Max's ears, and, given how deeply upset he already was, they had to consider their every word.

SIXTY-NINE

Once Quinn and Jude returned to the boathouse, it was decided that they would all leave for London right away. And it wasn't until they got back, had dinner, and sent the kids to bed that Quinn and Jude could finally speak privately. By that point, she was no longer angry with him for not calling, just grateful that he had spotted Max and made sure he was safe.

They stepped outside into the garden, and Quinn wrapped her arms around Jude and pressed her face to his chest. He'd changed so much since she had first met him. Then, he had been an angry, disgruntled young man who'd found solace in his music, booze, and drugs. Now, he was a husband, a father, and a career soldier, and his demeanor reflected his need to guard and protect. He hugged her back, and they remained that way for a few seconds, their mutual concern for Logan and love for Max binding them.

"Why didn't you ring me?" Quinn said when Jude finally let her go.

"I did. Several times."

"I don't have any missed calls from you."

Jude's expression was pained. "I called from a pay-as-you-go phone. It wasn't until I was already on my way that I realized I left my phone at the rental car counter. I didn't want to waste time going back to the airport, so I bought a burner at an all-night kiosk and headed straight up to the Lake District. I rang the rental car company and asked them to hold on to my mobile until I return the car."

Quinn sighed in exasperation. Of all the times to forget his phone, this was probably the most inconvenient, but she now knew who'd tried to reach her from an unregistered number that she'd blocked.

"Why didn't you leave a message?"

"Because Max was in a state, and then you blocked the number. And then I realized I was being followed by a patrol car. I tried to explain, but they were under the impression that I had kidnapped Max and had me in handcuffs before I could produce my ID."

“I’m sorry about that, but I was in a panic,” Quinn explained. “I honestly believed Max had been taken.”

“Yeah, I figured. It’s all right, Quinny. You did the right thing. Imagine if someone else had seen him first, or if no one had and he’d kept going.”

“You would think someone would call the police if they saw a little boy on his own,” she said.

“Most people would, but there are some who would see it as an opportunity.”

“What a sad world we live in when an unattended child is a pleasant surprise.”

“There has always been evil in the world. We didn’t invent it,” Jude said soberly. “And sometimes people you think are basically decent will do terrible things when they know they’ll get away with it.”

Quinn didn’t think they were speaking about Max anymore. Jude had been to war zones and had seen the victims of war crimes. He knew all about evil and lack of accountability. But now wasn’t the time to put the world to rights. All she cared about was her brother and nephew.

“Jude, what’s happening? Where can Logan be? DI Malone suggested that he torched his car for the insurance and took off voluntarily. They’re not doing anything to find him.”

“Perhaps that’s not a bad thing,” Jude replied.

“What do you mean?”

“Look, whatever happened will not look good for Logan. So maybe it’s better that the police don’t focus on him. At best, they could send in social services to take Max, and, at worst, he could be arrested.”

“On what charge?”

“He clearly got involved in something he shouldn’t have, and the scheme went tits up.”

“What scheme? Do you know something?” Quinn asked.

“I don’t. I’m just speculating.”

“So, what do we do now? And what do we tell Max? He is distraught. And he thinks we’re not trying to find Logan. Where can he be?”

Jude’s expression was thoughtful. “When we were small, our parents used to take us to Nare Head on holiday. One day, Logan and I found this abandoned bunker. We were so excited. And we were even more thrilled to discover that there was a manhole that led to a subterranean level. We were

lucky not to come upon an unexploded grenade," he said with a shake of the head.

Quinn looked at him, uncomprehending. "What does that have to do with the current situation?"

"I think that if Logan was going to hide out anywhere, it would be there."

"You think Logan is in some bunker in Cornwall?"

Jude shrugged. "It's the only thing I can think of. I'm going to go there tomorrow. Check it out."

"Then I'm coming with you."

"I don't think you should leave Max," Jude said. "Not after…"

"I wasn't going to. We'll take Max with us."

"All right," Jude said resignedly. "But what do we tell him?"

"We'll tell him the truth, that we're looking for Logan. We might not find him, but at least Max will know that we're doing something to find his dad."

Jude turned to go back inside. "I'm going to the airport to collect my phone, then I'm going to Logan's."

"You can stay here."

"You have a full house, and I don't fancy sleeping on the sofa. Besides, it will give me a chance to poke about. Maybe I'll find something relevant. I'll collect you at eight." Quinn nodded, and Jude pulled her into a hug. "We'll find him, Quinn."

"Yes," she replied, but she no longer believed it.

SEVENTY

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Honor

Honor stood beside her father and Jesse at the foot of the stairs and watched as Geneva finally descended. Both men looked up at her and smiled, and it wasn't the perfunctory, absentminded smile men often gave to female relations. It was genuine admiration, even pride. What was it about Geneva that inspired such devotion? She had always been their father's favorite, and Jesse had had eyes only for her from the moment he'd set foot inside Bellamy Hall. Rory was besotted too, and even now probably harbored hope that Geneva would change her mind and run away with him. Despite the vast differences in their upbringing, their social standing, and their views, he loved her and would bend over backwards to make her happy if she allowed it.

When Honor looked in the mirror, she saw a girl who was lovely and spirited, but she wasn't aloof like Geneva. Was it that she gave too much away, while Geneva managed to keep everyone slightly off balance, even their father? Why were some women magnets for admiration while others were quietly overlooked? She hated giving in to jealousy, but the truth was that, even though Geneva had not chosen this path, she was still getting the better end of the bargain. She would marry their handsome cousin, inherit the family's titles and wealth, and one day become the matriarch of the Bellamy family. Honor, meanwhile, was to be shipped off to Switzerland with Rose to be polished, as if she were a gem of the wrong size and cut and did not shine brightly enough to attract the right husband. Perhaps Rose needed polishing, but Honor thought she was perfectly fine as she was.

Her turbulent thoughts broke apart as the guests began to arrive. Douglas welcomed them warmly and introduced them to Jesse. He beamed

at the younger man as though welcoming a long-lost son, and Honor supposed he was the closest thing now that his own boys were gone. Jesse was her father's last hope, and he was clearly relieved to find that he wasn't some rough-and-tumble yokel from the frontier towns Honor had seen in American films, like *The Silent Call* or *The Broken Spur*. That was what she had imagined when she'd first heard he had been raised in Montana. But Geneva, as usual, had luck on her side. No rough rustic for her, but a man who charmed everyone he met and made their father glow with pride.

Honor felt a little better when she spotted Rose. She loved her cousin dearly, but Rose was as determined as she was awkward. No matter how much Aunt Clarissa harangued her, Rose remained a funny duckling rather than the graceful swan her mother kept hoping for. She simply needed time, Honor thought with a generosity that surprised her. Rose would come into her own; everyone blossomed at their own pace. She had little interest in marriage and still clung to childish pursuits, like spying on the adults and eavesdropping on their conversations, just as Geneva and Honor had done together when they were little. Rose liked to know things. Perhaps it was her way of gaining a measure of control over a world in which no one ever asked for her opinion.

The gong for supper finally sounded, and the guests filed into the dining room. Jesse sat to her father's right, Geneva to his left. Aunt Clarissa bristled as she took her place farther down the table, clearly believing she ought to be nearer her brother to demonstrate her importance. Honor did not care where she sat. She did not expect to enjoy the evening until the men had finished their brandy and cigars and rejoined the ladies in the drawing room. Then the carpet would be rolled back and Jesse's records played on the gramophone. She could hardly wait to dance, and she felt a pang of sympathy that Rose would miss the only fun part of the evening.

Honor met Rory's eyes across the table and smiled. His brow furrowed as he returned her gaze, but she wanted nothing more from him than a little mischief and a chance to strike back at the people who considered her inconsequential. Tonight, she would be the cat among the pigeons.

SEVENTY-ONE

Rose's face drooped with misery when Aunt Clarissa ordered her upstairs. She looked longingly at the gramophone and the younger guests, who were eager to dance and welcome in the new year. The older folk were breaking up into small groups and settling in for quiet conversation while they enjoyed, or more likely tolerated, the newfangled music that was an affront to their ears, and attempted to drown their distaste in glasses of expensive champagne.

Honor went to sit by her father. Douglas had made it through supper but had eaten very little, and was now relaxing in his favorite chair by the hearth. He looked pale, and his forehead was damp with perspiration, even though the room was pleasantly cool. He was barely managing, but she knew he would refuse to retire if anyone suggested it. He had sent Nurse Jeffries downstairs to celebrate with the servants and was now waiting patiently for the engagement announcement, which would be made immediately after the midnight toast. And then he would go upstairs and rest easy in the knowledge that he had done what was expected of him and had passed the torch to a new generation.

The music finally began, and Honor tried to suppress her burning envy as Jesse led Geneva to the center of the floor. Geneva, whose expression was serious, as if she were about to undertake an arduous task, suddenly brightened. She grinned at Jesse conspiratorially and they began to dance, their movements almost completely in sync, as if they had practiced beforehand. Had they? Honor wondered, as other couples joined them and tried to copy the steps.

Determined to get in on the fun, Honor marched up to Rory and held out her hand. She had promised her sister that she would keep him away from her, and he could hardly refuse in front of all these people. It would be very bad manners indeed, and Rory was a gentleman. At least with her. She had tried to kiss him, but he had taken her firmly by the shoulders and pushed her away. What had he thought she was going to do? She wasn't

fool enough to compromise her future. All she'd wanted was to learn a few things every woman should know, and the best way to do that was to try it on with the hired help, who would be torn between their astonishment at being chosen and their desire to keep their position and do whatever it took to keep the lady happy so she wouldn't complain to her father.

Honor's plan just might have worked if Rory wasn't already leaving England and so didn't give a fig about his future at Bellamy Hall. The only thing she could do to hurt him would be to accuse him of assault, but that would do her reputation more harm than Rory's. And she had no desire to ruin his life. She'd let him go and wish him well. But first, she'd dance until she was giddy with excitement and champagne, and until she showed her sister and Jesse that she was not to be dismissed.

Rory was obviously reluctant, but she grabbed him by the hand and pulled him onto the dance floor. As she'd predicted, he was too polite to say no, and, since Geneva was dancing with Jesse, he had no other partner. Honor beamed, and Rory smiled back, the tension easing out of his shoulders as he began to dance. Their moves weren't as practiced as her sister's and Jesse's, but they did all right, and before long they were jigging like they had been dancing together for years. It really was exhilarating to dance with an actual man. Until then, she'd only danced with Geneva.

"You're a cracking dancer," Honor whispered.

"Ye're no slouch yourself. And ye look simply smashing tonight," Rory replied.

Honor grinned. "As good as Geneva?"

"Better."

Rory grabbed her around the waist and pulled her close, but loosened his hold when he caught sight of Douglas, who looked none too pleased.

"I'm almost sorry I'm leaving," Rory said quietly.

"Then don't go."

He didn't reply.

"I could use some air," Honor said when the song came to an end. "It's warm in here."

"I think ye're drunk," Rory teased.

"All the more reason. The cold breeze will help me to sober up. Will you join me in the garden?" she purred.

"I will, but only because I don't think ye should go by yerself."

"Why? What do you think will happen to me?"

“The world is full of danger, Honor. Especially for a beautiful woman.”

She lifted her hand to her bosom and gave him her best coy smile. “You think I’m beautiful?”

“Don’t ye?” he teased.

“Let me get a coat,” Honor said, and sauntered towards the door. Rory followed, and, as soon as she wrapped herself in a fur-lined wrap, she led Rory through the house and out the door that led to the moonlit garden.

The night was cold and still, the sky a blanket of stars. Honor could hear the gentle rush of waves rolling onto the shore and smell the smoke drifting from the chimneys. Warm amber light glowed in the windows, and music and laughter floated from the house, but in the garden they were blessedly alone.

She leaned into Rory and smiled into his eyes. “I’m cold,” she said. “Maybe you can warm me.”

Rory looked down at her, his expression irritatingly guarded. “What is it that ye want from me, Honor?”

“I want to know what it is to be a woman.”

“It means responsibility and sacrifice. And pain.”

And she knew he was referring to Geneva. It made her angry that even at this moment, when she was suggestively pressing her hips to his, he was thinking of her sister.

“Forget about Geneva. She didn’t waste any time on you,” Honor snapped, and saw a flash of anger in Rory’s eyes. “I’d come with you if you asked.”

“Would ye?”

Honor thought he was teasing, but she didn’t care. “Yes, I would. And I will come with you now, if you invite me to your cottage.”

Rory looked at her for a long moment, then took a step back. “It’s nearly midnight, and I believe yer father is about to announce Geneva’s engagement. I think yer sister would want ye there.”

“And what if I don’t want to be?” Honor pouted.

“Remember what I said about sacrifice and responsibility?”

“You’re an awful wet blanket, Rory Sullivan.”

“Not all the time. I know how to enjoy myself.”

“Go on, then—prove it,” Honor said.

“Come to my cottage when the party’s over. If ye’ve the nerve,” Rory said.

He rested a hand at the small of her back and steered her inside, but not before Honor whispered, “Challenge accepted.”

