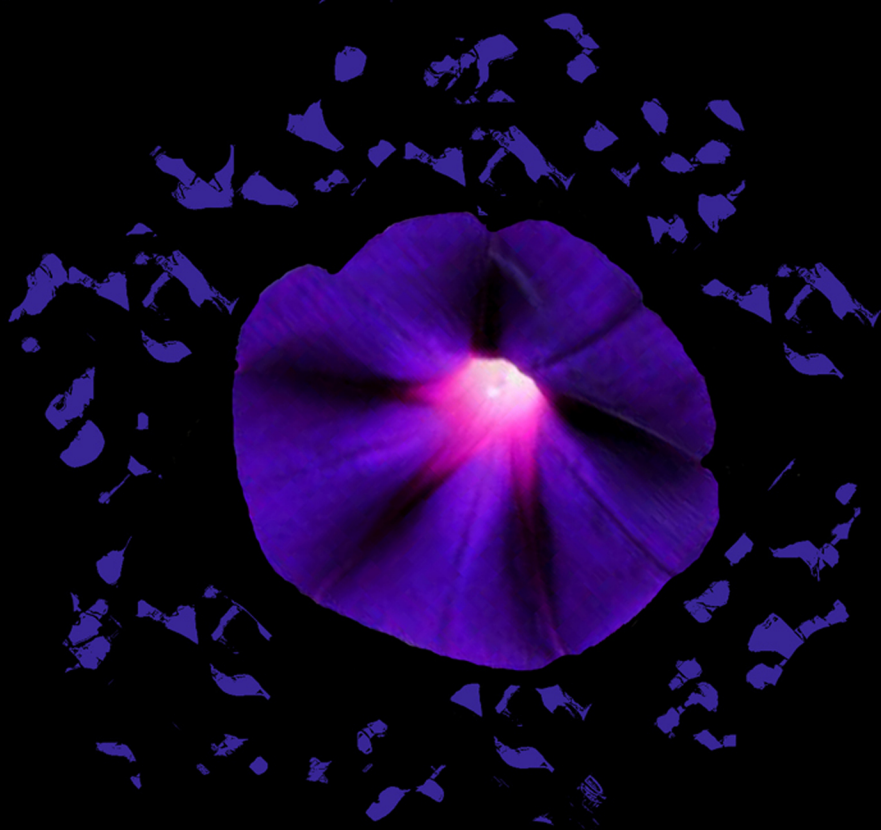


PART TWO OF
THE WOLFBLOOD PROPHECIES

MOURNING GLORY



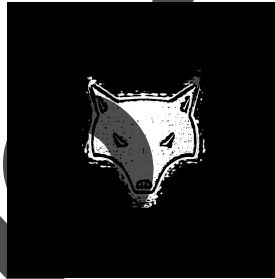
AVRIL SILK



MOURNING GLORY

by

AVRIL SILK



BOOK TWO

of

THE WOLFBLOOD PROPHECIES

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of
Elanor Silk-Turnbull.

Known for a moment, remembered forever.

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*To dance is to pray,
to pray is to heal,
to heal is to give,
to give is to live,
to live is to dance.*

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Chapter One – A Wake

'Quinn would have loved this party. Pity he can't be here.'

'Well, that is the downside of being dead. You don't get to come to your own wake.'

In the middle of the bad jokes, laughter, tears, chatter and music that filled the restaurant, Jo Lakota and her mother Ali sat in silence. Both were thinking about Quinn. Jo had only known him for a couple of days when she was on the run, in danger and terrified. Sometimes a couple of days is all it takes to love someone. He had sheltered her and taught her to be bold and courageous. He had transformed her from a rather studious, serious, sensible schoolgirl to a Goth Princess and most of all, he made her laugh when laughter was the last thing on her mind.

Ali also remembered Quinn's vivid, wild, reckless laughter. He was her first love and the man who had broken her heart, betraying her with her twin sister, Lethe. Now he was dead.

Most people thought Quinn had drowned after falling into the canal at Camden Lock. Jo listened as the myths took shape all around her.

He was high as a kite after the party to end all parties and was trying to walk on water.

He had rescued a drowning child.

He was tap-dancing along the parapet of the bridge.

Only Jo and Ali knew that he had been murdered by VergissMeinNicht, the sinister organisation controlled by Lethe and her consort, the Svengali-like Titus Stigmurus.

Ali gazed out of the window, watching the passers-by. Jo studied her mother's reflection, wondering if this was the right time for the questions that, once answered, would change her life forever.

Aunt Lethe's voice still echoed in her mind. ***Jo, you have a brother. You have to find him. Find your brother.*** However many lies Lethe had told (and the number of her lies was legion) Jo knew for certain that

this, at least, was true, told in desperation as Lethe's life-blood drained away.

'What is it, Jo?' asked Ali gently. Jo hesitated, longing to share the burden of her concerns but her mother's face was just too sad. Jo put up her shield, feeling her heart contract as she sensed Ali's anguish. Ali was hurt. 'Don't shut me out, love. What's wrong?'

'Nothing that can't wait,' answered Jo. Then the splinter of ice that had entered her heart when she was on the run seemed to twist, releasing a dart of anger and venom. 'Anyway, you've shut me out ever since we got back.' Ali's eyes filled with tears. Jo looked away and stared out of the window.

Titus Stigmurus was cold, hungry and very frightened. He was imprisoned in the cellar of an old gunpowder factory, converted by VergissMeinNicht to CUT, the ruthlessly efficient Centre for Utilisation and Training for street children and runaways.

Titus was terrified that if he moved, he would detonate the booby trap which connected him to an unstable barrel of gunpowder. He had tried to keep count of the days and nights that had passed, but as he grew weaker it was hard to focus on anything other than the fear crawling like spiders across his skin and into his mind, jostling for space there with his dreams of rescue, promises of repentance and the memories of Vienna he could no longer keep buried.

The golden giant with the ice-cold, steel blue eyes was there in those memories, his gaze raking the small boy from head to toe. He turned to the beautiful blonde woman, gesturing at the boy with a half empty brandy bottle. 'No son of mine,' he said contemptuously. 'A little runt with beady black eyes and greasy black hair. You slut.' He moved towards her, his arm raised.

She almost succeeded in keeping the fear from her voice. 'Wolfgang – wait. Titus, go to your room. NOW!'

Fragments of broken glass exploded as the brandy bottle became a weapon. The boy was running, then, trying not to hear the sounds coming from the room

behind him. Ahead, at the end of the corridor, the door was open. The young lodger, the art student, stood silhouetted against the light. 'Come on in, Titus,' he said kindly. 'I've got some new paintings to show you.'

The table was covered with postcard-sized watercolours – buildings and trees mainly. 'They're very good,' said Titus politely. He was trying not to cry.

'My father had a terrible temper, too,' said the lodger, sketching furiously as he spoke. 'Nothing pleased him. In the end I stopped trying.'

'Why haven't I got blue eyes and blond hair like Father? Why aren't I tall and slim?' The words burst out on a tide of longing.

'Probably some genetic quirk,' shrugged the lodger. 'Titus. Listen to me. Don't waste your time trying to be one of the beautiful people. It will never happen. They will never accept you. Instead, use your brains – see what makes them tick and learn to control them. Make them march to your rhythm.' He signed the sketch with a flourish and handed it to Titus. 'There! A picture of you, leading your toy soldiers to victory!'

Titus looked at his portrait and smiled at the image of himself at the head of a vast army. 'Thank you,' he said. 'I will never part with this.'

The lodger hesitated, then plunged ahead. 'This is my last day here, Titus. I need to live somewhere cheaper, and my friend Gustl and I have found somewhere we can share on Stumpergasse. So I'm afraid this is goodbye. Be a brave boy. And Titus...'

The little boy's voice was tremulous. 'Yes, Adolf?'
'Vergissmeinnicht.'



The silence was becoming uncomfortable. Jo looked at the scar across her palm. It was just over a week since she had injured her hand when she and Smokey had helped rescue the children from CUT. There had been no contact between them since then. Her mother had been adamant.

'There will be a time for remembering, Jo, but right now you will concentrate on recovering and getting back to normal. You did everything you could.'

That was easy to say, but Jo could not forget the children she had seen, imprisoned, broken and corrupted by VergissMeinNicht. She wondered what had happened to them all after their escape from CUT.

Her scar was itching unbearably. It was hot and angry. Jo remembered with a shiver how her blood, and that of her dying aunt, had mingled in the wound. She longed to run it under the cold-water tap.

'Back in a bit,' she said, but her mother did not appear to have heard. She squeezed her way past Quinn's many friends and relations, and headed towards the cloakroom.

There was a gentle tap on her shoulder. 'You must be Jo.' The voice was friendly, and Jo turned towards the speaker, a smile on her face.

She looked into the warm brown eyes of a tall blonde woman about the same age as her parents.