SEVENTY-TWO

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

"I really don't think you should take Max with you," Gabe said when Quinn informed him of their plan to go to Cornwall after Jude had left. "Imagine his disappointment if Logan is not there."

"I'm afraid he's going to run off again," Quinn said. "I only want to keep him safe."

"Leave Max with me. I have a staff meeting at nine, but then I can skip out for a few hours. I will take Max to the Natural History Museum."

"Gabe, you can't keep doing this."

"So, what do you suggest?"

Quinn considered the problem. Gabe was right. Max would be heartbroken if Logan wasn't there. But what was the alternative? She didn't think it was safe to take Max to nursery, and Ruth Watley had asked her not to bring him in as long as there was the possibility of another kidnapping attempt. And whoever had tried to take him was still out there, just waiting for them to lower their guard and offer her an opportunity.

"Daisy," she finally announced triumphantly. "I can ask her to mind Max for a few hours."

Gabe nodded. "That a good idea."

Max adored his cousin, and Daisy was at a loose end until school started next week. She had recently returned from the States and was about to start at University College London, where she was planning to pursue a law degree. Quinn trusted Daisy implicitly and knew that she would take good care of the little boy. But she didn't think Daisy and Max should go to a crowded public place where Max could be snatched. It would be best if they spent the day at home. There was plenty they could do indoors or in the garden.

"Dad," Mia called from upstairs. "Dad, Alex is being mean to me."

“I am not,” Alex hollered.

“Here we go,” Gabe grumbled and headed upstairs.

Quinn was just about to ring Daisy when her mobile vibrated. It was Drew, so she answered immediately.

“Drew, are you still in the Czech Republic?”

“No, I’m back,” he said. “Just got in.”

“Were you able to find anything out?”

The heavy sigh told its own story. “Chrissy was estranged from her parents, which explains why she didn’t return home after Max was born, but they reconciled when she became ill. Her mum said Chrissy was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had surgery and follow-up treatment in London, but, once her course of chemo came to an end, she came home.”

“Were you able to speak to her?” Quinn asked.

“The cancer had metastasized. Chrissy died four months ago. She’s buried in Kladno. I saw her grave.”

“Oh my God,” Quinn exclaimed. “Poor Chrissy. She was so young.”

“Thirty-one. According to Chrissy’s mum, her partner’s name was Ronnie, but she never knew his surname. He worked in construction.”

“Did he go home with her?”

“No. He remained in London.”

“And Logan? Were you able to learn anything more?”

“I don’t have any new leads. A mate has been monitoring Logan’s phone and banking activity, and there’s nothing. I’m sorry, Quinn.”

She stifled a sob so Drew wouldn’t hear her cry. But she knew what he was saying. No activity meant no hope. Even if Logan was hiding somewhere, he’d need money, and if he had a burner phone he could have called. He’d want to know that Max was all right.

“I will keep at it, but I don’t think you should get your hopes up,” Drew said gently. “And you need to make arrangements for Max.”

“Thank you,” Quinn choked out and ended the call. She couldn’t bring herself to accept that Logan was dead. She simply couldn’t.

She knew what she could do to learn the truth, but she didn’t think she had the strength to witness Logan’s final moments. It would break her. The only other person who could help was Daisy. Quinn hated to ask her niece. Daisy had suffered enough when she’d seen shocking and painful visions of her mother, Jo, but Quinn needed to know what had happened to Logan. She would never be able to move on otherwise. And she had to figure out

what to tell Max. It would be cruel to keep hope alive if Logan was really gone.

Quinn walked into the kitchen, took out a bottle of whisky, and took a large swig. And then she rang Daisy.

SEVENTY-THREE

Quinn spent a restless night. Every time she drifted into sleep, her mind supplied horrific scenarios, each ending with Logan's agonizing death. She could see the outline of the earring container on her bedside table, but didn't reach for it. The past was a kind of drug, but she couldn't escape into it tonight. She didn't want to. She needed to feel her fear and grief because everything would change tomorrow. Everything depended on what Daisy saw, and if Logan was indeed gone, Quinn would have to adapt to a new reality—something she had already done too many times in the past few years.

After living vicariously through the people in her cases, she knew her own life was charmed. For all her losses, she lived in the most advanced, enlightened era so far, with access to therapy, medication, and countless ways to ease emotional pain. She wasn't condemned by the conventions of her time to hide her grief. She could talk about her feelings, dull the sharp edges, and eventually crawl out the other side—battered, perhaps, but not destroyed. Still, despite the available resources, she had buried her emotions when Phoebe and Sylvia had died, focusing instead on guiding her family through an unprecedented crisis. She had almost erased Brett and Jo from her heart; she'd known them for so short a time that she could pretend they'd never been truly hers.

But she couldn't erase Logan. She loved him, depended on him, and adored Max. And she knew exactly what losing a parent so suddenly and brutally could do to a five-year-old child. Whatever tomorrow brought, she would face it head-on. She would put Max first. He deserved that much from the family he had left, and they would see him through.

Quinn was giddy with exhaustion when the doorbell chimed at ten past eight. Gabe and the children had only just left, Max was still picking at his breakfast, and Quinn was nursing her second cup of coffee and not yet dressed for the day. She went to the door, but instead of opening it immediately—as she once might have—she peered through the window to

make sure she recognized the visitor. Jude stood on the step, looking as if he were running on pure adrenaline.

SEVENTY-FOUR

"Make me a cup of coffee, will you?" he asked Quinn after he'd given Max a hug and helped himself to his uneaten toast. "Can you give us a few minutes, buddy? Aunt Quinn and I need to talk."

"About Dad?" Max asked.

Jude nodded. He tensed as though he thought Max was about to ask what they were going to talk about, but Max simply walked out of the kitchen, his head bowed and his shoulders stooped as if he were an old man and not a little boy.

"That poor child," Jude said softly. "What a toll this is taking on him." He sat down at the table, accepted a mug of coffee, and added a splash of cream. "You look shattered," he told Quinn.

"I couldn't sleep. You don't look so great yourself."

"I don't think Logan is in Cornwall."

"Based on what?"

Quinn thought it was mad to go poking about in some World War Two bunker but, for lack of any other alternatives, she had been prepared to make the drive. She'd needed to do something, since sitting around and waiting for news was killing her. But that was before she had decided to appeal to Daisy.

"I went through the whole house last night. Room by room, cupboard by cupboard, drawer by drawer."

"The police searched the house," Quinn reminded him.

"Yes, but they were looking for evidence of a crime. I was looking for something different."

"And did you find it?"

He nodded and took a noisy gulp of coffee. "Logan was involved with someone."

"He did date."

"I don't mean a casual fling," Jude replied. "He was in a relationship."

"What makes you say that?"

“There was a second toothbrush in his bathroom.”

Quinn rolled her eyes in exasperation. “Yeah, Max’s.”

Jude shook his head. “It was an adult-size toothbrush, and Max’s toothbrush is still in his own bathroom.”

“OK, so you found a toothbrush. Maybe Logan had an overnight guest.”

“I found shoes,” Jude announced triumphantly.

“Shoes?”

“Trainers. Logan wears eleven and a half, and these shoes were a nine. There was also a sweatshirt in Logan’s bedroom. Medium.”

Logan wore large, sometimes even extra-large. He’d gained a few pounds in recent years and had not been able to shift them. Quinn had to admit that this was definite proof that Logan had been seeing someone. A casual fling wasn’t likely to leave his shoes, not if he wasn’t sure he was coming back.

“Do you think the man who followed him from the hospital could be the bloke he was seeing?” Jude asked.

“I don’t know. He never mentioned a new partner.”

Jude cocked his head to the side, his gaze thoughtful. “Logan was never secretive by nature. He’s open and honest and doesn’t like to play games. He came out to Mum and Dad when he was fifteen. He was terrified of their reaction, but he couldn’t lie to them.”

“People change.”

“Not Logan,” Jude insisted.

“Jude, he never mentioned anyone to either of us.”

“There must be a reason he decided to keep it on the down-low,” Jude insisted.

“Maybe he simply wasn’t ready. He was heartbroken when he and Colin called it quits. And then Rafe walked out on him and left him alone with a toddler during what had to be the hardest year of Logan’s life. And he has to be cautious now that he has Max to consider. There are a lot of sick people out there who would abuse their position if brought into a child’s life.”

Jude’s expression suddenly changed, as if he’d had an a-ha moment. “Max. He must know who it is.”

“Maybe he never saw the person. If he came round after Max went to bed and left before he woke, Max would have no clue.”

“Kids know everything, even when we think they don’t,” Jude said with unwavering conviction. “We need to ask him.”

“I don’t want to upset him any more than he’s already upset,” Quinn protested.

“Quinn, we’ve run out of options. The police are not doing anything to find Logan, especially now that they know Max wasn’t abducted. Drew has hit a brick wall, and there’s been no word from Logan. It seems to me we don’t have much of a choice.”

“All right, but after.”

“After what?”

“After I have a peek,” Quinn replied.

Jude fixed her with a searching stare. “Do you mean you plan to do the clairvoyant thing?”

Quinn nodded. Like everyone else in the world, Jude now knew about Quinn’s psychic ability, but she’d never told anyone besides Gabe about Daisy. If Daisy wanted to tell people, then it was up to her. But Quinn didn’t think it was her place to out her to Jude.

“When Daisy gets here, I’ll ask her to stay with me. I can’t do this alone.”

“I can stay with you,” Jude offered.

“Maybe you can take Max for a walk. He’s safe with you, and I will need quiet.”

“All right.” He reached out and covered Quinn’s hand with his own. “Are you afraid?”

“Terrified. I can’t bear to see Logan die.”

“Do you think I’d know if he was gone?” Jude asked. “People sometimes say they can feel when someone they love passes from the world.”

Gabe had felt it when Phoebe had died. He had woken in the middle of the night, sat up, and buried his face in his hands. When Quinn had stirred and wrapped her arms around him, she had realized he was crying. They hadn’t received the call until that afternoon, after Phoebe’s neighbor had gone to check on her following several unanswered messages from Gabe. The poor woman had been frightened—and who could blame her, given that several of her neighbors had already died?—but through the window she had seen Phoebe curled on the sofa, eyes staring, mouth slack. The neighbor had phoned Phoebe’s friend Cecily, who’d called an ambulance

and later arranged for the cremation. The urn had been placed beside Gabe's father's.

"Do you feel like Logan is gone?" Jude asked. "No, don't say anything. I don't think I'm ready to hear the answer."

The doorbell rang, and they both turned fearfully towards the door.

SEVENTY-FIVE

Daisy cried out in delight when Max threw himself into her arms and kissed her face. She hugged him fiercely and kissed him on both cheeks before finally setting him down.

"I'm so happy to see you," she said. "You've grown."

"Really?" Max asked, clearly pleased.

"Definitely. At least two inches. And look what I got you."

She held out a gift bag. Inside was a box wrapped in blue-and-white paper and tied with a blue ribbon. There was a huge silver bow at the center.

"It's not my birthday," Max said as he pulled out the box and shook it experimentally.

"Do I need a reason to give my favorite cousin a gift?"

"No," Max cried. He looked happy for the first time in days, and Quinn could have kicked herself for not thinking to ring Daisy before. She could always make him smile, even when he was sad.

Max carried the box into the lounge, tore off the wrapping paper, and pulled out a remote-controlled helicopter.

"This is next level," he exclaimed, and Quinn's eyes pricked with tears because he sounded so like Logan. "Can we fly it right now?"

Daisy looked at Quinn, but it was Jude who came to the rescue. "How about we take it to the park," he suggested. "There isn't enough room indoors, and if we fly it out back and it lands in someone else's garden, we might have a problem getting it back."

"OK," Max said.

"Get your trainers on, mate," Jude said and turned to Daisy. "I hope you got batteries."

"Of course I did."

She took a pack of batteries from her satchel and handed it to Jude, who popped open the remote control and installed them before moving on to the helicopter. Max came running back. He had on his shoes and cagoule, and was wearing a red cap.

“Ready?” Jude asked as he handed the helicopter to Max and grabbed the remote. “Ladies, we’ll be back in an hour.”

“Can we watch *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* when I get back?” Max asked Daisy.

“Of course. Love Harry Potter.”

As soon as Jude and Max were gone, Quinn turned to Daisy. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

Daisy smiled sadly, her eyes warm with sympathy. “Of course I don’t want to, but I owe it to Max. And to you. You’ll never be at peace until you find out what happened to Logan. So let’s just do it quickly. Like tearing a plaster off.”

Quinn nodded. Daisy was right. They’d know as soon as Daisy picked up something of Logan’s if he was alive or dead. Then they could decide how to proceed.

Daisy settled on the sofa while Quinn walked into the kitchen. She pulled on a rubber glove, then opened a side drawer and took out a pair of aviator sunglasses. Logan had forgotten them when he came by a few weeks ago, and she had forgotten to return them to him when he’d next come round. She carried the glasses through to the lounge and handed them to Daisy. Then she yanked off the glove and tossed it on the coffee table. Quinn watched intently as Daisy shut her eyes and leaned back against the cushions. Her hands were clenched, her shoulders hunched, and her eyes moved rapidly beneath the lids.