'I'm Louise,' smiled the woman. Her face was wreathed with smiles, but there was a deep sadness written behind her eyes. Jo warmed to her immediately. As they shook hands Jo felt puzzled.

'Have we met?' she asked. 'Only you seem familiar.'

'It's the eyes,' laughed Louise. 'We were completely different in every other respect. I'm Quinn's big sister.'

Realisation dawned. 'He told me he had a sister,' said Jo, adding impulsively, 'He was so kind to me. I'm so sorry he's gone.' She just couldn't bring herself to say the word *dead*.

'I can hardly believe it sometimes,' said Louise, her eyes filling. She reached for Jo's hand. 'Oh, Jo – you were the last person to see him before he died. I want you to tell me all about the time you spent with him. I really want us to be friends.'

Jo was surprised to find how good it was to talk freely about Quinn at last. Her parents couldn't hide the awkwardness they felt when Jo mentioned him – at last here was someone who loved him as straightforwardly as she did. By the time an old friend came to claim time with Louise she and Jo were fast friends, and promised to meet again soon.

Jo smiled to herself as she went down the stairs to the cloakroom. She had expected a queue, but there was no-one else around and the sudden quiet came as a relief. As the cooling water splashed over her hand she studied herself in the mirror. Her hair had been dyed black, cut short and finally shaved, but now her auburn curls were slowly growing back, helping give the illusion that life was returning to normal.

'But everything is different now,' she thought, suddenly resentful and angry. Yet again she tried to emp Smokey. **Where are you?**

Still nothing. Then she tensed. There seemed to be a faint whisper on the edge of her perception. *Help me. Please help me.*

Smokey?

Silence. Jo waited, but there was nothing else.

As Jo returned to the table, Ali looked up. She smiled vaguely, faintly puzzled, but soon her mind returned to her memories as she stared into the dark street outside.

Jo wondered what her mother was thinking about. Quinn had told her so many things about the time when he was at college with Lethe, Ali, and Paul, Jo's father. She remembered what Quinn had said.

Did you know that Ali and I were sweethearts then? We were going to get married after college. I've thought about it a lot since. But whatever Ali had, Lethe wanted. Including me. Lethe was sensational. And I was sensationally stupid. I dumped Ali. I broke her heart. God. I shouldn't be telling you this. Once Lethe'd got me away from Ali, she grew tired of me pretty quickly, I can tell you. I was besotted with her, though, and I just let her walk all over me. Then Ali started going out with Paul, and to no-one's surprise but mine Lethe decided to add him to her collection.

Lethe and I had a special place under a willow tree by the river. On Midsummer's Eve I thought I would surprise her with a romantic picnic – fairy lights in the

trees; champagne; strawberries. The works. I went to get it all set up and it was me who got the surprise. She was already there. With Paul. And they weren't discussing Philosophy.

Quinn said one more thing that night. He'd heard later that Lethe was pregnant.

This news was a complete shock to Jo. There had never been any mention of a cousin. Did Lethe go through with the pregnancy? And if so, where was the child now and who was the baby's father? And how did all this connect with Lethe's last message to Jo?

Jo, you have a brother. You have to find him. Find your brother.

How can I possibly have a brother? I can't believe my mother and father had a child they kept secret, thought Jo, for the umpteenth time. By now these thoughts were so familiar to her she had almost ceased to feel shocked by them. *But if they did, where is he? Or is it possible that Lethe had her baby and he is my brother? In that case, Lethe must be my mother. Or was Quinn my father? Or...*

'No!' Ali's voice was almost a hiss. Jo jumped guiltily. Surely her mother hadn't got past her shield and emped her? Jo looked across the table, and saw that Ali was not looking at her at all. She was staring fixedly at her reflection in the window. Her face was white with shock.

As Jo followed her mother's gaze, the scar on her hand began to throb in time with her heartbeat. She could not believe her eyes. One minute her mother's reflection was staring back at her, the next it was gliding away, leaving behind only the dark and empty street.



Half a world away a sullen boy with dark emptiness in his soul stared defiantly at the old man sitting cross-legged opposite him. The boy's fist clenched and unclenched in time to the pounding of his heart. The Elder spoke of family, and honour, and respect for the land. He spun webs of words, generous, warm and

wise, to anchor the boy, who was losing himself in a dazzling world of ice and mirrors. *He is drifting away from us*, thought the old man, and he fell silent.



The bell tinkled as the restaurant door opened. A ripple of excited whispers spread quickly through the room then silence fell as all eyes turned towards the newcomers. The burning in Jo's hand was unbearable.

The skinny, spidery man with the over-large head carefully manoeuvred the forget-me-not blue wheelchair towards the table where Jo and Ali were sitting.

Ali stood up, knocking over her chair in her haste. 'Get your coat, Jo. We're leaving.'

Jo was transfixed. She looked deep into the beautiful green eyes of the woman she believed to have died when Smokey shot her.

Beneath her exquisite make-up Lethe was deathly pale. She looked directly at Ali, her twin, her reflection.

'I loved him as well, you know.'

'You do not know the meaning of the word.' Jo had never heard such contempt in her mother's voice before.

'Please stay,' Lethe said quietly, and she reached out to take Jo's hand. Jo jumped as a crackle of electricity sparked between them. She began to feel dizzy and faint, and Lethe seemed to grow stronger before her eyes. Then abruptly the electrical current stopped flowing as Ali pulled Jo away.

Her eyes blazed with fury. 'Keep away from my family,' she snarled, 'Or I will complete what Smokey started.'

She frogmarched Jo out of the door and onto the street. As Jo looked back she caught a glimpse of her aunt's anguished face. Part of her wanted to run back but she was swept away on the tide of her mother's rage and her own memories of Lethe's treachery in the name of her twisted scientific research.



The Northern Line train rattled through the night. Ali wasn't talking and Jo was glad about that. She tried to straighten out her thoughts. She was surprised by her reaction on seeing her aunt again – before the anger flooded back there had been pure, unalloyed relief that Lethe had not, after all, been killed by Smokey. More than relief. Something very like happiness.

Jo gradually became aware of the earnest conversation of two boys sitting behind her. She smiled because they sounded just like her dad as they traded facts about the London Underground. Paul's encyclopaedic knowledge of disused stations and tunnels had helped Jo hide from VMN. She was tempted to join in their conversation, but suspected they preferred to be a club of two.

'Not long 'til Hampstead,' said one. 'Deepest station on the Underground.'

'Bet you don't know there's a ghost station,' said the other.

'Bet I do. North End. Between Hampstead and Golders Green. They never opened it 'cos it was too expensive. My dad says it would have been two hundred feet deep.'

'Bet you don't know how deep Hampstead is,' said the first speaker, undeterred.

'Bet I do too. Hundred and ninety two feet. And they call North End station the Bull and Bush 'cos there's a pub nearby.'

The conversation ambled on, good humoured and competitive. Jo tuned out, and thought instead about Smokey. Why wouldn't he respond when she emped him? Where was he? Yet again she tried to make contact.

You're being a complete pain, Smokey.

Nothing. Nothing at all.

The train was slowing down now, as it approached Hampstead. Jo felt very aware of the depth of the station, remembering how her powers had been most acute when she was deep underground.

Then there was the faintest signal.

Help. Please help me.

There it was again. The sound was stronger now.

Help me. But it wasn't Smokey.

The train doors opened, and to her surprise Ali found herself being pulled out onto the platform.

'What the hell?'

'Tune in, Mum. It's Titus. He's still alive. Just. And I know where he is.'



Now they were heading east, towards London Bridge then on to Gravesend, then to CUT, a place Jo had never wanted to see again. They'd phoned Paul, and he was going to meet them at the station. He was not best pleased. 'Leave the bugger to rot,' he grumbled. 'If anyone deserves to die, he does.'

Jo answered him decisively. 'We're better than that, Dad,' she said. 'Can you get hold of Reg?'

Paul brightened up. 'Good idea,' he said. 'Turn Titus over to Reg and the Righteous. I like it.'

'Oh, by the way, bring a blanket or something,' she added, grimacing. 'Back at Hampstead I could see him clearly. He's naked. Gross.'

The train sped through the night. There were no other passengers in their compartment, so Ali and Jo could talk freely.

'Why are you so keen to save him?' asked Ali.

Jo shook her head. 'I'm not at all keen to save him,' she said slowly, 'but I don't want him on my conscience either. Otherwise we're as bad as they are.'

'So what on earth are we going to do with him when we get there? He's got the courts stitched up – he'll never get what he deserves. Then he'll be free to ruin more people's lives in the name of progress and perfection.'

'So what is the right thing to do?' asked Jo. Her tone was challenging.

'I'd like to kill him – and her – for stealing you away from us and messing with your memory,' said Ali fiercely.

'Thou shalt not kill,' said Jo lightly. Her mother pursed her lips.

'Lock him up and throw away the key then. And that goes for her too. Because she won't stop until she gets what she wants. And what she wants is to control you and use your power. Oh, I know she's weak at the moment, but if she ever regains her strength – and I am sure she will – she will try again.'

'I'm glad she's not dead, Mum,' said Jo impulsively. 'Even after everything that happened. Don't you feel the same? She is your sister, after all.'

'As far as I am concerned, Jo, she might as well be dead. I have no sister. Don't speak to me of her again. She is dangerous and lethal.'

Lethal, thought Jo. *Lethal Lethe. Beautiful and deadly. Pure evil. And completely fascinating.*

Chapter Two – The Ordeal of Titus Stigmurus

Paul's ramshackle estate car trundled through the empty streets. His passenger was grumpy, having been awoken from a nice early night. 'Never thought I'd go back there again,' grunted Reg. 'And certainly not to rescue the head of the Vermin. You sure your girlie's right about all this?'

Paul gave a heartfelt sigh. 'You want to try living with a couple of deep empaths,' he said. 'They know what you're thinking before you do. She's not wrong. If she says she knows where he is, then we'll find him.'

Reg grunted. 'Thought you were the one who could locate things.'

'Things, yes. People. no.'

'Not sure if Titus qualifies as people. He's barely human. God only knows what we're going to do with him.'

'I expect the Righteous will have a few good ideas about that...'

'What's left of us. We took a hell of a knock the last purge your sweet sister-in-law ordered. And I'm sure we've got a mole, working with the Vermin. Wonder who's leading them now, with Lethe dead and Titus out of the reckoning.'

'Lethe's not dead,' said Paul bluntly. 'Ali and Jo saw her at Quinn's wake this evening.'

Reg let out a long whistle. 'Well, now we know who'll be running VMN. I really thought she was a goner.'

'No such luck, mate,' said Paul with feeling. 'Still, she didn't get off scot free. Ali said she was in a wheelchair. That creep Sebastian was with her.'

Reg shuddered. 'He's the one that gets into your dreams, isn't he. All these weird powers you've all got – gives me the willies. I know your missus is an empath, and she can help people remember stuff. And Lethe makes them forget.'

'That's right. But they've got to ask her – and she's very cunning at making them ask her if it suits her purpose.'

'And you can find stuff, and Smokey's more or less invisible... What about Titus?'

'Bit of a wild card, that one. He can emp a bit, but the main thing he seems to do is enhance what other people do – and sometimes it strengthens their talent; other times it twists it. Don't know if he can control it. So what about you?'

'Me?'

'Yes. What special powers have you got, Reg?'

'I'm just an ordinary bloke. Nothing weird about me, mate. And your girlie? She can do lots of stuff, can't she?'

Damn right she can, thought Paul. We haven't even begun to discover what she's capable of. She can emp, she can truth-tell, she can deep-read and she can heal. Just for starters.

'She's pretty talented,' he told Reg. 'That's why VMN are so keen to control her.'

Reg paused for a moment, then plunged in. 'I heard she was a thingamabob – a chimera – with patterns all over her body.'

Paul nodded. 'Blaschko lines. Chimeras can happen if twins are conceived and one dies in the womb. Sometimes the surviving twin absorbs the one that died and has two lots of DNA. And very rarely the one that lives has Blaschko lines on their skin.'

'Poor lass,' said Reg. 'Sad to lose your twin. Unless it's Lethe, of course. The world would be better off without her. But I bet Jo would have loved a brother or sister.'

Paul did not reply.



By the time everyone reached the small straggly copse a misty, silver dawn was breaking. A lone blackbird heralded the day, launching the dawn chorus. Nobody noticed the shadowy figure watching from behind a tree.

Jo remembered standing in the same spot with the Ferals; the gang of street kids who lived in a long dis-used Underground station. Then they were going to liberate the children held captive at CUT. Now it was

Titus Stigmurus who needed rescuing. Ali, Paul and Reg looked expectantly at Jo. 'It's round here somewhere,' she said. 'I know it's hidden by brambles and bushes.'

'Oh good,' said Ali unenthusiastically. 'This is my best frock. Come on, Paul. You're the one who can locate things.'

Paul smiled and concentrated, then pushed aside a particularly overgrown shrub. 'Is this it?' he grinned triumphantly. Jo nodded and she led the way into the abandoned smuggler's tunnel. Reg turned back to make sure the entrance was concealed again. Just for a second he thought he saw something moving. He waited a moment, but all was still, so he followed the others and disappeared from view.

Smokey stepped into the clearing. His expression was unfathomable, but his eyes, dark with malice, glowed like embers.

'Why are we going this way?' asked Paul. 'We could have just driven straight there.'

'Don't want anyone to know we've got him until we've decided what to do,' answered Reg. 'The fewer people who know we're here, the better.' He hadn't forgotten that someone had betrayed Jo's whereabouts to VergissMeinNicht. Ali had told him what Lethe had said to Titus during the showdown at CUT.

'Your informant took you for a fool.'

So who was the informant? wondered Reg. Was it one of the Ferals? Or one of the Righteous?

'I thought it was Zebo or Wheezy, after the reward money,' Jo said out loud, then realised her mistake.

Reg scowled. 'Keep out of my head, girlie.'

'Sorry. Didn't mean to intrude. The further underground we go, the stronger it gets.'

They trudged on in silence.

Now Jo was so close to Titus she could feel his terror. It flooded her mind, overwhelming her. Resolutely she shut him out and concentrated on the journey.

Eventually they reached the end of the tunnel. They stood in a tumbledown shack as the heavens opened and rain poured down. A short distance along a narrow track were the CUT buildings, squat and menacing in the bleak, windswept landscape. Jo shivered. Fragments of memory returned.

She could see herself as if from a distance, dressed in boy's clothing and shaven-headed, her mind a fog. Lethe had wiped Jo's memory and even now she struggled to separate the truth from the lies she had been told when her mind was a clean slate.

'Come on,' she said abruptly, and broke into a run. 'We'll have to use the stairs,' she called over her shoulder. 'The lift's broken.'

The fear was much stronger now. *I'm coming to help you*, emped Jo. At the foot of the stone staircase Jo stepped out into a large, vaulted cellar. She remembered coming here to rescue Lanying, the Chinese girl who had been in solitary confinement for refusing to co-operate. The air was still dank and musty, impregnated with a strong smell of sulphur. Now it was overlaid with the stink of human terror and excrement. Jo looked at the heavy, studded oak door. She walked purposefully towards it. The others followed.

Fragrant smoke filled the air. The two old men sat facing each other. Once they had been inseparable; true blood brothers with a striking physical resemblance. Now their lives had shaped them and they had become themselves; Grey Wolf, the older of the two, had grown somewhat soft, rounded and comfortable where the other, Silver Lightning, was sharp, thin and spiky. He was proud and very quick to anger. Now his voice was cold.

'He does not belong here, yet you persist in teaching him our ways; telling him our secrets.'

'He does belong here. You only have to look at him to know that.'

'All I know is that thirteen years ago a new-born baby in a basket lined with pine needles and hackle

feathers was found at the entrance to the Reservation. You and Summer Moon were childless, so you took the child in and raised him. And how does he thank you? He is sullen and silent. He runs with the wild, white boys.'

'Even more reason to teach him our ways. Our path is the way of wisdom and should not be hidden.'

'Oh, brother! There are so many pretenders trying to take our secrets and our strength. They have no spirituality of their own and are reaching out to steal ours. Would you let them all into the sacred places? Do you not know that there is a Declaration of War on those who violate our traditions?'

'I do. And I am saddened by it. The path should be open to all who seek the true way. We do not own the healing ceremonies and rites.'

'You would squander our heritage on those who do not deserve it – and that includes the boy. He will throw your offerings in your face and ride rough-shod over your dreams. And you know I am right.'

The old man bowed his head, suddenly weary to the bone. 'Yes,' he said. 'I know you are right.'

Jo was just about to open the door when Reg gently pushed her aside. 'Give me the blanket,' he said gruffly to Paul. He turned to Jo. 'I'm going in first. Even Titus deserves a bit of dignity.'

'What about the booby trap?' said Jo. 'It's an old-fashioned poacher scarer. I need to disable it, like Smokey did, so it doesn't set off the gunpowder.'

'If the gunpowder is unstable, it could go off anyway,' said Reg glumly.

'That's what Smokey said.' Jo shivered as she remembered how Smokey had saved her. She tried not to remember how it had felt when he'd held her in his arms once they were safe.

Reg shrugged. 'We'd better sort it out pronto, then. Come on, girlie. Lead on. Now, nobody speak, and nobody move.' He carefully opened the door and Jo went in. Reg was right behind her.

She was half-afraid of what they would see. She glanced at the wretched figure in the centre of the room, gagged and trussed with duct tape. She saw a broken man, once all-powerful, whose eyes overflowed with tears of humiliation and relief. The silence was filled with racking sobs. She couldn't believe how quickly he had aged.