Realizing she was holding her breath, Quinn sucked in some air. Her chest felt tight and her hands were trembling. Daisy had been holding the glasses for only a few seconds, but it felt like much longer—eons. She wished Daisy would say something, or that Quinn could glean the truth from her expression, but her niece was perfectly still, her breathing coming in shallow gasps. Quinn was just thinking she couldn’t wait a second longer when Daisy dropped the glasses into her lap and opened her eyes. The two women looked at each other, each searching the other’s face.

And then Daisy smiled.

SEVENTY-SIX

Quinn rested her head on Gabe's shoulder and sighed heavily. Another day had passed, and, even though they now knew Logan was still alive, they were no closer to figuring out where he'd gone or why. After Jude and Max had returned from the park, it had been decided that they wouldn't drive down to Cornwall. It was a wild goose chase based on nothing but their mounting desperation. And to take Max along would only give him false hope, which was sure to end in bitter disappointment.

"What will you do now?" Gabe asked once the silence had stretched on for too long.

"I don't know, but Jude must return to base, and I suppose we have no choice but to carry on." She sighed. "Jude found Max's passport while he was at Logan's. He offered to take him for a few weeks."

"Will you let him?"

"I think Max will be safer in Germany. No one will be able to gain access to him on the base."

"What a dreadful thing to happen to a small child. The not knowing will haunt him for the rest of his days if Logan doesn't come back." Gabe paused, and Quinn thought she knew what he was about to ask. "Quinn, is it possible that the man we saw following Logan had nothing to do with his disappearance? Could Logan have cracked under the strain and walked out of his life?"

Quinn lifted her head and looked at him. With all her heart she wanted to say that no, Logan would never do that, but now she wasn't certain. Perhaps DI Malone was right and Logan had made the choice to leave. He'd had some sort of breakdown, or maybe there was something he couldn't face. He'd gone knowing that Max would be safe with her and Gabe. People walked out on their children every day, fathers and mothers, who, until that fateful date, had been loving parents.

"I don't know," she said at last. "I don't want to believe it of Logan, but I have been let down before, so I have to question his motives."

“What about the Bellamy case?”

“I now think the victim might be Honor, but I have yet to witness the moment of her death. I suppose once Jude and Max leave, I will be able to return to the story.”

“It seems odd—” Gabe began, but then the doorbell rang.

Some desperate part of Quinn’s heart leapt at the sound, thinking it was Logan come back to them, but when she opened the door, she found a dripping Drew on the doorstep.

“It’s really coming down,” he said as he stepped inside and shook his head like a dog. Droplets of water flew in all directions, and Quinn jumped back to avoid getting wet.

“Sorry about that,” Drew said and smiled contritely. “Can we talk?”

“Of course. Would you like some tea?”

“Yeah, that’d be grand.”

Drew set down his rucksack, shrugged off his coat, and followed Quinn into the kitchen. Gabe came to join them a moment later. Once the kettle had boiled and small talk was out of the way, Quinn and Gabe both turned to Drew, waiting for him to explain the reason for his visit.

“Is Max here?” Drew asked.

“He’s asleep.” Quinn experienced a sinking feeling. “Is it bad news?”

“No, but I don’t want to get Max’s hopes up. Not if my hunch proves wrong.”

“What hunch is that?” Gabe asked.

“I had some time to theorize on my flight back from Prague, and I kept coming back to the same thought. A person can’t disappear without either preparing in advance or having someone help them. As far as I can tell, Logan hadn’t planned his escape, so there are only two possibilities left. Either he’s—” Drew looked at Quinn apologetically. “Please forgive my bluntness, but it needs to be said. Either he’s dead and his body is well hidden, or someone is aiding him.”

“Jude thinks Logan was in a relationship with someone,” Quinn said.

Drew nodded. “I think Jude might be right.”

“But we don’t know who his partner might be.”

Drew took a sip of tea and set down the mug. “I asked a friend who shall remain nameless to hack into the NHS database.”

“Why?” Gabe asked.

“Something Chrissy’s mum said about her boyfriend got me thinking, so I decided to check if she had next of kin listed in her medical file.”

“How is this relevant?”

“At the very least it would help me find this Ronnie.”

“Do Chrissy’s parents know about Max?” Quinn asked.

“I saw a photo of him in their bedroom. Through the open door,” Drew hastened to add. “The photo looked fairly recent, taken in the past year.”

“Where did they get it?” Gabe asked.

“Presumably from Chrissy. She may have been spying on Logan and Max.”

“Do you think Chrissy’s parents want to take their grandson?” Gabe asked.

“That was my thought as well. As you know, your brother, God bless his trusting little heart, tried to cut too many corners when he decided to have a child of his own. He did not use a donor egg to ensure that maternal feelings did not get in the way of his path to parenthood, nor did he fork out for experienced legal counsel. If he had, his lawyer would have advised him that legally, Chrissy is Max’s primary parent unless a Parental Order that transfers legal parenthood to Logan was filed with Family Court. Now, because Chrissy came here illegally, Logan probably assumed that she wouldn’t want to draw too much attention to herself or take him to court if she changed her mind. And perhaps he was right. But if Chrissy’s parents decided to take legal action, they might have a chance of taking Max if Chrissy made a will and listed them as Max’s guardians.”

“And are they? Taking legal action, I mean?” Quinn asked.

Drew shook his head. “I don’t believe so, but something caught my eye when I checked Chrissy’s file. Someone accessed her medical records three weeks ago.”

“Who?” Quinn and Gabe asked in unison.

“Colin Scott.”

“Colin?” Quinn gaped at Drew. “Why would he need to see Chrissy’s medical file?”

“Possibly for the same reason I did. Or maybe he was trying to verify the facts of her illness and treatment.”

“And the only reason Colin would need to know that was if Logan had come to him for help,” Quinn reasoned.

“Precisely.”

“Was there a next of kin listed?” Gabe inquired.

“There was—Ronald Stalk. And our Ronnie hasn’t been to work since Logan went missing.”

“Perhaps he fled after the altercation with Logan,” Quinn said.

“Perhaps,” Drew agreed.

“Unless Logan was killed by this man, which we don’t think he was,” Gabe added meaningfully, and looked to Quinn to check if she wanted to enlighten Drew, “he must be hiding somewhere. And someone is helping him.”

“And we now know who that someone is,” Drew announced.

“Let’s go,” Quinn said.

“Gabe, if you wouldn’t mind looking after Max,” Drew said. “Quinn will be safe with me.”

Gabe nodded. “Of course.”

Before Quinn left, he pulled her into his arms and held her tight. She knew he understood how she was feeling. On the one hand, she wanted to wring Logan’s neck for being so bloody stupid. But on the other hand, all she wanted to do was to find him, and hold him, and reassure him that all would be well, and they would find a way to safeguard his family.

Quinn hardly noticed the rain. Her heart beat wildly, and she muttered a prayer under her breath as Drew’s Nissan pulled away from the curb. They were either about to get some answers or realize that they were wrong and lose any hope of ever finding Logan.

SEVENTY-SEVEN

Quinn didn't bother to ask Drew if he knew where he was going. She was sure he had already looked into Colin and had all the information he needed. She remained silent throughout the drive, her mind flitting from one scenario to another as she tried to understand what had happened to Logan. Drew parked in front of a luxury building on the Chelsea Waterfront and waited for her to get out. She looked up at the glass and chrome structure. A flat in one of these waterfront properties had to cost a bomb, but she supposed Colin and Adam could afford it. They were both successful in their work and had no dependents, so were free to live for their own pleasure.

Drew hastened his steps when an older man pushed open the door and walked out into the rainy night. He opened his umbrella and kept his eyes down as he walked down the street. Drew caught the door before it closed, and Quinn followed him into the foyer. She wondered how Adam felt about Colin helping his ex-boyfriend, or if he was even aware that Logan had come to Colin in his hour of need. Perhaps it was unwise to barge in this way and jeopardize Colin's relationship and possibly his career.

"Drew, perhaps we should ask Colin to meet us somewhere instead of showing up at his home. His partner might not know about Logan."

"Don't worry about his partner," Drew said. "I don't think he'll raise any objections."

Quinn turned to look at Drew, but his profile was inscrutable as he pressed the button to summon the lift. They rode to the top floor in silence. Quinn hung back when Drew knocked on the door. It had been clever not to announce their presence, but now she wondered if Colin would even let them in. She didn't hear any sounds behind the closed door, and, when nothing happened after a few moments, she assumed no one was in.

"I don't think anyone is at home."

Drew didn't reply but raised his hand to knock again. Another few moments passed, and then they heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps.

There was the metallic snick of an opening lock, and then Colin was standing in the doorway, his silhouette illuminated by the soft glow from the light fixture.

His initial reaction was surprise, but then he chuckled mirthlessly as he looked at Quinn, as if he should have known that she would figure it out. Not that she had. She would have never suspected Colin of being involved.

"Who's your friend?" he asked.

"This is Drew Camden."

Colin and Drew had never met, but Colin had heard the name and knew precisely what Drew did for a living.

"Come in," he said and stepped aside. "This is not a conversation to be had in the corridor."

Quinn gaped at the view beyond the floor-to-ceiling windows. Even on a cloudy, rainy night, it was spectacular. A sizable balcony overlooked the Thames, and she pictured Colin and Adam sitting out there on fine evenings, sharing a bottle of wine as they watched traffic on the river. The décor was as modern as the architecture—white leather sofas, asymmetrical metal end tables, and a long glass dining room table flanked by white leather chairs. The walls were off-white, the only items of color several canvases that although they depicted nothing in particular still brought to mind dramatic sunsets and stormy seas.

Colin gestured towards the sofa, then walked over to the sideboard and poured three glasses of French brandy. Quinn didn't like brandy, but her heart was racing and she needed something to calm her.

"Are you going to tell us what happened, or are we going to beat around the bush for a while?" Drew asked. He'd softened his words with a self-deprecating smile, as if to say, *I figured out part of it, but only you can tell us the rest.*

"How much do you know?" Colin asked as he sat in an armchair across from them.

"We know you accessed Chrissy's medical file and that you probably helped Logan to lie low this past week."

It was only when dense silence settled on the room that Quinn realized that Adam probably wasn't in the flat. He'd have come out if he were.

Colin studied Quinn over the rim of his glass. He appeared to be ignoring Drew, which she supposed was natural, given that the man had the power to land Colin in a world of trouble.

“Colin, please,” Quinn implored. “I’ve been going out of my mind, and Max is heartbroken. He needs to know what happened to his dad. You have my word that anything you reveal will remain in this room.”

Sighing heavily, Colin nodded. “Adam and I split just after the new year,” he said. “It was my decision. I hated to hurt him. He was one of the best people I had ever met, but I could no longer ignore the gaping hole inside my heart. I didn’t love him. I don’t think I ever had.”

Colin’s eyes grew moist, and his hand trembled as he set his tumbler on the coffee table. “It was always Logan for me. He was the love of my life—my soulmate. The longer I was away from him, the more I realized what a terrible mistake I had made and how empty my life had become.”

“Was it your things Jude found at Logan’s house?” Quinn asked.

Colin nodded. “It took months for Logan to agree to see me. He was understandably cautious and didn’t want to upset Max, so we only met after Max was asleep. I had denied Logan the family he’d always wanted, and I was the one who left him. I knew things with Rafe wouldn’t last, but Logan made emotional decisions and threw himself into a relationship with someone who seemed to worship him. Rafe would have agreed to anything to keep him, so, when Logan said he wanted a child, Rafe went along with it and even introduced him to Chrissy.”

“Was Rafe in on this scheme to take Max?” Drew asked.

“No. Rafe is not to blame. He simply wasn’t ready for the sort of commitment Logan was after. Rafe is one of those men who will always remain a child at heart, no matter how old he gets.”

“Colin, what happened?” Quinn asked softly.

“About a month ago, a man named Ronnie Stalk rang Logan. He said he was Chrissy’s partner and that Chrissy wanted Max back. He sent a video of Chrissy, talking about how she would do anything to get Max and how she was the primary parent and had rights. Of course, Logan panicked. He tried to reach out to Chrissy, but her number was disconnected and no one seemed to know where she was. He was able to find out that Chrissy had been ill and had left her job at the nail bar months ago.”

“Was that when you logged into the NHS to see what was what?” Drew asked.

Colin nodded. “The prognosis hadn’t been good. Chrissy’s cancer had spread, and, although treatment could buy her some time, she wasn’t likely to live more than a few more months. There were no entries in her chart

after her last chemo session in April. Logan thought she might have gone home, so I rang a colleague in Prague. He was able to confirm that Chrissy had died and obtained a copy of her death certificate."

"Wait, if Chrissy was in the country illegally, how was it that she had access to the NHS?" Quinn asked.

"Regardless of immigration status, no one is denied emergency medical care. And Chrissy was brought in to A&E when she began to hemorrhage. She was taken directly to the operating theater and had to have follow-up care. And then, once she realized how serious the situation was, she must have decided to go home, to people who loved her and would care for her in her final months."

"So, Logan knew Chrissy was dead," Drew confirmed.

"Yes, which meant that this bloke had used a video Chrissy had recorded before she became ill and only wanted money. Logan told him to sod off and blocked his number. But he wouldn't go away. Ronnie came to see him at the hospital. He said that legally Chrissy was the primary parent and could take Max anytime she wanted. When Logan told him he knew Chrissy was gone, Ronnie said her parents had a right to their grandson and could petition the court for custody. Which is rubbish. Logan is Max's biological father, and Max has lived with him from the start. Chrissy's parents had no legal rights."

"Unless both biological parents were deceased," Drew interjected.

"Precisely."

"Did Logan think Ronnie Stalk was working on behalf of Chrissy's parents?"

"Either that or he was just trying to shake him down."

"So, what happened the day Ronnie followed Logan home?" Drew asked.

"I think you should ask Logan that," Colin replied.

"We would if we could."

Quinn experienced a strange sensation, as if someone were watching her, and then noticed a reflection in the window that hadn't been there before. She whipped around to find Logan standing in the doorway. He looked anxious but otherwise unharmed.

"Logan!" she cried as she sprang to her feet and threw herself into his arms. "Thank God. Oh, thank God you're all right." Logan stiffened, and

Quinn pulled away and looked up into his face. “What did you do?” she whispered.

“I’m going to need some of that brandy,” Logan said as he sank into the vacant armchair.

Colin poured him a generous measure and handed him the tumbler before resuming his own seat. Logan took a gulp, then another, then set the nearly empty glass down. He didn’t look at Quinn.

“I told everyone I wasn’t in contact with Chrissy, but I did speak to her from time to time, and I sent her photos of Max. It seemed cruel to refuse. She came to me several times during the pandemic. She wasn’t able to work and was skint, and I willingly helped her. She was Max’s mother, after all, and she had given me the most precious gift. Chrissy wasn’t devious,” Logan said with a shake of the head. “She was trusting and naïve, the perfect mark for someone like Ronnie. The guy was a petty criminal and had been squatting on someone’s houseboat when they met. He took Chrissy out for fancy meals, gave her a few trinkets—probably stolen—and she was convinced he loved her. I distanced myself once she moved in with him. I had no idea Chrissy had died until Ronnie contacted me and I had no choice but to try to ring her.”

“So, what did he want?” Drew asked.

“At first, he asked for twenty thousand pounds, but once he realized I knew Chrissy was gone, he lowered the number to ten. He said he would see to it that I never saw Max again unless I paid up. I called his bluff and refused. And then I caught him following me when I was on my way to collect Max from nursery.”

Colin reached out and grasped Logan’s hand. Logan didn’t look at him, but some of the tension seemed to drain out of him.

“I wasn’t going to lead him to Max, so I decided to go home,” Logan said. “I had to see what he meant to do, and I knew the nursery would call you if I didn’t come for Max.”

“What did he do?” Drew asked.

“He forced his way in, held me at gunpoint, and demanded that I transfer money into his account.”

Quinn thought she was going to be sick as she pictured the scene. “And then?” she asked quietly.

“A car alarm went off outside, and he was momentarily distracted, so I charged him. He hadn’t expected it, but we were evenly matched, and I had

a decent chance of disarming him. We grappled, and he tried to shoot me in the stomach. I seized the gun by the barrel and wrenched it upwards just as it discharged. I knew he was dead before I even checked his pulse."

"Why didn't you ring the police? He attacked you in your own home," Quinn exclaimed.

"Yeah, and I killed him," Logan countered. "At worst, I'd be charged with manslaughter. At best, I would give Child Services and Chrissy's parents ammunition against me. Besides, I didn't know if he was working alone."

"What did you do?" Drew asked warily.

"I cleaned up, wrapped the body in a duvet, and stuffed it into the boot of my car. Then I put on a cap to hide my face from the cameras and drove away."

"Where did you go? They found your burned-out car in some abandoned lot," Quinn said.

Logan nodded. "I used Ronnie's burner to ring Colin and asked him to meet me at the lot. I knew there were no security cameras, and no one would have reason to follow Colin. We transferred the body and the towels I had used to wipe up the blood to Colin's SUV and set my car on fire, since it would retain traces of the victim's DNA even if I had it thoroughly cleaned."

Quinn turned to Colin. She was amazed that he would take such a risk, but he would clearly do anything for Logan, even if it meant risking everything he had achieved.

"So, where's the body now?" she asked.

"I cremated it," Colin replied. "I listed him as Joe Bloggs."

"Joe Bloggs?"

"That's a name commonly used for unidentified bodies," Drew explained.

"So why did you run?" Quinn asked, turning to Logan once again.

"I didn't know if someone would come looking for him, and then you sent the police to my house," Logan exclaimed. "I was afraid they'd find something and open an investigation."

"I had no choice," Quinn snapped. "I had no idea what happened to you. And what was I to tell Max? He was frantic."

Logan's eyes welled up. "I wanted to ring you and ask to speak to Max, but Colin wouldn't let me," he explained. "If anyone found out what

we'd done, we'd both go to prison. So Colin took Ronnie's phone and tossed it in the river, and he handed his wallet, which was full of credit cards, to a homeless guy who begs outside King's Cross. If anyone reported Ronnie missing and the police checked his financial activity, that would be proof of life, unless they pulled the footage and saw someone else using his credit cards. If they questioned the bloke, they'd assume the wallet had been stolen."

"No one is pursuing a case against you, Logan," Drew said. "Quinn reported you missing, but the police found no evidence of foul play and moved on, even after someone tried to abduct Max from the nursery school."

"What?" Logan cried.

"Some woman pretending to be Quinn turned up at the nursery school the following day."

"Is Max—?" Logan cried.

"Max is safe. But when Ronnie didn't come back, she either continued with the plan or decided to try her hand at blackmail and keep the money for herself. When the school refused to hand Max over, she fled."

"Is it safe for me to go home?" Logan asked. His gaze burned with hope. "I need to see my Maxie."

Drew nodded. "If anyone asks where you've been, say you went off the grid for a few days—maybe a walking holiday, and you and Quinn got your wires crossed. And while you were away, someone stole your car. No one is going to waste precious resources trawling through endless hours of CCTV to try to verify your whereabouts. And I seriously doubt that woman will try again. She shot her shot, and now she's out of ammunition."

"But what if she comes for Max again?" Logan exclaimed.

"Then you go to the police," Drew said. "All this could have been avoided if you had done that to begin with instead of taking the law into your own hands."

"I was afraid I'd lose my son."

"Now that I know what happened and have Ronnie's name, it won't be too difficult to track the woman down. I'll make sure she never troubles you again," Drew promised.

"Thank you," Logan said.

"Don't thank me yet," Drew said gruffly, and pushed to his feet. "I'll be in touch once I've had a word with her and explained what will happen if

she's charged with attempted kidnapping."

"Max will still be up," Quinn said, and Logan was on his feet before she'd even finished the sentence.

"I need to see my son."

"Go on," Colin said. "I'll be here when you're ready."

He shot Drew a worried look, but Drew shook his head. "As far as I'm concerned, you were nowhere near this, Doctor. It's case closed."

"Thank you," Colin said somberly.

"I can't believe this nightmare is finally over," Logan said.

Colin smiled at him, and his eyes shone with love. "He cried himself to sleep every night because he was worried about Max, even though I told him I had spoken to you and Max seemed to be all right."

"So, what's on the horizon for you two?" Quinn asked Colin when Drew had stepped outside to give them a few minutes and Logan popped into the other room to get his wallet and keys. "Have you changed your mind about being a dad?"

Colin nodded. "I was such a fool, Quinn. I will never forgive myself. But if Logan will have me, I would like to be a partner to him and a father to Max."

"You saved my life," Logan said as he came back into the room. "And I never want to be parted from you again. I was an idiot to take up with Rafe. I always knew it wasn't right."

"Sometimes two wrongs do make a right," Colin said. "Maybe we both needed to experience the loss to realize how much we love each other. Now go on. Max is waiting for you."

Max came running downstairs as soon as Quinn called out to him, and launched himself into Logan's arms from the third step.

"Oh, Daddy," he cried. "I missed you so much. Where have you been?"

Logan was holding Max so tight, Quinn thought the child might have difficulty breathing, but Max clung on.

"Did Aunt Quinn and Uncle Gabe not take good care of you?" Logan asked, expertly changing the subject.

Max nodded. "Yeah, they did. But I wanted to be with you. I missed you. Can we go home? And I miss my room and my toys."

“I missed you too, little buddy,” Logan said tearfully. “And yes, we can go home.”

“Uncle Jude is there,” Max announced. “I think he’s cross with you, but he’ll be happy to see you. I just know it. Can I stay up late?”

Logan nodded. “As late as you like.”

“Really? Till midnight?”

“I doubt you’ll last that long, but sure. Maybe we can make some popcorn and watch a film.”

“Yes!” Max cried. “But I get to pick.”

“You get to pick,” Logan agreed.

“But where were you?” Max tried again. “Aunt Quinn was worried. I saw her crying.”

“It was just a terrible misunderstanding. I had to go away for work, but Quinn never got my message.”

“But why didn’t you ring us? Did you lose your phone?”

“Yes, I did.”

Max nodded wisely. “It’s an awful thing to lose your phone. Can I get one?”

“Not just yet.”

“But what if I need to call you? In case of emergency?” Max tripped over the word, but his meaning was loud and clear. He wanted to have some control over his situation in the future.

“We’ll discuss it later, OK?”

“No, now,” Max said. “I want a phone.”

And so it went until Logan finally capitulated and promised that he would get Max a phone suitable for a child. Pleased to have won the argument, Max finally went upstairs to get dressed and collect his things.

Quinn couldn’t help but weep when father and son were finally reunited, and had to watch them from the kitchen so as not to upset Max. He glowed with happiness, his relief and joy at seeing his dad so poignant, it nearly broke her heart. She desperately wished he could have been spared the pain of their separation and the uncertainty that had followed, but, given how badly things could have ended, she supposed a few days apart wasn’t the worst thing that could have happened. And at five years old, he was satisfied with Logan’s explanation and focused on his own needs.

Gabe volunteered to drive Logan and Max home, where Jude was waiting for them. He wouldn’t accept the made-up explanation and would

want all the details, but he would support Logan no matter what. Even though he'd probably have a lot to say about Logan charging a man holding a loaded gun. Logan hadn't said what had happened to the gun, but it was probably at the bottom of the Thames as well, where no one would ever find it. Tomorrow, Jude would fly home and life would get back to normal, but perhaps they could celebrate Christmas in Germany this year. It was something to look forward to in the coming months.

Quinn went upstairs as soon as the children retreated to their bedrooms. She had managed to solve one mystery, but she still had to find out what had happened to the Lady of the Well. Tomorrow, she would begin to research the family to see if she could find any leads about how they had fared throughout the twentieth century, but tonight she wanted only to escape into the past and witness the events for herself. She shut the bedroom door and settled in her usual spot.

Then she reached for the earring.

SEVENTY-EIGHT

DECEMBER 1923

Ravenglass

Honor slipped into the drawing room just before midnight, glad no one seemed to have noticed her absence. The record had come to an end, and the servants passed around fresh glasses of champagne. The guests instinctively moved towards their loved ones so that they could kiss them at midnight, but at a few minutes to twelve, Douglas struggled to his feet, shuffled to the center of the room, and raised his hand.

"If I may have your attention."

Everyone stopped talking and turned to face him. They probably suspected what was coming, but they were still eager to hear the news from the horse's mouth. As Honor surveyed their faces, she thought few guests felt sympathy for any of the Bellamys. To Douglas's so-called friends, this was as entertaining as a stage production, a tragedy that had befallen someone else for their enjoyment. By tomorrow, everyone would know that Douglas was dying and that his daughter would marry a virtual stranger in order to save the family, or what was left of it, anyway. They would spend the coming days gossiping about Geneva, Jesse, and Honor, and debate ad nauseum all the ways in which Douglas had failed his children. It made her sick, and, just as her father began to speak, she backed out of the room and ran up the stairs. She would ring in the new year with Rose, her only real ally in this house. And then, after everyone left, she would slip out and go to Rory. She didn't care that he was leaving tomorrow. It was for the best, since she only needed him tonight.

Honor pushed open the door to Rose's bedroom. She thought Rose would be in bed, reading or sulking, but she was on her knees, dressed in the blouse and skirt she'd worn earlier in the day. Her head whipped about at the sound of the door opening, and her shoulders sagged in relief when she saw it was Honor.

“What are you doing?” Honor asked as she approached.

Rose was rifling through the contents of a suitcase, but she hastily shut the lid before Honor could see what was inside and sat back on her haunches. The case was plain brown cardboard, not at all the sort of luggage Aunt Clarissa was accustomed to. Her cases were leather and embossed with her initials.

“Whose case is that?”

“Why aren’t you at the party?” Rose countered.

Honor shrugged as a lump formed in her throat, and she felt the prickling of tears. She couldn’t bring herself to explain all the things she was thinking, and all the resentment she felt towards her father, her sister, and Jesse, but mostly towards a world that had robbed her of her mother and two brothers and was about to take away the remaining two people she loved. Starring tonight, she was on her own. She knew Rose would understand, but she didn’t want to start the new year on a sour note, and instead waved a dismissive hand, unwilling to articulate her thoughts.