Then she felt something deep and powerful, and knew she was not the only one. Compassion for Titus flowed through her and Reg.

Jo walked carefully over to the poacher scarer. 'Don't touch the trip wire, Reg,' she whispered. 'Otherwise the weight will fall, set off the cartridge, and...'

'Got it,' said Reg brusquely.

Jo walked carefully to the booby trap, and just as Smokey had done before her, wedged her finger between the suspended weight and the cartridge. 'OK,' she said. 'You can cover him up now and undo the trip wire.'

Reg wrapped Titus in the blanket, then undid the wire that led from Titus to the booby trap. He called to the others. 'I need a hand,' he said. 'He's in a bad way. He'll barely be able to walk.'

Jo watched as her parents came in, their expressions complex but predominantly compassionate.

'Come on, old chap,' said Paul awkwardly. 'Let's get you away from here.' He started to remove the duct tape as gently as he could.

Jo was looking puzzled, at a long, sodden string that came out of a small hole in the duct tape across Titus's mouth. She looked for the other end, and saw that it led inside a half-full bottle of water.

Like watering a plant when you go away on holiday, she thought. *Someone's been keeping him alive.*

Prolonging the agony. Because she was more powerful underground, and Titus was too weak to shield against her, she was easily able to probe his shattered mind for clues to his ordeal. The fact that Titus had a lifetime of cruelty to his discredit didn't excuse what had been done to him. Her face was set and grim as she

watched her mother gather up his clothes. Something dropped from the bundle and landed at Jo's feet.

Titus whimpered something, his voice broken and faint. Reg strained to hear. 'Wants his wallet,' he said tersely to Jo. She looked at the soft, expensive leather case at her feet. Still holding the weight on the booby trap, she carefully used her free hand to pick up the wallet. To her surprise her fingers throbbed as she touched it, then, moving surprisingly quickly, Titus snatched it from her.

He was sobbing again, but now with relief as he searched inside the wallet. Whatever he was looking for was clearly there, because he was transformed with joy. Over and over again he gasped, 'Thank you! Thank you!' as tears streamed down his face.

'It's only money,' said Reg, mystified.

'No,' said Jo slowly, her face puzzled. 'It's not money. Whatever it is, it's much more valuable than that.'

'Let's get going,' said Ali. 'This place is giving me the creeps. You can let go of that now, Jo. The trip wire is disconnected.'

Jo shook her head. 'There's something else,' she said. 'There's a thread leading from the cartridge to the gun powder... a fuse, I suppose. If anything sets off the cartridge, there'll be a spark and...'

'Wedge it with this,' said Paul, handing Jo a rolled-up handkerchief. 'Then let's get the hell out of here.'

They all moved towards the door, Paul and Ali supporting Titus, Jo and Reg bringing up the rear.

'Once you're outside, run like stink,' said Reg quietly. 'It's going to blow.'

'It should be OK, Reg,' argued Jo, then looked in horror as he produced a box of matches.

'Like I said, girlie, it's going to blow. I'm counting to a hundred. Now move.'

Jo ran, pushing her parents and Titus on towards the stone staircase. 'Reg is going to blow it up,' she gasped. Her father swore and moved faster, but Titus stumbled on the steps, blocking the way ahead. There was a terrible frozen moment when they all stared at

each other, the seconds ticking by, then, from somewhere, Paul found the strength to haul Titus onto his shoulder in a fireman's lift.

Jo ran as she had never run before. She tried to keep track of the passing moments, but time was playing tricks, stretching and contracting, and it was hard to count. Behind her she could hear Ali's breathing growing more laboured and knew she was struggling. 'Nearly there, Mum,' she gasped and she pulled and pushed her mother towards the door to the outside. 'Ten seconds left,' she said.

Once through the door they kept on running, gulping down the fresh air, all the time waiting for the explosion they knew was coming.

'Five seconds! Get on the ground!' shouted Paul. 'NOW!'

When the blast came the noise was terrifying. A huge explosion shook the ground, quickly followed by a series of violent eruptions. Paul's warning came moments too late and they were all thrown to the ground by a sudden blast wave of searing heat. Where once were buildings now raged a crackling, exploding mass of flame and sparks.

Chunks of masonry and timber flew into the air and smoke billowed into the night sky. Part of a roof lodged in a tree, tiles falling like dominoes. A cascading fountain of glass fragments reflected red, orange, silver and gold before raining back down into the inferno.

Debris crashed down around the helpless Jo. As she screwed her eyes closed, she could feel not just her own fear but the fears of everybody around her. She did not even hear herself scream. Above, a plume of thick, black smoke signalled destruction and danger.

'Where's Reg? Has anybody seen Reg?' cried Paul. 'I'm going back to look for him.'

'No you are not.' Ali's voice was sharper than Jo had ever heard. 'You are not risking your life as well.'

'I can't just leave him!

'But you can leave us?'

Paul was silent. A mutinous silence clamouring with unspoken words.

Ali spoke urgently. 'We have to get to the tunnel, Paul! Thank God the car's the other end, not here. Any minute now, the emergency services are going to arrive and I want us gone before they ask too many awkward questions. Come on, Jo. Jo?' She whirled round, looking for her daughter. ***Jo! Get back here now!***

But Jo was running back towards the flames. ***It's OK, Mum. I can see him.***

The blast had blown Reg clear of the blazing building. He was lying on his back, dazed and covered in soot, and blood, his clothes ragged and torn. He was nursing his right arm. His legs were trapped by part of a smouldering table.

'Is anything broken, Reg?'

'Can't say my arm's too clever... and I reckon this table's probably had it, girlie.' Reg winced as he smiled.

'I'm going to try and lift it off you.'

'Is that bugger watching it all burn?'

'Yes.'

'Good.'

Jo wrapped her jacket round her hands and with a strength she did not know she possessed, she heaved at the table, levering the edge up against Reg's industrial boots and letting its own weight roll it away.

'Bloody good boots,' said Reg groggily, as she helped him to his feet.

'You're a brave man, Reg.'

'Oh, girlie, it was just a little bitty bonfire.'

'I'm not talking about facing the flames, Reg. I'm talking about facing my mother.'

Chapter Three – GLORY

'So what happened to Titus after you rescued him?'

Samantha studied her reflection in Jo's bedroom mirror, turning slowly round. 'Does this skirt look alright?' she added.

Jo opted for honesty. 'Your gran would like it, Sam.' Her friend pulled a face and swapped the offending item for a trusty pair of faded jeans. Meanwhile Jo was considering Sam's first question. 'Well – for a start, he made a remarkable recovery. When we found him, he looked like a living corpse, but in no time at all he seemed right as rain.'

'So does he just get away with everything?' asked Sam in disbelief.

'Well, not exactly. There was a trial, of sorts. Of course it was a complete fix, with VMN running it. He's spending a few months in prison just for show. He promised to mend his ways and be a good boy and they believed him.'

'Yeah, right,' said Sam derisively.

Jo looked thoughtful. 'The funny thing is, so did I. He vowed to atone for his sins, and work for good in the world. He was completely sincere.'

'I'll believe it when I see it. And what about Smokey? Any news?'

Jo shook her head, then frowned. Sam noticed.

'What's up?'

'I thought I heard your mum calling...'

Sam looked at her watch. 'That can't be the time. She'll kill me.'

'I'm coming with you, Sam.' Jo drew a deep breath as a wave of powerful, empathic emotions engulfed her. 'There's something wrong.'

First the feelings, then the images. She could see Sam's mother, bending over a dark shape on the floor.

The two girls ran out of Jo's house.

Jo emped her mother. **Mum. Call an ambulance.**

It's Sam's dad.

'It's my dad,' sobbed Sam. 'I can tell.'



The boy clenched and unclenched his hand as he listened to the two old men talk about him. No-one in the tribe realised that, when he chose, he could hear their most secret whispers. They saw his skill as a tracker, but had no idea of the reason. He had no intention of revealing his talent to anyone.

The man he called *Uncle* did not mince his words. 'He will throw your offerings in your face and ride rough-shod over your dreams. And you know I am right.'

The boy listened intently, willing the man he called *Father* to defend him to the proud and supercilious Silver Lightning. The pause seemed to go on forever. When his father spoke, he sounded defeated.

'Yes,' he said. 'I know you are right.'

The boy was washed in wave upon wave of hot shame and anger. Tears pricked his eyes. He turned and ran then, deep into the dark, silent trees, deafened by the roar of disappointment and humiliation filling his mind. So he did not hear Grey Wolf add, 'As we rode rough-shod over the dreams of our parents. But we found our true pathways, and so will Hawk. There is much goodness in him.'

'We were never as wild, never as wayward, as he is,' stated Silver Lightning.

Grey Wolf laughed. 'Your memory is failing you, brother.'