“I wanted to ring in the new year with you,” she said. “You’re the only one in this house who cares how I feel.”

Rose nodded. “I do.”

Her cousin looked conflicted, as if she had a secret but wasn’t sure she could trust Honor.

“Rose, what is it? What’s on your mind?”

“I think Geneva is about to make a terrible mistake,” Rose blurted out. She flipped open the lid of the case to show her what was inside.

Honor peered at the navy-blue coat with brass buttons and the cap with a black patent visor and an emblem at the center. “Is that a military uniform?”

Rose looked at her as if she were an idiot. “It’s a steward’s uniform, from the White Star Line.” She took out the coat, trousers, and several pairs of white gloves. “And look at this.”

Her cousin handed her an envelope, and Honor took out the pages inside and unfolded them with shaking fingers. There were several letters from Mr. Lefferts, all addressed to Jesseph Bellamy, and two photographs. One photograph showed a dark-haired woman dressed in a high-necked gown with leg-of-mutton sleeves and a bodice fitted neatly to the waist. A boy of about ten stood before her. He was dark-haired and dark-eyed as well, his narrow, thin-lipped face rather homely, and his expression pinched.

Honor turned the photograph over. The inscription read: Constance and Jesseph, June 1901.

The second photograph depicted the same woman with a dark-haired man and appeared to be their wedding portrait: Alan and Constance Bellamy, October 1882.

Honor looked up from the portrait and was startled by Rose's expression. She looked almost exhilarated, and, when she smiled, the grin had a malicious edge to it.

"I don't understand," Honor said, even though she was beginning to get a fairly good idea of what Rose had discovered.

"Don't you see?" Rose exclaimed. "Jesse is an imposter. That's the real Jesseph, and he looks nothing like the man accepting heartfelt congratulations right about now. He was a steward on the RMS *Olympic*. He murdered the real Jesseph Bellamy and took his place."

"But the man who died was William Heller. It said so in the paper."

"Maybe he was traveling under an assumed name," Rose insisted.

"Surely he would have needed a valid passport to board the ship."

Rose sprang to her feet and snatched the newspaper she had shown them earlier. Honor stared at the photo of William Heller. He was about twenty years older, but there was little doubt he was the boy in the photograph with Constance Bellamy.

"This is proof," Rose announced. "William Heller is Jesseph Bellamy."

"Maybe there's a reasonable explanation," Honor tried again.

"Such as? That our handsome, successful cousin from America has a secret fantasy of becoming a ship's steward?"

"Rose, please," Honor moaned. "Don't you see what this revelation will do? If the man who died aboard the *Olympic* was truly our cousin, then there's no one left to inherit. We will lose everything."

"No, you won't," Rose protested. "The court will have to lift the entail, and Geneva will get it all."

"That's not how it works. Mr. Lefferts said so."

"So, you think your father should hand over everything, including his daughter, to some confidence trickster? I'm going to march down there right now and confront that man," Rose said. "In front of everyone." Her eyes glowed with manic excitement. "I will be written about in the papers, credited with solving a murder. I will be famous."

“Wait,” Honor cried, and grabbed Rose by the arm as she turned towards the door. “Rose, you can’t.”

“Why not? The man pretending to be Jesse is a murderer.”

“You don’t know that,” Honor protested. “The police thought Heller died of natural causes. Anaphylactic shock.”

“They’re a bunch of stupid clodhoppers who don’t know their arse from their elbow.”

“And you do?” Honor exclaimed.

“The evidence is staring you in the face, you little fool,” Rose cried. “How much more proof do you need? That man down there gave the real Jesseph something he was deathly allergic to and waited for him to die. Then he stole his identity.”

“You can’t confront him in front of everyone.”

“So, what do you propose we do?” Rose demanded.

“I don’t know, but you can’t go down there. The scandal will kill Father, and Geneva will be humiliated in front of all our guests. We can speak to Jesse tomorrow. In private. It’s not as if he’s going anywhere. And maybe he had nothing to do with that man’s death. It could have been an accident.”

“You know, you always were a simpleton,” Rose snarled. “That’s why you will be forever overlooked. I have no intention of relying on some hick from America or begging my dried-up, bitter mother for every farthing. I mean to be independent.”

“By doing what?” Honor asked. She had never seen Rose so determined, and so obsessed.

“I’m going to be a writer, like Dorothy L. Sayers. I’m going to make a name for myself.”

“Rose, please, let’s talk about this,” Honor pleaded.

“There’s nothing to talk about. Now get out of my way.”

Rose was already marching towards the door, a look of cold, hard intent in her eyes.

“No,” Honor cried. She couldn’t allow Rose to do this. She would destroy everyone Honor loved, including Jesse, who, even if he wasn’t who he said he was, still seemed better than the man in the photo.

The evidence against him was concerning, but there was no proof that he’d murdered the real Jesseph Bellamy. Neither the ship’s surgeon nor the police were confident that his death had been the result of foul play.

Perhaps Jesse, or whoever he was, had seen an opportunity and grabbed it. And he could still save them. She needed to speak to her father and Geneva. To tell them what Rose had discovered and decide on a course of action that would cause them the least amount of embarrassment and harm.

But Rose would not be deterred. Her hand was around the knob, and she yanked open the door with unnecessary force. Honor lurched towards her cousin and grabbed her arm.

"Rose, please," she cried. "Think what this will do my father and Geneva. And your mother will be destitute."

"I don't care," Rose snarled. "I despise her."

"My father has always been good to you."

"Yes, the awkward poor relation no one really likes but is forced to tolerate."

"I won't let you go down there," Honor hissed.

"You don't have a say in what happens."

Rose tore free of Honor's grasp with surprising strength. Before Honor could recover, Rose planted both hands against her cousin's chest and shoved her with all her might. The force of it shocked Honor, and she stumbled back, arms flailing as she fought for balance, but Rose had pushed her far too hard.

The world seemed to tilt on its axis, the edges of the room blurring as her body pitched backward. She hit the floor with brutal force, the side of her head striking the corner of the trunk at the foot of Rose's bed. A white-hot burst of pain exploded in her temple. Her stomach lurched. The ceiling spun in dizzying circles above her. Honor tried to draw breath, tried to speak, but the only sound that escaped was a strangled, rasping cough. She lifted a trembling hand, reaching towards Rose—pleading, signaling for help—but her arm felt heavy and unresponsive, her hand curled into a claw. Rose stood frozen, her wide eyes reflecting terror rather than satisfaction.

A warm metallic taste flooded Honor's mouth. The blood was thick on her tongue and then trickled down her chin and slid down her neck. Her vision dimmed at the edges, as though a dark curtain were being slowly drawn across her sight. Thoughts flickered and died before she could catch hold of them. The room narrowed to a black tunnel, Rose's face drifting in and out of focus.

And then everything slipped away into impenetrable darkness.

SEVENTY-NINE

SEPTEMBER 2023

London

Quinn dropped the earring and sat bolt upright in bed. Honor. The woman in the well was Honor. And her injuries had been inflicted by Rose. Neither girl had been anywhere near Quinn's radar when she'd first stepped into this case. But Alex's reaction had made one thing clear: Honor had still been alive when she went into the well.

Had Rose intended to kill her, or had she believed her cousin was already dead and panicked, desperate to conceal what she had done? And if Rose had not acted alone, then who had been her accomplice? How had no one heard anything? Surely someone would have realized Honor was missing and searched the grounds. Yet even as the questions formed, Quinn knew the truth. No one would have suspected Rose. And no one would have thought to look in the old well. Why would they? But why had Honor been wearing Geneva's claddagh ring?

She had a handful of answers, but they only gave rise to a slew of new questions. Unable to wait, Quinn hurried into the study and opened a fresh browser tab. Honor's disappearance must have been reported. There must have been an investigation, perhaps even an arrest. But two hours later, she was forced to admit defeat.

The only document she found was Douglas Bellamy's obituary. He had died on January 1, 1924, the very night his daughter vanished. There was no mention of Honor, and none of the newspapers available online made any reference to a missing persons inquiry. Her search for Geneva and Jesse yielded nothing. There were hundreds of men named Jesse and Joseph Bellamy, but she did not find a Jesseph. And although Geneva was less common, there was not a single result for the right Geneva. It was as though the entire family had vanished from the face of the earth on January 1, 1924.

Quinn even tried William Heller. As with Jesse, the search returned thousands of irrelevant hits. The only person she could trace was Rory Sullivan, who had indeed moved to Pittsburgh and become one of the founders of McDonagh's Brewery, a company that had still been operating as late as 2020. McDonagh's had been known for its stout, and later its pale ales. She could probably locate Rory's descendants if she tried, but she doubted they would know anything about the Bellamy sisters.

She needed answers—not only for herself, but for the show. Rhys couldn't air a story without an ending, and, now that Quinn's secret was public knowledge, her critics would be eager to tear her apart if she failed to deliver a coherent narrative. As with any extrasensory ability, people clung to the misconception that she saw everything. They couldn't understand that her visions were fragmented and narrow, snippets of truth rather than an unbroken narrative. It was up to her to stitch the rest together.

Gabe was waiting for her when she finally came to bed.

"Quite a day," he said, watching her closely.

Quinn only nodded. She was thrilled that Logan was safe and that Max was finally back with his father, but the relief was tinged with sorrow. Logan might not have intended to kill Ronnie, yet he was still responsible for a man's death, and that knowledge would haunt him. And then there was Chrissy, gone at thirty-one, leaving Max without a mother. They hadn't had a real relationship, but sooner or later he would have begun to ask about her, and they might have grown closer as he moved into adolescence and adulthood.

Logan, meanwhile, would always be waiting for the other shoe to drop, living with the fear that someone would one day piece the story together and discover the truth. The woman who had tried to take Max must have known where Ronnie was headed and that he'd never returned. Their plan appeared to be more involved than Logan had given them credit for, and they had been prepared to take Max if he refused to pay and use him as leverage. Perhaps the woman believed Ronnie had run off with the money. Or perhaps she was searching for him even now, convinced that something terrible had happened and that Logan might be responsible. It would be in her best interests not to draw attention to herself, but there was still the possibility that she would one day report Ronnie missing, and that the police would eventually find their way to Logan's door. That was an uncertainty he'd have to live with, at least for the foreseeable future.

“I know the identity of the woman from the well,” Quinn said in an effort to redirect the conversation.

“So it’s not Geneva?” Gabe asked, instantly fascinated.

“It’s Honor.”

“Honor? Who killed her?”

“I think it was her cousin, Rose, but I wasn’t able to see anything beyond Honor losing consciousness.”

She relayed everything she had seen in that final vision and found that she was weeping again, hot tears sliding down her cheeks. How unfair life could be, and how fickle. One wrong decision had cost Honor her life.

“I don’t think Honor was dead, Gabe, but I wasn’t able to see anything more.”

“But Alex was,” Gabe said, his forehead creasing with concern. “Why was he able to witness her death?”

“I don’t know,” Quinn replied wearily. “But there’s no rulebook. I suppose we all experience these flashbacks a little differently.”

“No, I don’t suppose there is. What about the bangle they found at the bottom of the well?”

“I don’t think it will show me more than the earring. It must have come off when Honor was plunged into the water.”

“And if you can’t see anything? Will Rhys accept this version of events?” Gabe asked.

“Rhys will need to find out what became of the family. And if I’m honest, I need closure myself. Honor might have died, but Geneva didn’t. And the viewers would want to know about Jesse. He clearly wasn’t who he said he was.”

Gabe shot her a dubious look. “Quinn, Geneva might have living descendants. It would be unconscionable to tell her story without obtaining their permission.”

Quinn sighed. Gabe was right. Except for one more recent case, all the *Echoes from the Past* episodes had focused on individuals who had died centuries before. But a hundred years wasn’t so very long. It was only a few generations, and if Geneva had had children, they might still be alive. Their children for sure.

“I need to return to Ravenglass,” Quinn said.

“I can’t take any more time off work,” Gabe replied. “And the children should not miss school.”

“I’ll ask Rhys to come,” Quinn said. “He will want to be there.”
“When will you go?”
“Tomorrow,” Quinn said as she reached for her mobile to call Rhys.

EIGHTY

Quinn and Rhys were both in a somber mood as they headed back to the Lake District, no longer two friends giddy with the prospect of a few days of unexpected freedom, but historical detectives who needed to tie up loose ends. They would stop by the police station to collect the bangle and earring that had been found at the bottom of the well, then visit Dinah Wilson at the retirement village. She had agreed to see them, and Quinn hoped she might be able to fill in at least some of the blanks. She couldn't stop thinking about Honor and her horrific final moments, but didn't think the bangle would show her anything she hadn't already seen. Honor's story had come to an end when she had been tossed into the well, and Quinn didn't care to relive her terror as she died.

Focused on the business side, as usual, Rhys lamented the future of the show and vented his own frustrations.

"The historical portion is weighty enough, but the modern-day component will fall flat if we can't effectively bring this tragedy into the present."