Jo looked out of her bedroom window, across to Sam's garden. Through a haze of cherry blossom she could see her friend pushing the wheelchair along the crazy paving path. Sam's dad stared straight ahead, apparently oblivious to the beautiful garden and his devoted daughter. Jo could see that Sam was chattering cheerfully away, seemingly unperturbed by the lack of any response from her father. Jo opened the window and called across. Sam looked up and waved, then turned back towards the house.

Jo spoke to the empty air. "Hi, Sam. Fancy coming to the pictures tonight?" "Oooh, sorry Jo; I promised Dad we'd watch the football together." "How about tomorrow night?" "That's Mum's evening class so I need to keep an eye on Dad." "How about if I come over and give you a hand?" "Dad's still a bit wobbly about company, Jo – so not for a bit..." "Sam, your dad wouldn't notice if I came round with a chicken on my head and the entire football team at my heels."

Jo moved away from the window, her shoulders drooping. She caught sight of herself in the bedroom mirror and noticed how dispirited she looked. *Don't be so mean*, she told herself sternly. *You'd be just the same if it was your dad trapped in a wheelchair*. The arguments came and went in Jo's mind as she struggled to be fair. 'Even so,' she muttered, 'I'd still have some time for my best friend.' She mooched into the kitchen, where her mum was reading the parish magazine.

Ali looked carefully at her daughter. 'Fancy a walk?' she said, her voice over-bright. 'The fresh air would do you good.'

'It's alright, Mum,' said Jo. She tried not to sound ungracious. She poured herself a glass of squash. 'Mum... how long is Sam's dad going to be like this?'

Ali's voice was gentle but her eyes were bleak. 'Short of a miracle, love, Howard's not going to get better.'

Jo looked stricken. Her mother tried desperately to cheer her up. She passed the parish magazine to Jo. 'I see there's a new youth group starting up at the church hall tonight. Why not give it a try?'

'No fun without Sam,' mumbled Jo, but she looked at the advert anyway.

***THE GLORY GANG!
IF YOU ARE AGED BETWEEN TWELVE AND
TWENTY WE HAVE JUST WHAT YOU WANT!
A CHANCE TO CHAT AND RELAX, HAVE FUN,
SHARE YOUR WORRIES AND FIND THE PATHWAY
THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU!***

GOD'S LOVE ONLY REQUIRES YOU!
COME AND SEE WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER.

'Why not give Sam a ring and see if she'd like to go?'

'She won't leave her dad,' replied Jo despondently. 'I keep suggesting stuff to do, but she just makes excuses.'

Ali looked thoughtful. 'How about if I offer to go over and sit with Jean and Howard? Sam mightn't feel so bad about leaving him if I'm there. It's about time she had some fun.'

Jo looked doubtful for a moment, then grinned. 'It's worth a try,' she said impulsively. 'Thanks, Mum! I'll ring her right now.'

Ali smiled, half listening as Jo spoke excitedly to Sam. The smile faded, however, as it became clear the conversation wasn't going at all well. She tried not to appear too anxious as Jo hung up.

'She's already going,' said Jo flatly, in response to Ali's unspoken question. 'With Beth. She says she didn't think it was my type of thing.'

'She has a point,' said Ali carefully. 'It does sound a bit, well, evangelical...'

'That's not the reason she doesn't want to go with me,' said Jo. 'I emp'd her – oh, don't look at me like that. It happens. You know it does. I've never done it before... well, not with Sam, anyway.'

Ali was curious, in spite of her disapproval. 'So what's the problem, then?'

Jo was hesitant. 'When we came back... after we set the children free... I told Sam a bit about it. I told her about the healing...'

Realisation dawned on Ali's face. 'And she wants you to heal her dad,' she said slowly. 'And you can't, but she thinks you won't.'

Jo nodded miserably. 'What good is all this power if I can't control it?' she demanded angrily. 'I've really tried to help Sam's dad, but there's nothing.'

'These gifts...,' said Ali hesitantly, 'sometimes appear when we least expect them. Other times we

long for them and they're nowhere to be found. It's not a right. It's a state of grace. And you are still very young.'

'I did it once; I can do it again,' said Jo flatly. 'Anyway, you and Aunt Lethe can control your powers.'

'Well, to a point. It's taken a long time to learn whatever control I have,' said Ali.

'So let's start now. You can teach me.'

'It won't happen quickly,' warned Ali. 'I'm still learning, after all these years.'

'So show me some short cuts. I bet you know some.'

'Maybe I do. But short cuts can be very dangerous.'

Jo lost patience. 'Oh, forget it,' she said angrily. 'If you can't be bothered to help I'll work it out for myself.'

The front door slammed. Ali sighed, but for the time being, at least, she thought she had achieved what she wanted and put a brake on Jo's curiosity. In that she was quite wrong.

Chapter Four – Blood Magic

The final notes of the song lingered in the late afternoon air, shimmering as delicately as soap bubbles. There was a silence, then the handful of passers-by laughed and clapped their hands together. Some of them threw small change at Hawk's feet. He nodded in acknowledgment, waiting until they'd all gone before bending to scoop up the coins.

'Barely enough for a burger and a coffee,' drawled a voice from the shadows. 'You're worth a lot more than that, friend.'

'I'm not your friend. And if I'm worth so much, how come you didn't part with a measly dime?'

'Because I can offer something way better than money, my friend.'

'Yeah, right,' sneered Hawk. 'Like what? A recording contract?'

'That could very well happen, but just now you look in need of a change of clothes, a hot meal and a good night's sleep.'

Hawk laughed derisively. 'So what's the catch?'

'No catch. It's your call. You can follow me and fill your empty belly, or you can keep running. How long's it been? Three weeks? Can't deny you've managed pretty well so far – stealing eggs and apples and sleeping in hay barns. But it's going to be a bitter cold night and the sheriff's men don't like strangers on the streets after dark.'

Hawk tensed and listened intently.

'In fact, they're on their way right now,' added the man, emerging from the shadows. 'But you know that, don't you. Because you can hear them.' He laughed at Hawk's shocked expression. 'It takes one to know one, friend. But your belly's rumbling so loud you couldn't hear me listening. Now. Are you coming or not, pardner?'

Hawk saw a tall, bony man wearing a long coat as black as midnight and a dusky leather Stetson hat. Silver spurs jangled. Then there was another shape, silken and silent. The most wonderful horse Hawk had

ever seen, shimmering golden as the street lights came on.

Across the street a door opened and four thickset men, silhouetted against a rectangle of blue-tinged light, stepped out onto the sidewalk.

The man swung effortlessly onto the horse's back, then extended his hand to Hawk. 'I'm the Reverend Obadiah Moon. Folk call me the Pastor,' he said, 'and this here is Glean. Now, what's it gonna be, boy? Glory or gloom?'

Ignoring the outstretched hand Hawk sprang onto Glean's back.

'Glory it is, then,' said the Pastor, and he smiled to himself as they rode away.

Titus sat at his desk and looked at the cut on his arm. A drop of blood fell silently onto an old, creased, stained and faded piece of paper.

'For God's sake, Titus,' said Lethe contemptuously, 'you know that won't work.'

'I don't particularly mind if it doesn't,' said Titus wearily. 'I am so tired.'

Lethe spoke urgently. 'You can't give up now. If you do, all we have worked for will be wasted. The day of the prophecy is almost here. You fell from grace, as was foretold. You repented. You had a penitent's vision of glory and now you are making GLORY a reality. Without you, it all falls apart. You must go on. You know what you have to do. Go and see Mirabel.' There was a long silence and she struggled to contain her irritation. She made a supreme effort and her voice was almost tender. 'Would you like me to come with you? You know you will feel so much better afterwards.'

Still the man at the desk was silent, his head bowed, his shoulders shaking. Lethe reached for his hand. 'Oh, Titus,' she said gently. Now her concern seemed completely genuine. 'Tears won't do. It has to be blood. You know that. Life's blood. The prophecy is clear.'

Hidden in the shadowy folds of the long, crimson velvet curtains a stony-faced Smokey watched impassively as Lethe stroked the weeping face of the man he hated more than any other. He watched as Titus rose shakily to his feet, carefully folding the stained paper and placing it in his wallet before allowing Lethe to lead him to the door.

The door closed behind them and Smokey crossed over to the luxurious leather chair behind Titus's magnificent desk. He sat down, his expression thoughtful. 'So there's a prophecy,' he said to himself. 'I bet he's got a copy stashed away somewhere.' So saying he began systematically searching the drawers, cupboards and shelves.

The morning sun streamed in through the crimson, gold and blue stained glass window. Hawk came down the rickety spiral staircase into a large, high room. He could hear old time rock 'n roll coming from an organ converted to a hi fi. A chipped stone angel seemed to double as a coat rack. High-backed pews in dark wood with carved panels showing the seasons of the year were arranged around a scrubbed pine table covered with what looked suspiciously like an altar cloth.