Quinn sighed in exasperation. "If you want to control the narrative, then you must rely on fictional accounts. I can only tell you what I see and offer up whatever ending I find. If that's not good enough for your viewers, then perhaps we should leave this story untold."

"I didn't mean that," Rhys instantly backpedaled. "But I do have to consider the ratings."

"I understand, but these are people's lives, Rhys. And if the Bellamys have living descendants, we owe them a duty of care."

Rhys nodded. "We do, but they might want the story to be told. They cannot let that poor girl be forgotten."

"First, let's see what we can find out, shall we?"

They drove the rest of the way in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Quinn experienced an acute pang of melancholy when they drove through the gates of the retirement village. It didn't resemble the community Phoebe had lived in, but the residents who were gardening, playing tennis, and walking in pairs or groups of threes made her miss Phoebe with an intensity she hadn't felt since those first months. It gladdened her heart that these people seemed to be enjoying an active and social retirement, but it also reminded her that, for each and every one of them, this was the final chapter in a life that might not have been newsworthy but was still precious and now so woefully short.

"Here we are," Rhys said as he pulled up in front of a neat one-story cottage.

He stepped out, then popped the boot and took out a plastic cool box.

"Homemade napoleon," he explained. "Katya would never forgive me if I showed up empty-handed. And this is so much better than store-bought cake."

"You don't bring me napoleon," Quinn grumbled.

"That's because I have the deepest respect for your arteries. That custard cream is all butter and sugar."

"What did this nice lady do to you that you're trying to hurry along her demise?"

"I just want her to experience a slice of heaven," Rhys said and rang the bell.

The woman who opened the door was in her eighties, but despite her age her gaze was bright and her smile welcoming. And she was surprisingly stylish. Dinah Wilson wore her gray hair long and loose, and her wraparound dress put Quinn in mind of the psychedelic patterns of the sixties. It was all oranges, reds, blues, and greens, the motif a mosaic of vibrant color. Dinah's blue eyes were accented by expertly applied eyeliner, the ends winged, and she wore pearly pink lipstick. She looked like one of the earliest Bond girls, now enjoying her golden years.

"Dr. Allenby," she exclaimed, as if Rhys weren't even there. "It is such a pleasure to meet you. I've watched every episode of *Echoes from the Past*. It's one of my favorite programs."

"Thank you. That's very kind," Quinn said.

"Please come in. Shall I pop the kettle on?"

"My wife made napoleon," Rhys said and handed her the container.

“How very considerate,” Dinah Wilson replied. “I’m not much of a baker, but I do have a sweet tooth.”

“Don’t we all?” Rhys said and smiled broadly.

The next few minutes were spent preparing the tea, putting the squares of pastry onto a pretty plate, and setting up in the lounge. It was a warm, comfortable room full of books, colorful pottery, and amateur paintings.

“I always wanted to paint,” Dinah said when she followed the direction of Quinn’s gaze. “But I never had the time. I made a promise to myself that I will do whatever I want from now on. And eat whatever makes me happy. And this makes me happy,” she said as she took a forkful of napoleon. “This is delicious.”

“I’ll tell Katya you liked it,” Rhys replied.

Once the small talk was truly out of the way, Dinah said, “So, you want to talk to me about the body in the well. I’m afraid I can’t help you. I don’t know who that is.”

“We have been able to identify the victim,” Rhys said.

“Victim? Are you suggesting the woman was murdered?”

“She was,” Quinn said, “her body thrown down the well by the killer.”

Dinah set down her cup and looked at Quinn, her gaze suddenly anxious. “Who was she, dear?”

“Honor. Honor Bellamy.”

Dinah shook her head. “Oh, no. That can’t be right.”

“Why do you think it can’t be Honor?” Rhys asked.

“Honor ran off to America with the Bellamys’ estate manager, Rory Sullivan.”

“What makes you say that?” Quinn asked carefully.

“Geneva told me.”

“How did you know her?”

Dinah stood and went to the faux fireplace. She took a framed black-and-white photograph off the mantel and handed it to Quinn. It was of a lovely little boy, aged five or six. He wore a sailor suit with short pants. One knee was scraped above the dark knee socks he wore, and his shoes were a bit scuffed at the front. He had tried to look serious for the photographer but couldn’t hold back the smile that threatened to split his round face. The child had large light eyes, probably blue, and dark hair.

“Your son?” Quinn asked.

Dinah shook her head. “My husband, Kenny. Geneva was my mother-in-law.”

“And the name Wilson?” Quinn carefully asked. Perhaps Dinah had remarried.

“Kenny’s stepdad adopted him when he was five. Wilson was his name.”

“And Kenny’s real dad?” Rhys asked. “Was it Jesse Bellamy?”

No, Quinn wanted to cry out. *It wasn’t Jesse. Kenny’s dad was Rory Sullivan*. She could see the resemblance, especially in the boy’s smile.

Dinah shrugged. “Geneva never really talked to Kenny about her past. In those days, people were a lot more tight-lipped than they are today, especially when their reputation was less than sterling. Geneva only started to open up a few years before she died. It was as if she suddenly needed to talk and let out all the feelings she’d bottled up for decades. Kenny wasn’t overly interested by that point, but I liked to listen to her stories. And it brought her comfort to be able to finally share. She told me about Bellamy Hall, about her wayward little sister, and about Rory. I had never heard about him until then, but she had told Kenny that Rory was his father when he was old enough to understand.”

“Did Geneva tell you about the New Year’s Eve party in 1923?” Quinn asked.

“She did. That was the day it all began to unravel for the Bellamys. Although, of course, what happened was a culmination of bad decisions followed by unimaginable tragedy.”

“What happened?” Rhys said. He was leaning forward, his eagerness on full display.

“Geneva’s father, Douglas Bellamy, was very ill, and he took a turn for the worse after the party broke up. Geneva and his nurse remained by his side, but there was nothing they could do. He passed in the early hours of the new year. Geneva thought her sister couldn’t bear to watch their father die, but, when she went to find her later that morning, she discovered that Honor had gone. Her party dress was draped across a chair, her shoes were beneath the bed, and her headband was on the vanity. Some of her clothes were missing, and she had even taken Geneva’s ring. It had been given to her by Kenny’s father. The scoundrel,” Dinah said with feeling. “It seems he was romancing both the Bellamy girls. Geneva turned him down, so Honor took her place. But not before he got Geneva up the duff.”

“Did Rory know he had a son?” Quinn asked.

Dinah shook her head. “Geneva never told him she was pregnant. She didn’t find out until after he’d gone.”

“Did anyone see Honor go?” Rhys inquired.

“I don’t believe so, but it must have been chaos. The party had just ended, the guests were departing, there was cleaning and washing up to be done, and the servants must have been exhausted. They wouldn’t have noticed her slipping out before the sun was even up. But she left a note,” Dinah hurried to explain. “She said she loved Rory and they were going to make a go of it in America. Geneva hoped Honor would write once they got settled, but she never heard from her sister again. It broke her heart.” Dinah’s face clouded as the implications of that took on a new meaning. “Are you sure it was Honor in the well?” she asked again. “How could it be?”

“Yes, I am sure,” Quinn said softly. “Honor did not run off to America. She was murdered in the early hours of the new year.”

“Who by? Rory?”

“No. Rose.”

“Her cousin?” Dinah exclaimed. “But why would Rose hurt Honor?”

“Did Geneva tell you about Jesse?”

Dinah nodded. “She never did understand why he suddenly took off. One moment they were announcing their engagement, and the next he had left without a word of explanation.”

“Rose discovered a steward’s uniform from the RMS *Olympic* in Jesse’s suitcase,” Quinn said. “And some photos and letters that suggested he wasn’t the real Jesse Bellamy. She was going to go downstairs and confront him in front of everyone. Honor tried to stop her. She didn’t want to upset her father when he was already so ill, and she worried that her family would lose everything if Jesse turned out to be a fraud.”

Dinah exhaled heavily. “Well, then she died in vain because they lost it all anyway.”

“Was Jesse’s ruse eventually discovered?” Rhys inquired. He looked much happier now that the story was finally living up to his expectations.

“Not that I know of, but maybe he realized that his bride-to-be was playing him for a fool and carrying another man’s child. Or maybe he got to know the Bellamys and experienced pangs of conscience about duping them.”

“What happened after he left?” Rhys asked.

“Geneva saw no reason to hold on. Her father was gone, Honor was gone, the father of her child was gone, and there was no one left to inherit the hall. She packed a bag, took the jewelry her mother had bequeathed to her, and left.”

“Where did she go?” Quinn asked.

“To London. She struggled those first few years. It wasn’t easy to be a single mum in those days, especially when the child had been born out of wedlock. Geneva eventually found work in a pub. Kenny would sleep upstairs while she served the patrons in the taproom. They got by. And then she met John Wilson.”

“Did they have children of their own?”

Dinah nodded. “They had a daughter. Abigail. She died during the war, when the hospital she worked at was bombed. Geneva didn’t have an easy life.”

“No, but at least she had a life,” Rhys pointed out.

“Yes, I suppose when you put it that way,” Dinah agreed.

“What happened to Rose?” Quinn asked.

Dinah stared at her. “You don’t know?”

“No. I tried to find her, but there was nothing online.”

Dinah chuckled humorlessly. “Rose inherited the lot and promptly cut off her cousin. Geneva never saw a penny from the estate.”

“But how did Rose come to inherit if the estate was entailed?” Quinn exclaimed.

“Rose married within weeks of Douglas’s death. She was a Bellamy, and since there was no direct male descendant, Rose’s husband was now the sole male relation. The Bellamys’ lawyer, Mr. Lefferts, named him a trustee, and when Rose gave birth to Charles, the inheritance was transferred to him. As his mother, Rose became the lady of Bellamy Hall.”

“I have to give it to her. That was absolutely diabolical,” Rhys said, clearly stunned by the depth of Rose’s betrayal.

“Who on earth did she marry?” Quinn exclaimed. She couldn’t see Rose engaging in a whirlwind romance and marrying just weeks after her uncle had died. Not only did it seem unfeeling and improper, but it was also rather too convenient.

“She married the son of one of her father’s associates. Geneva always suspected the marriage had been arranged by her aunt. The young man, who

was something of a ne'er-do-well, was promised a fortune, and I expect a certain degree of freedom. He saw the advantages of such an arrangement and agreed."

"And did the marriage last?"

"It did. Rose and Peter also had a daughter, Ruby."

"How did Kenny come to own Bellamy Hall?" Quinn asked.

"Charles was killed in Libya in 1942," Dinah said. "And Peter died in 1944, in a prisoner of war camp. The house had been requisitioned by the government and turned into a military hospital during the war, but the last patients were discharged in the summer of 1945. Rose had plans to retore the hall to its former glory, but Ruby had other ideas. She had never felt an attachment to the place and wanted a fresh start. She married, and she and her husband took advantage of the Assisted Passage Migration Scheme and went out to Australia. Ten Pound Poms they called them because that's how much it cost to get a new life," Dinah said with an amused smile. "When Rose passed in 1967, Kenny inherited the property. He was the only male descendant, and he petitioned the court to have the entail lifted. And a good thing it was too, since our girls had no interest in managing the place and the place would have been turned over to the Crown. Our oldest works for Doctors Without Borders, and our youngest lives in Paris. Fancies herself an artist. I put the property on the market when Kenny passed, bought this place, and divided the remaining proceeds between my daughters. Thus came the end of Bellamy Hall and all associated with it," Dinah said. "Or so I thought, until that poor girl was fished out of the well."

"Dinah, would you have any objection to us dramatizing Honor and Geneva's story on *Echoes from the Past*?" Rhys asked.

"Not at all. I think their story ought to be told. They deserve that much."

"Is Rose's daughter still with us?" Rhys asked.

"If she is, she would be close to one hundred. Ruby never had children of her own, and her husband passed years ago."

"Dinah, there's the question of Honor's remains," Quinn said gently.

Dinah nodded. "I will see Honor buried. Next to her sister. I think it's fitting that they should be reunited."

"It is," Quinn agreed.

"Do you have any photographs from that time?" Rhys asked. "The viewers would love to see what Geneva and Honor looked like."

“I’m sure I can find some. I still have some of Geneva’s things, and, of course, I kept the photo albums.”

Dinah left the room. She was gone for quite a while but eventually returned with an ancient photo album. The faux leather cover was stiff and cracked, and the pages had faded to a soft beige. There weren’t many photographs from the first half of the twentieth century, but a few had survived. Goose bumps stippled Quinn’s arms as she turned the pages, looking at the faces of people who were long gone but so vividly alive in her mind.

There was Geneva, and Honor, and their father, imposing in his military uniform. There were no photographs of Rory Sullivan—he was hired help—but there was one photo of Jesse and Geneva, taken at the New Year’s Eve celebration to commemorate their engagement. Perhaps Geneva would have destroyed it had Douglas not stood next to them, looking stooped and frail but obviously sincerely pleased. Geneva might not have been able to get rid of the final photograph of her father.