The Pastor grinned at him. 'Yup. It's the house of the Lord alright. What with it being dark last night and you being so tired and hungry, I guess you didn't realise.' Hawk was silent. 'Oh, I see,' said the Pastor. 'First time you've been in a church.'

Hawk looked irritated. 'How do you know what I was thinking?'

'Sorry, friend,' said the Pastor. 'Didn't realise you don't know how to shield. You'll soon get the hang of it. Take a pew. You look better this morning. Reckon you sorely needed some supper and a good night's sleep. I'm doing eggs and bacon. Want some?'

'Just eggs,' said Hawk, still irritated. 'I don't eat meat.' The Pastor nodded but said nothing. 'It was my decision, since you're asking,' Hawk added. 'Not that it's any of your business.'

'Never said a word,' laughed the Pastor.

'Yes, you did!'

'Nope. But you heard what I was thinking, just like I heard what you were thinking just now. So how long have you been able to emp?'

'Since always,' said Hawk, surprised. 'Is that what you call it?'

'Yup. And no, you are not the only one who can do it. It's a gift – like your other gift – hearing sounds and conversations a long way away. What's your range, by the way?'

'Never really tested it out – a mile or more, maybe.'

The Pastor nodded. 'Hmm. You could work on that. Anyhow, emping means you can hear people's thoughts... if they let you... or if they're too distracted to remember to keep you out. And you can send them your thoughts – if you want to. Sometimes it happens whether you want it or not. And sometimes it won't happen, even if you really want it to. We'll need to teach you some basic emping rules, or you'll be up to your neck in hot water faster'n you can say *Jack Rabbit*.'

Hawk looked hesitant. 'About the other thing,' he said. 'When I hear real noises...'

The Pastor interrupted. 'Believe me, thoughts can get real noisy.'

'You know what I mean. You can do it as well?' The Pastor nodded. 'Are there many of us?'

'Not many as good as you. I figure I'm a match for you – kind of on the same wave length. Been picking up some of the same stuff as you for a while now. Reckoned we'd be bound to meet some time.'

'But that's private!' Hawk looked angry.

The Pastor was unabashed. 'No more'n a radio's private. This stuff is out there – I just pick it up sometime. Like when you ran away. That came through loud and clear.'

Hawk felt his face redden with anger as he remembered. He could still hear his uncle's cold voice.

'He will throw your offerings in your face and ride rough-shod over your dreams. And you know I am right.'

Tears sprang to his eyes as he remembered his foster father's reply. He brushed them away angrily.

'Yes,' the old man had said wearily. *'I know you are right.'*

Now Hawk felt hot with shame. He hung his head. The Pastor surveyed him kindly. 'You should have listened a little longer, my friend. Try now.'

Hawk spoke angrily. 'How can I hear a conversation that happened weeks ago?'

'Can you rewind a cassette? Course you can. It's that easy. Well, for the likes of you 'n me. Like I said, all this stuff is out there. You just have to concentrate and tune in. Remember where you were. Remember what you were wearing. The weather. The smells. The sights. The sounds. The textures. Then, instead of running off, keep listening.'

'You're crazy,' said Hawk rudely, and he turned on his heel and went back upstairs.

The Pastor listened to the sound of Hawk's footsteps. A door opened and slammed. He heard Hawk throw himself onto the bed. There was a long silence, followed by a crackling noise, like static. The Pastor smiled to himself. There was another pause, then more static, and then he, like the angry boy upstairs, could clearly hear Grey Wolf's voice, followed by that of his blood brother.

'As we rode rough-shod over the dreams of our parents. But we found our true pathways, and so will Hawk. There is much goodness in him.'

'We were never as wild, never as wayward, as he is.'

'Your memory is failing you, brother.'

There was another pause, then, barely discernible, the sound of someone sobbing into a pillow. The Pastor turned up the music and finished his breakfast at leisure, before he slowly climbed the spiral staircase.

Chapter Five – Second Sight

Lethe Lacuna turned away from the mirror with a sigh. Her pale reflection gave her no pleasure. Her portrait, beautiful and vibrant, showed what she had been, mocking her from above the mantelpiece.

There was a very small noise outside her door. Lethe was rarely surprised, but she was not expecting a visitor. She reached into her desk drawer for the exquisite pistol with the mother-of-pearl handle.

'Come in,' she called, and the door to her study opened slowly. Her guarded expression quickly turned to delight. 'Jocasta! How wonderful to see you! I was afraid...'

'It's Jo, Aunt Lethe. Don't call me Jocasta. And I need your help.'

'Brought you up some coffee.' Hawk turned his face away from the Pastor to hide the evidence of tears. 'So what you gonna do now, kid? Keep running, or head on back?'

Hawk's reply was hesitant. 'I don't want to go back yet,' he said. 'But I don't want to run, either. I need time to think and plan. I was wondering...' He paused, hoping that the Pastor would help him out, but there was only silence, so he ploughed on. '... if I could stay here for a while. When I was on the run, I realised something. I want to know where I came from. I know I wasn't born on the reservation. And if I ever go back to the tribe, I want them to be properly proud of me, not just because they love me...'

'Love doesn't ask you to be worthy,' observed the Pastor mildly. 'But yeah, you can stay here – if you earn your keep. You're a good kid. If that's what you choose. But make no mistake, you've got it in you to be every bit as wild and wayward as your uncle said. Pretty much up to you.'

'I should let them know I'm safe.'

'Easy enough. You can drop them a line, give them a call; heck, you could even send a telegram. Or you could emp. Worth a try.'

Hawk looked surprised, then concentrated hard, picturing Grey Wolf in his mind's eye before sending his message. He began hesitantly. **Father?**

Moments passed, then he could have sworn he heard the old man's voice, full of love and concern. **Hawk? Is that really you?**

'You report for duty in ten minutes,' said the Pastor, grinning as he closed the door.

Lethe looked at Jo's turbulent face. 'You want to learn how to control your powers?' Jo nodded. 'Then give me your hand.'

Jo reached out hesitantly, remembering the last time Lethe had touched her hand. Once again a crackle of electricity arced between them. Again the faintness and the sense of Lethe gaining strength. But this time there was no loving mother to pull Jo free.

She felt drained and weak and sank to the floor. Lethe laughed, then with a theatrical gesture, she released her niece. The scar on Jo's hand, where their blood had once mingled, throbbed angrily.

'There is always an exchange and there is always a price, Jo. And the usual currency is blood.' Jo could only whimper. 'Suppose I tell you that to heal your friend's father you need the blood of, oh, let us say, a single pigeon. There are thousands of them. Such pests. One less won't be missed. Then I'll tell you that you will have to kill the pigeon yourself. And that is only the beginning. I doubt you have the stomach for it.'

'I healed before.' Jo could barely croak. 'And I didn't have to kill then.'

'Beginner's luck, my dear. But if you want to control the power you undoubtedly have, there are hard lessons to learn. My dear sister's way is slow – my methods are considerably faster.' She paused. 'How much time does Samantha's father have, do you think?'

Jo struggled to her feet. 'I have to go,' she said painfully and she hobbled to the door.

Lethe looked magnificent. Now her mirror showed sparkling eyes dancing with mischief; her cheeks were flushed; her expression triumphant. 'Do call again,' she laughed.



As Jo limped painfully home, drained and exhausted after her distressing encounter, she passed the open door of the church hall. Loud music was playing and coloured lights flashed in the darkened interior. Then she remembered. The Glory Gang. Sam would be there. Jo missed their friendship so much. Perhaps if she really tried to fit in she could join the group.

She still felt weak but she willed herself to stand upright and walk into the church hall. It took a while to get used to the darkness, but the music stopped for a moment, and she could clearly hear Sam's laughter. As she turned to locate her, Jo remembered Beth. Sure enough they were there, and Jo realised with a sinking heart that the two of them were watching as she stood uncertainly in the entrance. Not only that. She was the reason for the laughter. It only took a moment to understand why. She was in her old blue jeans and a homemade jumper, whereas every other girl there was dressed as if for a child's birthday party. Frills, satin, lace and, above all, the same lustrous colours. Deep indigo and silver.

Jo watched as Sam turned and whispered something to Beth. They both laughed. Jo squared her shoulders. She marched over to Sam, willing her to smile, but Sam wouldn't meet her eyes.

'I'm going to do it, Sam. I'm going to heal your dad.'

Jo saw the longing in Sam's eyes. Then Beth laughed. 'Words are easy, Freckle Freak. Sam needs friends she can rely on, not empty promises.'

'Shut up, Beth,' said Sam. She looked directly at Jo. 'Do you really mean it?'

Jo nodded. 'I really mean it.' She ignored the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. 'I promise you I'll make him better.'

You bloody idiot. Just how are you going to manage that?

Jo jumped. She gave Sam one last smile and moved away quickly, glad to notice that Beth looked furious.

Smokey? Where the hell are you?

'I'm right here,' said a familiar voice. 'I've been looking for you everywhere. We need to talk.'