Quinn focused her attention on Jesse. He was a handsome man with beautiful eyes and a movie star smile. She didn’t suppose they’d ever know who he really was or what had become of him, but it didn’t matter. He’d be long gone, and, if he had any descendants, they probably wouldn’t know anything about his stint at Bellamy Hall. And it was doubtful they would ever discover what had happened aboard the RMS *Olympic*. Perhaps the real Jesseph’s death was an accident, or maybe he was murdered by someone who had known about his deadly allergy. Either way, his identity had clearly been stolen by an ambitious steward who had nearly pulled off his ruse.

They left Dinah’s house, Rhys carrying the carefully wrapped photo album beneath his arm. Quinn’s mind was still on Jesse.

“Do you think we might be able to locate him through the White Star archives? If he was an employee, they must have some record of him.”

“Not without a name,” Rhys said. “He would have been one of dozens on that ship, and unless they kept a photograph of every employee, which is doubtful given this was 1923, we’ll never be able to identify him.”

“Shame,” Quinn said. “I would have liked to know his story.”

“And if he killed Jesseph Bellamy,” Rhys added. He smiled happily as he got into the car. “We have a solid story, Quinny. It will make for

excellent television and a worthy addition to the *Echoes from the Past* lineup." He turned to her and grinned. "Christmas special next year?"

"Sod off, Rhys," Quinn said and grinned.

"I'm not so easily dismissed."

"Don't I know it! Now, take us home."

EPILOGUE

Alex watched his mum hide the bracelet in the drawer of the desk and leave the study. He wasn't supposed to go in there, and he had been warned many times not to touch items that might have belonged to someone who'd died, but he couldn't resist the lure of that bangle. Looking into the past was like watching a scary movie. He sometimes covered his face with his hands, then peeked between his fingers to see what was happening on the screen. Alex had seen that girl in the well. And she had been just a girl, only five years older than Emma. It had horrified him to see her suffering, but it had also frightened him when he'd felt her pain. That had never happened before. But strange as it might seem, he felt connected to her and wanted to know how her story ended. He'd heard his mum say that she had been murdered by her cousin. That was like him murdering Max. It was unthinkable.

After making sure the coast was clear, Alex slipped into the study and shut the door. Then he pulled the bag out of the drawer and studied the bracelet through the plastic. It was so pretty. Like something out of Lara Croft. A shimmering golden snake with an emerald eye, swallowing its own tail. Wicked. Alex opened the bag and stared at the bracelet, terrified and mesmerized in equal measure. Mum would be angry if she found out, but he had to see. He'd drop it if he got too scared. He reached into the bag and wrapped his fingers around the cool metal. And then he was there. He was her…

* * *

Honor slowly came to. Her thoughts were sluggish, as if she were half-asleep, and she tasted blood. Her tongue felt weirdly thick, and she couldn't do much more than moan. She tried to lift her arm, but her limbs felt leaden, and she couldn't seem to open her eyes. She tried again to call out,

but nothing came out, not even a whimper. It was like her body had shut down but her mind was awake, if only just. She felt like she was wading through treacle as she tried to make sense of what had happened. Dr. Miller was downstairs. Rose must have gone to get him. He'd help her. Hot tears slid down her temples and into her hair. She wanted Geneva, and Father. She wanted her mum.

The door opened and someone walked in. She heard the door click shut, and then two sets of footsteps approached.

"You stupid girl. What have you done?" Clarissa hissed.

"It wasn't my fault. She went for me."

"Tell that to the police. Just look at her," her aunt exclaimed.

"She's still alive," Rose wailed. "I'm sure she is. We must get her to the hospital."

Aunt Clarissa pressed her cool fingers to Honor's neck, then lifted her limp wrist. "I can't feel a pulse."

There was momentary silence, and Honor wanted to scream that she was alive and she needed help, but her aunt seemed to have written her off.

"No one must find out about this," Clarissa said.

"How are they not going to find out?" Rose asked. She sounded shocked and confused.

"Because they will never find the body."

"Mother, what are you saying?"

"Do you want to hang, you nitwit?" Clarissa screeched. "Because that's what's going to happen if you are charged with murder."

"But it was an accident," Rose tried again.

"And who is going to believe that? You rowed, you pushed her, she hit her head and died. Even if the charge is manslaughter, you will still go to prison. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Rose whimpered.

"Good. Now help me. Let's get her out of that dress."

"Why?"

"Because we're going to make it look like she ran away with that damn Irishman. And if anyone finds the body, they'll think he killed her."

"He gave Geneva a ring. An Irish one," Rose offered. "I saw it in Geneva's jewelry box."

"Go get it. We'll put it on her finger. If anyone finds her, that'll put him in the frame. But don't touch it with your bare hands. Put on those

white gloves."

Honor tried to scream as her aunt and cousin pulled off her dress, but she couldn't make a sound. She was trapped inside her body, unable to call for help. Her brain seemed to be pushing against her skull, throbbing and aching dully as her thoughts became even more muddled.

"Everyone is downstairs, drinking and dancing. And the servants are having their own celebration in the servants' hall. No one will be on the servants' staircase at this time of night. Let's get her outside."

"What are you going to do?" Rose whispered hoarsely.

"Dump her down the old well. No one will think to look for her there. Then, tomorrow, we will leave as planned." A pause. "Can you copy her handwriting?"

"I suppose."

"You'll write a note saying she went off with Sullivan. We'll leave it on her dressing table."

"Mother, are you sure about this?"

"Oh, I'm sure," Clarissa snarled. "You're going to be mistress of Bellamy Hall."

"What? How?" Rose exclaimed.

"Do you still have the photographs and the newspaper?"

"Yes."

"Once we dispose of Honor, I'm going to have a word with Jesse."

"Are you going to report him to the police for murdering William Heller?"

"No, you idiot. The last thing we need is to involve the police."

"But who was he if his name wasn't Jesseph Bellamy?" Rose demanded.

Clarissa huffed with exasperation. "William Jesseph Bellamy Heller. His mother remarried after Alan died. I expect William took his stepfather's surname. He told Mr. Lefferts he preferred to go by Jesseph. Lord knows why. You should have shown me that article," Clarissa admonished.

"You forbade me to read the papers," Rose snapped. "And how was I to know that this person had any connection to us? What will happen to Jesse?"

"He's not likely to brazen it out when I tell him I know he's not who he pretends to be and threaten to go to the police. Then, once he's gone, you will marry Peter Conklin. That one will do anything for money."

“I don’t like Peter,” Rose moaned.

“You should have thought of that before you caved Honor’s head in. You will do as I say, or you’re on your own.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Rose was gone for a moment, then Honor felt her slip the ring on her finger, Rose’s hand covered with Jesse’s glove. Clarissa grabbed Honor beneath the arms, and Rose took her by the ankles. The two women grunted with effort as they hefted her down the servants’ stairs.

“Should have tossed her out the window,” Clarrisa said on a huff. “She’s heavier than she looks.”

“We’re nearly there.”

Honor felt the bite of cold air on her bare skin as they got her outside, and then the sharp edge of icy metal as they dropped her into a wheelbarrow. She tried to struggle, but she was paralyzed, unable to speak. It took the greatest effort, but she was able to open her eyes just a little. She saw the vast, black sky above, the stars cold and distant as they glowed above her. There was the far-off sound of waves, and the wind that was so bitter, it made her feel a little more alert. The wheelbarrow bumped over uneven ground, the wheels squeaking, and then it stopped. Honor managed to let out a groan, and she was sure her eyelids had fluttered.

“Mother, she’s alive,” Rose whispered. “She’s trying to open her eyes.”

“Too late now. Smother her, and let’s get her over the lip of the well.”

Nnnnooo, Honor tried to say, but only a faint hiss came out.

And then Rose’s gloved hand was over her mouth and nose, trying to suffocate her. Honor gathered all her strength and tried to stick her legs out, but Clarissa, certain that she was dead, forced them into the shaft, and then she was falling, feet first, into the well. The water was so cold, it momentarily revived her, and she flailed as she tried to scream. Icy water rushed into her mouth, and she tried to slow down her fall by holding on to the stone walls, but they were covered in slime and she was unable to find purchase.

There was no way she could climb out of the well even if she had the strength to hold on. Her heart hammered in her chest as her skin burned with cold. She turned her face upward and saw one last glimpse of the starry sky before her aunt’s hand plunged into the water and pushed her down, pressing on top of her head. Honor’s lungs felt like they were going

to explode and she attempted to shake off Clarissa's hold, but she was too weak, and her aunt wasn't about to let go. Unable to hold on, she began to sink. Rose tossed in a pair of white gloves just before the cover was fitted over the well.

Then the world went dark.

* * *

Alex dropped the bracelet and wiped away his tears. It was horrible what had been done to that girl. Scarier than anything he'd seen in a movie, because it had been done by people she had loved and trusted. But terrifying as Honor's end was, it was a long time ago, and she would be gone by now anyway. That realization made him feel better, and he put the bracelet away, resolving never to touch it again. Honor's story was at an end. But he wasn't sure about Logan's.

Alex had been shocked to overhear that they had come awfully close to losing Logan and Max. Something terrible had happened, but he didn't know what it was and was certain his parents would not care to explain. Adults were always hiding things, convinced that their children didn't hear them whispering and couldn't interpret their worried looks. Well, they were wrong. Mia was oblivious, but he and Emma weren't so easy to distract. They'd find out the truth in time.

As Alex left the study, he remembered that his dad had once told him that trust was the greatest gift one person could give another, and to always choose wisely. He hadn't really understood what his dad had meant at the time, but he did now. And as he stood in the corridor, listening to the voices of his parents and sisters, Alex knew that something inside him had profoundly changed. Just as he knew that he didn't blame his mother for this strange gift he had received from her family.

It was a door to a world he had yet to understand, but he had every intention of walking through it.

*

Have you raced through Quinn's thrilling adventures? If you love Irina's gripping storytelling and absorbing historical settings, you'll be hooked on *The Passage*. On a tour of a stately home, Neve Ashley steps through a

mysterious doorway and emerges in 1685, and into the path of Lord Hugo Everly's galloping horse…

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THE PASSAGE

PROLOGUE

MAY 1685

Surrey, England

Just as a hint of lavender stained the pristine blue of the spring sky the soldiers reconvened on the village green, their faces glistening with sweat and their feet sore from hours of walking. The villagers threw them curious looks but averted their gazes before eye contact could be made, afraid that they would be accused of being complicit. The village was abuzz with talk, but everyone spoke in whispers, their heads bent together as they conveyed the news to one another, shaking their heads and speculating as to what might have happened.

Captain Humphries looked from one tired face to another and felt a twinge of pity for his men. They'd been on their feet for hours, searching the countryside, turning the manor house upside down, going house to house in the village and intimidating the inhabitants in the vain hope of finding some trace of the missing man, but they turned up nothing.

"It was magic, it was," a young soldier named Dawson whispered to the man next to him, but, to his misfortune, the captain overheard.

"There's no such thing as magic, Dawson," Captain Humphries barked, although deep down he wasn't so sure. His father, who was a learned man, always told him that there was a reasonable explanation for most things, but as far as he could see, there was no reasonable explanation for what had happened that day.

"There is, sir," Dawson persisted. "I saw a hare turn into a crow once. It flew straight into the air, wings soaring, and circled over my head thrice. I thought I was done for," the young man confided with a shiver of fear.

"You're an ignorant fool, Dawson, as is the lot of you. This wasn't magic; this was a well-planned escape, an affront to His Majesty, and another nail in that traitor's coffin. Find him!!!!" Humphries roared and watched as his men shuffled off toward their horses. They'd been hoping

for a cup of ale and a meal, but instead they'd have to make a pretense of searching for the man when they all knew that he wouldn't be found.

Humphries walked to the public house, tied up his horse, and took a seat in a shadowy corner, gesturing to the barkeep for a tankard of ale. He was a man who needed to understand the way things worked in order to make sense of the world around him, but what he witnessed that morning defied all reason. The man was there one minute—gone the next. He simply vanished. There was nowhere he could have hidden, no other door he could have slipped through. How was that possible, unless there really was such a thing as magic?

Captain Humphries took a long pull of the cool ale and rubbed the bridge of his nose, his eyes watering with fatigue. What was he to tell his superiors? How was he to explain that four soldiers of His Majesty's guard allowed one unarmed man to slip through their fingers? Someone would have to take the blame, and that someone was him. For a brief second, Humphries wished he could disappear as well, for that was much more preferable to what he'd have to face once he arrived back in London.

1

MARCH 2013

Surrey, England

Was it possible to change history or prevent something that had already taken place? Those were not questions I would normally ask myself, but had I known that my life was about to change irrevocably, and that, in less than a week, I would be questioning everything I'd believed up until that moment—I might have. But, as I rolled down the motorway on a sunny, but frigid March morning I wasn't pondering philosophical enigmas; all I could think about was the promise of a good night's rest. I'd always had trouble sleeping in strange places, and the past week had been particularly tiring, since I'd barely got any sleep at all, more due to personal worries and less to strange beds at out-of-the-way village inns. My job as a location scout for an independent film production company took me to many different locales, but at least this time I got to stay in England, which was a relief.