Jo looked around her. It was always hard to locate Smokey – he seemed to blend into the background wherever he was. Jo peered into the shadows and suddenly there he was and she remembered the last time they had met. Blushing, she quickly pushed their brief embrace to the back of her mind. They had rescued the imprisoned children at CUT, and Smokey had shot her Aunt Lethe. She was pretty sure he had imprisoned Titus as well, after Titus had left him for dead.

'Pity I didn't get rid of the pair of them,' said Smokey dispassionately. 'Trust you to go all soft-hearted.'

'It's good to see you too,' said Jo sarcastically. She could see Beth walking towards her. The music started playing again. 'Dance with me, Smokey,' said Jo urgently.

Beth laughed unpleasantly. 'Talking to yourself, Freckle Freak?'

'Only way to get an intelligent conversation round here,' riposted Jo feebly.

Smokey! Make yourself visible or...

Beth stopped laughing and stared behind Jo. You could almost see the mental cogs whirring as Beth evaluated the situation and re-positioned herself in the great scheme of things. 'Well, hello,' she simpered as Smokey stepped out of the shadows. 'Jo – I think we should bury the hatchet and you should introduce me to your friend.'

'When pigs or you fly, Beth,' said Jo rudely. 'Ah. But I repeat myself. Come on, Smokey.' She pulled him

away, onto the crowded dance floor. Jo was aware of Beth's eyes following them. In fact, she soon realised that Smokey was causing quite a stir. He was far and away the best looking boy in the place. Jo hugged the knowledge to herself and kept a tight rein on her thoughts, making sure Smokey couldn't sense just how pleased she was to be so close to him. As they danced he told her what he had seen and heard in Titus's office.

'I searched everywhere, but I couldn't find a copy of any poxy prophecy,' said Smokey. He was plainly irritated.

'We really need to find out about it,' said Jo. 'And the mysterious piece of paper in his wallet.'

She remembered how desperate Titus had been to get his wallet back after being rescued. It was uncomfortable to remember how Titus had been when they found him. Neither did she like the suspicion that it was Smokey who had trapped and humiliated him. She tried to concentrate but the encounter with Lethe was still taking its toll and she suddenly slumped forward. Smokey caught her before she fell and she leaned against him gratefully, closing her eyes as her head swam.

Then it happened. One minute she had only darkness before her closed eyes, the next she could clearly see Beth, preening herself and smirking at Smokey.

Jo was completely puzzled, then an idea began to form. 'Are you looking at Beth, by any chance?'

'So what if I am?'

'Do me a favour, Smokey, and look somewhere else... it's really important.'

Smokey sighed. 'OK. But there's no need to be jealous. Even though she's amazing.'

Jo kept her eyes closed. 'I am so not jealous. Are you looking at the disco ball?'

'Yeah, as it happens. What's going on?'

'I'm not sure, but it seems like I can see what you're seeing. Look at something really weird.' There was a pause, then she said crossly, 'The top of my

head is not really weird, Smokey. 'Wow! Looks like somehow I can see what you see!'

'Oh, great.' He considered this new development without enthusiasm. 'Well, you keep out unless I invite you in,' he said finally. 'Or I can't answer for the consequences. Wonder if it works both ways?' There was a pause, then, 'Nope. Well, I don't want to know what you're looking at anyway.'

Just then the music stopped and a spotlight lit up the centre of the stage. Everyone crowded round as the curtains slowly opened, and a beautiful young woman, dressed in a gown of indigo velvet sprinkled with silver stars, walked into the spotlight.

'Welcome to GLORY,' she said. Her voice was husky, melodic and warm, almost hypnotic, but her lovely almond eyes were strangely cold. 'Thanks to the generosity of Titus Stigmurus and Lethe Lacuna, co-founders of the Glory Foundation, formerly known as VergissMeinNicht, tonight we begin a wonderful journey together, travelling deep into the love of the Lord.'

She carried on speaking, but neither Smokey nor Jo heard a word she said.

'Is that who I think it is?' gasped Jo.

'Yes,' said Smokey grimly. 'It certainly is. It's Bridget. My sister.'

Chapter Six – Hallelujah

'You've got a bleedin' nerve coming round here.' The raddled old woman kept the chain on the door, peering through her silver false eyelashes. 'I haven't forgot what you did last time. You shot that poor girl in cold blood and ruined her costume what I slaved over for hours. All them sequins took bleedin' forever to sew on.'

'Mirabel, I beg you. Please let us in.' Titus could hardly stand.

'I suppose you wants the usual. Well, I don't do that stuff no more since our Darren's gone off. I don't supply you-know-what and now they stopped the fights 'cos of all that trouble with that stripy girl there's no call for fancy costumes anymore.'

'Oh, but there is.' Lethe's voice was honeyed. 'There are such glorious opportunities opening up, and your talents – all your talents – will soon be needed like never before.'

Titus groaned. 'Please open the door. I implore you.' His voice was little more than a whisper.

'Just for you, Titus,' said Mirabel grudgingly. 'Good old Mirabel. Ain't never let you down yet. Her Ladyship can wait outside, though. Don't want no-one finding out my trade secrets.'

'Entirely understandable,' purred Lethe. 'Though one can't help wondering who will carry on your, ahem, trade when you eventually, alas, leave us. Your secrets are too valuable to die with you.'

'Don't think I don't know it,' hissed Mirabel. 'If it weren't for my little, "ahem", gift, you'd have got rid of me years ago. Better make sure I live to a very ripe old age, your Ladyship.' She lowered her voice. 'Speaking of which, we made a bargain, if you remember. Our little arrangement. Ain't seen much progress so far.'

'These things take time. I expect a breakthrough very soon. Be patient a little longer.'

'Not got much choice. But I'll wait. In the meanwhile, get your bony ass outta my sight!'

Lethe mustered as much dignity as possible. 'I'll be in the car, Titus.' She walked away. When the sound of her high heels could no longer be heard, Mirabel released the chain and Titus fell into the room.

Mirabel looked down at the unconscious man spread-eagled at her feet. Something like sadness swept across her rouged and powdered face. Teardrops fell from her peacock-blue-shaded eyes. She sighed. 'It's wearing off faster, ain't it,' she observed to his recumbent form. There was no reply. 'And you needs more and more for it to work. Well, I can do you a quick pick-me up, then you and me had better have a little talk.'

The bales of satin, velvet and lace shone with rainbow colours, reflected in the glittering mirrors that lined Mirabel's workroom. But there was dust everywhere and a cobweb on her sewing machine told its own story. She cleared a space on an antique table and opened a small compartment concealed in the carved table-leg. She took out a silver beaker, a syringe and a packet of hypodermic needles. Then she reached into her bouffant blonde wig for a silver hatpin.

She went through a beaded curtain and was gone for a few minutes. When she returned she was holding a humane mousetrap. She surveyed the occupant. 'Sorry, Mr. Mouse,' she said.

'Here's your work clothes.' The Pastor slid a bundle across the table to Hawk. 'Put 'em on and come and meet the others.'

'But it's a dress!' gasped Hawk, horrified. 'A blue silk dress! And a black jacket.'

'Wrong, my friend. That is a satin surplice and a black cassock. Put 'em on.'

'But I'll look like a girl!'

'Get over it. Giddy up, pardner. The others are waiting.'

'Sure you wouldn't like me to wear high heels and lipstick?' grumbled Hawk, reluctantly pulling on the

cassock. 'I'll put this on later,' he said firmly, and tucked the surplice under his arm. The Pastor grinned.

They stepped through the arched wooden doorway just as the church bell struck nine. 'Could have sworn I heard music,' said Hawk, grimacing and covering his ears as the bells rang out loudly. He followed the Pastor through a small graveyard where broken tombstones lay all higgledy-piggledy. He was affronted.

'Doesn't anybody care about their ancestors round here? My people would be ashamed of this.'

The Pastor made no comment. They were heading out of the graveyard towards a stile. Over the stile was a meadow. At one end of the meadow a quartet of horses grazed quietly. Gleam was among them and when she saw the Pastor she whinnied in greeting and trotted over to join them. At the other end of the meadow was a weather-beaten old barn. The church bells had stopped ringing and Hawk listened intently, first to the silence, then the hum of bees buzzing in the meadow, the wind in the distant trees and beyond that, the faint sound of a faraway river. Only then did he tune in to the wonderful music coming from the barn.

'I get it,' he said finally.

'Hallelujah,' said the Pastor sardonically.

Mirabel winced as the syringe pierced her arm. She closed her eyes. The peacock eyelids fluttered. The silver lashes glistened with tears.

'Love's blood,' she muttered, removing the syringe. She pressed the plunger and her blood and tears dripped into the beaker. She plunged the needle deep into the now lifeless mouse, impaled grotesquely on her silver hatpin. Again she emptied the syringe and watched as the blood of the mouse mingled with hers. 'And life's blood.'