The new project was an eight-part series based on the life of Charles II, who'd been invited to return to England following the death of Oliver Cromwell and the demise of the Protectorate after the abdication of Cromwell's son, Richard. After the execution of his father, Charles I, the royal family fled to the Hague, where Charles spent the greater part of his youth. He finally returned to England on his thirtieth birthday and was crowned shortly thereafter; beginning a period in British history known as the Restoration.

Personally, I'd always had a soft spot for Charles II. He was the handsome, tolerant, good-time king who wanted to live, love, and be left to rule in peace. It was a wonder that he had time to rule, since he had several mistresses and sired a legendary number of bastards, twelve of whom he'd acknowledged as his own. Sadly, his wife, Catherine of Braganza, couldn't give him a legitimate heir, a tragedy which resonated for decades, spawning

rebellion after rebellion either to depose a Catholic king or put a Catholic king back on the throne.

After years of bloody conflict, political strife, and joyless drudgery perpetuated by the Puritans, Charles reopened the theaters, and introduced music and gaiety back to the people, which earned him the title of the *Merry Monarch*. The Puritan black, white, and gray were replaced by vibrant color, frothy lace, and excessive ornament. The fashions were much like the man who sat the throne—flamboyant and over the top, and for the first time in decades the masses were content.

Shooting the series was going to be great fun, considering the amount of fornication Charles II indulged in, and the undoubted effect this was going to have on the cast and crew. There was usually at least one pregnancy that was the result of a long production, sometimes more, and countless affairs that rarely lasted past the wrap party. Casting had already begun for the various parts, and it was my job to find the right location for our production. It had to be affordable, historically appropriate, weather-cooperative—if such a thing were possible in England—and close enough to a village that would provide lodging. A decent pub large enough to accommodate a thirsty gaggle of actors, directors, cameramen, costumers, set designers, and various assistants who would descend on it after a day of shooting was also an absolute necessity, as was sufficient parking for all the vehicles and equipment, and an amiable landlord who was willing to allow us to overrun his property with minimal amount of meddling and complaints.

I'd already visited three locations in the past week, declaring them all to be unsuitable for various reasons. I'd left Everly Manor for last, hoping that this would be the one. I had to admit that I was secretly predisposed to it since Everly Manor was located in the village of Cranleigh, where one of my all-time favorite *Doctor Who* episodes was filmed. Everly Manor had all the right qualifications in terms of location and setting. The 'old' manor house and gardens were from the right era and were open to tourists five days a week. All that remained was checking out the village, agreeing on a fee, drawing up the legal documents, and taking numerous photographs and measurements, which would be required for set design and other preliminary preparations.

Lord Everly wouldn't hear of my staying at the pub, so I was offered room and board while I worked, assuming that a deal was reached on which

both parties agreed. I took the exit off the motorway and headed toward the village of Cranleigh, the peaked roof of Everly House visible in the distance above the stark lacework of bare branches that bisected the sky in their naked splendor. I never enjoyed winter, but I could appreciate the barren beauty of the landscape and the vastness of the sky, which never seemed as encompassing during the summer months as it did on a cold winter's day; the gray-white expanse of the heavens endless and impenetrable to the weak rays of the sun.

I slowed down as a huge tour bus rolled through the gates of the estate and made its way down the lane toward me, several people still taking photos of the receding manor house through the bus windows. The tourists might be a problem, but I was sure Lord Everly took that into account.

I parked my car and gazed up at the "new" manor house, which was a fine example of eighteenth-century Palladian architecture. The house was made up of three blocks, the middle one dominated by a grand portico complete with six Corinthian columns and a sweeping staircase. I made my way up the steps to the front door, which flew open as if by magic, and Lord Everly himself appeared, beaming from ear to ear as if I was the answer to his every prayer. I was taken aback by the man, having expected him to be older. Lord Everly was in his mid-thirties, with a mane of dark hair, warm brown eyes, and an athletic physique that suggested hours at the gym and lots of outdoor activity, judging by his complexion.

"Miss Ashley, I presume?" he asked as he skipped down the steps and scooped the carrier bag from my hand. "Max Everly. A pleasure to finally meet you. Do come in. We have much to discuss, but first I'm sure you'd like to rest and have some refreshment. I'm afraid Mother is a little under the weather, or maybe she's just sulking because she's as much against shooting a film here as she was against opening the old house to the public, but needs must, and so here we are."

I smiled at the man's effusive charm. I could see that he was slightly nervous beneath the nonchalant exterior, and I wondered why that should be. Maybe things with Mother were more difficult than he led me to believe, but as long as the offer was still on the table, I wouldn't worry about it. That was something he'd have to work out for himself.

"I'm afraid we're rather short-staffed," Lord Everly explained as he set my bag down on the black-and-white tiled floor of the foyer. "In its heyday, this house boasted a large staff, including a butler, housekeeper, and every

type of servant from scullery maid to boot boy, but now we must make do with only a housekeeper and a maid-of-all-work. Women are not as eager to go into service these days as they were before the First World War. They have much better opportunities."

"It must be very difficult for two people to take care of such a large establishment," I mused as I looked around the spacious foyer.

"Actually, we only use the East Wing these days, it being just the two of us. The staterooms have been closed for some time, and the West Wing is empty as well, to make things easier for Mrs. Harding to manage." He shrugged apologetically as a middle-aged woman appeared from a door at the back of the foyer, her face flushed with embarrassment.

"I do beg your pardon, Lord Everly. I didn't hear the bell. Will this be Miss Ashley then?" she asked, in an attempt to defuse the awkwardness of the lord of the manor having to open the door like a common butler.

"Not to worry, Mrs. Harding, not to worry. Miss Ashley never rang the bell; I saw her from the sitting-room window and went out to greet her. Why don't you show her up to her room?" Lord Everly suggested and turned to me with a smile. "I'm sure you'd like to rest and freshen up," he said as if I'd just traveled for days. In fact, I'd been on the road no more than an hour and a half, hardly enough time to get tired. "We can meet in the sitting room for tea, then turn our attention to the business at hand." He gave me a slight bow before disappearing into a room just off to the right, which I thought might be the library judging by the crammed bookcases I'd glimpsed through the door.

My room faced the back of the house and had lovely views of the park. It was decorated in the softest butter yellow which gave the room a sunny appearance despite the gray sky outside. A four-poster bed dominated the space and suddenly looked very inviting.

"You have your own private bath, Miss Ashley," Mrs. Harding informed me as she set down my bag and glanced around in the manner of a general preparing for battle, casting her eye over the well-dusted surfaces and fluffy bath towels just visible through the door. "Do let me know if you need anything. I'll bring you some lunch shortly."

"Don't trouble yourself, Mrs. Harding. I had a late breakfast, so I'm not very hungry. I'd much rather have a bath and a nap, actually."

"Very well, madam. Shall I run a bath for you? We have some Yardley bath salts," she added, as if sharing a great secret.

“Thank you, but I can manage.”

I hadn’t meant to sound dismissive, not being used to having servants, but Mrs. Harding seemed to take it that way. She gave me a slight nod and retreated, closing the door softly behind her. It felt odd to be treated so deferentially, but I might as well enjoy it while I could, I told myself as I rummaged in my bag for my dressing gown and turned on the taps.

* * *

Lord Everly was already downstairs by the time I arrived and went about pouring out the tea like the best of hostesses. He smiled as he urged me to try a piece of Victoria sponge.

“My absolute favorite. No one makes it like Stella—Mrs. Harding, I mean.” He winked at the scandalized housekeeper and put a thick slice on my plate.

It was indeed heavenly, and I took a sip of tea and let him talk while I took his measure. Max Everly was well-groomed, expensively dressed, and very charming. His brown eyes sparkled with good humor, and he was quick to smile—a trait that I found very appealing in people, especially when the smile actually reached the eyes. Having spent several years around actors whose egos needed to be stroked every hour of the day, and who were usually acting even when not in front of the camera, I was perhaps quick to pick up on certain techniques used for putting people at ease and winning their trust, which Lord Everly was using with or without actually meaning to. Despite his rank and wealth, he spoke to me as if I were his equal, serving me rather than allowing the housekeeper to do it, and talking to me in a manner I could only describe as confidential, as if I were an old friend rather than a woman he had met only a few hours ago. Max Everly seemed to be an old hand at winning people over.

“I hope your other locations didn’t suit,” he said with a wicked grin. “Or, if they did, Everly Manor is sure to outdo them. As I mentioned on the telephone, we have two houses: the rambling Georgian manor in which we now sit, and the Tudor-era mansion which is now the museum. The ‘new house,’ as we call it, was built in the late 1700s after my great-great-great-grandfather made a fortune selling gunpowder to the army during the

Revolutionary War. He moved the family here and left the old house to crumble. I had it restored and opened it to the public nearly a decade ago."

I set down my cup and leaned back in the chair, feeling pleasantly full. "You mentioned earlier that your mother objects to the museum…" I let the sentence trail off, hoping he would fill in the rest.

"Yes, she does," Lord Everly said as he poured himself another cup of tea and took a second slice of cake, silently offering me one as well.

I knew I shouldn't, but I accepted nonetheless and tucked in, enjoying the mouthwatering goodness. The cake was so moist and light that it didn't make one feel stuffed. It just settled pleasantly, giving a feeling of utter contentment.

"Mother is a proud woman, reared in a different time and with different values. Believe it or not, there are those in her circle who still see any kind of business venture as 'trade' and think it 'common.' I don't know where these people think money comes from, other than inheritances and trust funds. The truth is—and I'm not ashamed to admit it, although it makes Mummy turn puce with rage—that a house like this takes a fortune to maintain. There are just the two of us, and we have twenty bedrooms. There's always a leaking roof, dry rot, termites, or plant fungi—you name it. I would gladly sell the lot and move to my flat in London, but Mummy won't hear of it—family seat and all that. She won't allow herself to die until I produce an heir, so there's no rest for the wicked."

I couldn't help laughing. He was so easygoing and amusing that I fervently hoped I'd like his offer and get to work with him for the next few months.

"Can you show me the museum now?" I asked, putting down my empty plate and resolutely refusing another helping of cake.

"I'd rather do it tomorrow, if you have no objection. The museum closes to the public at 4 p.m., and then there are still people in the gift shop and the tearoom, and I'd like it to be empty when we visit. Since it gets dark so early, we'd need candles, which would make it kind of authentic. There's no electricity, you see. The house is as it was in its heyday. It's fully furnished, and there are trunks and trunks of clothes, which you would be welcome to should you choose Everly. Some of the dresses are rather elaborate, and I had them cleaned and preserved. Some of the more interesting ones are on display downstairs."

"Lord Everly," I began, but was interrupted.

“Please, call me Max. Lord Everly was my father.”

“All right, Max; would you not mind closing the place to tourists for a few months?” I knew what he’d say, but I still had to ask.

“Not at all. The tourists will flock to this place once they hear that a movie was filmed here, especially if someone famous was in the cast. It will give us much-needed marketing clout, if you will. The house and grounds would be completely at your disposal, as well as the car park. The villagers would welcome the additional business as well, and what’s good for them is good for me. They still view me as something of a feudal overlord, I’m afraid, since we own some properties in the village, and they feel as if they work for me.”

“All right, tomorrow it is then.” I glanced at the light beyond the window, which had grown a deep shade of violet while we talked. It would be dark in a few minutes, and I was grateful for the merry fire that crackled in the fireplace and the warmth of the tea. My room at the inn last night had been drafty and uncomfortable, so I was glad to be warm and snug.

“I do hope you’ll join me for dinner tonight. I had Stella prepare something special in your honor,” Max said, smiling at me warmly.

“There was really no need. A sandwich in my room would have been just fine,” I replied, somewhat embarrassed to be the object of so much attention. I didn’t expect to be entertained, but Max Everly seemed determined to treat me like an honored guest.

“There was every need, and I won’t take no for an answer. We dine promptly at eight,” Max announced, “and I think Mummy will come down to meet you. Her bark is worse than her bite. She’s actually quite a charmer when she cares to be, and I think you and her will get on like a house on fire.”

“I’m sure we will. I’ll see you at dinner then.” I certainly hoped I wasn’t expected to dress for dinner. I had only brought one nice dress just in case. In the meantime, I’d take a little walk in the wintry garden. There was plenty of light from the windows to light the path, and I was feeling restless after my nap.

I dashed upstairs, took my coat and gloves and made my way out into the garden. The flower beds were nothing more than dark circles, and the rose bushes had been pruned and covered for the winter, making them look like shapeless globs in the near darkness. A biting chill quickly turned my nose and cheeks red, but I huddled deeper into my coat and continued to

walk. The inky sky was strewn with countless stars, which paled in comparison to the nearly full moon which shone like an electric torch in the darkened heavens.

I tilted my head upwards, filled my lungs with the wintry air and closed my eyes, suddenly realizing that it'd been several hours since I'd thought of anything other than the forthcoming project. This was definite progress, and I smiled to myself and turned toward the door, ready to dress for dinner and meet Lady Everly.

*

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A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

I hope you've enjoyed this final installment of the *Echoes from the Past* series. If you want to join other readers in hearing all about my new releases and bonus content, you can sign up for my newsletter.

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