Carefully she discarded the used needle. 'Now for the picture,' she said. 'Usual place, I suppose.'

She reached carefully inside Titus's jacket and found his wallet. She took out the folded, stained and faded piece of paper and studied it. It was just possible to

discern a picture of a small boy leading an army of toy soldiers. She laid it on a plate and carefully poured the beaker of blood over the picture.

She squatted down by Titus. 'In memory of your poor Mama, my love,' she murmured. Her lipsticked mouth trembled as she softly kissed his face. 'And in memory of us.' A solitary tear fell, then she composed herself. She raised her voice. 'Titus! Open your eyes.'

She placed the blood-stained paper in his line of vision and moved his hand so his fingers were touching the picture. As he opened his eyes, slowly and painfully, he watched as the lines of the drawing began to glow, luminous and unearthly. 'Danke,' he croaked. 'Ich vergesse Sie nicht.'

Chapter Seven – Secrets

'Together we are GLORY! Our beloved founder was lost, then found. He repenteth of his sins and is devoting his life and fortune to creating a wonderful new world. You can be the building blocks of that world. Will you join us? Or will you walk away? Will you turn your back on love? Or will you cast off your old life and add your energy, hopes and dreams to ours? The place is here! The time is now!'

The mirror balls turned slowly, sending prisms of rainbow light around the darkened hall. The music throbbed and the ultra-violet lights flickered. The effect was hypnotic. The crowd seemed mesmerised.

'Let's get out of here,' muttered Smokey. They headed for the door. Beth blocked their way. She looked directly at Smokey. Jo saw a hunger in her eyes.

'So you're not buying it either?' Beth whispered conspiratorially, linking arms with Jo and Smokey. Suddenly she was Jo's new best friend.

Jo shook her head. 'Usual world domination claptrap.' She couldn't resist a dig. 'Just up your street, I would have thought.'

Beth rolled her eyes. 'There's something you need to know,' she said to Jo. But her eyes were all over Smokey. Her hand snaked out and yanked the neck of Jo's jumper, exposing her bare shoulder.

In the ultra-violet light, the Blaschko lines on Jo's skin pulsed and danced. 'You bitch,' said Jo angrily, covering herself quickly and thinking, 'Oh Sam! How could you have told her?' Her heart felt broken but to her relief her pride kicked in. She stood up straight. 'Like you said earlier. I'm a Freak.'

To her everlasting surprise Smokey sprang to Jo's defence. 'I guess that makes two of us, then,' he said, rolling up his sleeve. The light revealed a faint striation of luminous lines on his thin arm. Jo was stunned and said nothing. But Beth did.

'Three of us, actually,' she giggled, and slowly, tantalising, she unbuttoned the top of her blouse. A glowing spiral snaked between her breasts.

Smokey stopped staring, shook himself and bundled the girls out of the church hall. 'Cover yourself up,' he hissed to Beth. He propelled them into the graveyard. They stood beneath a stone angel whose widespread wings were silvery grey in the moonlight.

'At first I thought it was just me,' said Beth breathily. 'What does it mean?'

'Dunno,' said Smokey guardedly. 'Just a genetic thing, I guess. Doesn't have to mean anything.'

'Maybe we're all related,' said Jo unenthusiastically.

'Like brothers and sisters?' Beth's face fell as she considered the possible implications. 'Oh. I do hope not, Smokey. Very distant cousins, maybe.'

Smokey! We need to get rid of her and find out about this prophecy!

I know. Any suggestions?

Well, she clearly fancies you something rotten... I'll stomp off in a strop... you offer to walk her home...

'Are you doing that emping thing?' said Beth. 'I wish I could. I'm sure I could learn if someone would help me.' She batted her eyelashes at Smokey. 'Just think. I'll be able to join in all your adventures!'

...and come to my place after.

'Well, I've got better things to do than stand here all night,' Jo said, with an irritation which wasn't entirely feigned. 'I'm off.' She walked away without looking back. Smokey turned to watch her go, so neither of them saw the triumphant little smile on Beth's face as she emp'd a message to Lethe.

They know about the prophecy.



'They are good,' whispered Hawk to the Pastor. 'Pity about the frocks...'

The Pastor was unsmiling. 'Well now. The way I see it, you have a God-given, golden opportunity to be part of the Heavenly Blues Gospel Choir, kid. You had better be damn proud of the robes, damn quick, or you can

get back on the damn street. Your choice.' He walked away angrily, toward the twenty or so youngsters on the raised dais at the far end of the barn.

Hawk flushed, awkward with anger and embarrassment and moved swiftly towards the door. 'I'm already gone,' he said to Obadiah's back. His hand was on the latch when his foster father's voice filled his head as it had so many times before.

Face the music, Hawk.

He smiled ruefully at the double meaning. He knew what he had to do and he quickly pulled on the satin surplice. Then he emped the Pastor. ***Sorry.***

The Pastor turned, all smiles, and waved him over. 'Come and meet the best choir in the land,' he said, 'and the best choir master. Jeremiah Leroy Brown – meet Hawk. Heard him singing on the street. Sings like an angel.'

Hawk was fascinated by Jeremiah Leroy Brown. The men of Hawk's tribe tended to be grave-faced, straight-backed, angular and tall. Jeremiah was the jolliest, roundest, shortest man he had ever seen. He looked as if he would bounce rather than walk. His smile was a mile wide and his eyes twinkled with delight.

'Let's hear what you can do,' laughed Jeremiah. 'Sing me a song.'

Hawk gulped, but was determined to impress this wonderful man. He searched his heart for something true, something special. He breathed slowly and deeply and released the traditional music he held in the deepest part of his being.

There was a silence as the last notes faded away, then a round of applause. Jeremiah laughed with delight. 'A Lakota Honouring Song. Thank you. I have that very song recorded by the wonderful William Horneloud. It has pride of place in my collection. You sang it beautifully.'

'My father taught it to me,' said Hawk, glowing with pride.

The moment would have been perfect were it not for the two vitriolic words Hawk had heard in the apparent silence at the end of his song. ***Wagon***

burner. Someone in the room really hated American Indians.



'Mirabel, you are a wonder. Thank you.' Titus looked years younger. 'How do you do it?'

Mirabel remembered the strange story that Obersturmbannführer Titus Stigmurus had told her when first they fell in love. How Adolf Hitler had drawn him a picture which he put in his breast pocket, next to his heart. How he had found his beloved Mama minutes before she bled to death in his arms. How her blood had soaked through his jacket and stained the picture crimson. How the lines on the picture had glowed with a strange light. How the light kept him younger than his years.

Then Mirabel, a beautiful girl, deep in love, looked on as Titus, now a brave young soldier, lay dying from terrible wounds sustained in battle. She remembered the story and desperately experimented until she found a way to make the drawing glow again. Having saved his life with her special formula she then watched her lover keep time at bay, over and over again, as she aged inexorably.

'Life's blood,' she said. 'You know it has to be life's blood.'

He shook his head. 'There's something else. Some secret ingredient. If it was just life's blood, Lethe could do it. God knows she's tried. There's never been a shortage of corpses round Lethe. But it only works when you do it. Why is that?'

'My little secret. But you wants to know what will happen when I'm gone.' He nodded. 'Well, I'll tell you this much. First off, you're going to have to find some daft bugger who'll love you as much as I do. Got anyone in mind?'

'Well, there's always Lethe,' he said doubtfully.

Mirabel snorted with derision. 'I think not. Try someone who actually has a heart.' She watched his face as realisation slowly dawned. 'Not exactly beating down the doors, are they,' she said sadly.

Titus looked stricken. 'But if you're the only one in the whole wide world who really loves me, Mirabel, then I will die once you do.' She nodded. 'But the prophecy says...'

'That daft prophecy will be the death of you, Titus.'

He managed a bleak smile. 'On the contrary. If the prophecy is right, I get to live forever.'

Mirabel looked thoughtful. 'Since you got converted to the Lord and all that, don't you get to live forever anyway? Because he died to save you?' She raised her eyes heavenwards. 'I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.' John, chapter 11, verse 25.'

'I did not realise you were a theologian, Mirabel.'

'Hmm. You don't forget what gets beaten into you. But you don't mean that kind of everlasting life, do you?' He shook his head. 'So you really do want to live forever.'

He looked surprised. 'Of course. Don't you?'

'No, I bloody do not. Oh, I would if I could stop getting older. If it could be you and me again. But that ain't going to happen, is it?' Titus dropped his gaze. She sighed. 'I'm tired and sometimes I could just pop off and not care. But I can't go yet. I got responsibilities.'

'Our Darren?' hazarded Titus.

She shook her head and pursed her lips. 'Nah. Ungrateful little bleeder.' She thought for a while, then came to a decision. She stood up and took him by the hand. 'Come and see,' she said, and she led him through a heavy brocade curtain.

Titus stared at the bleach blonde lying on the bed, almost motionless, apart from the gentle rise and fall of her breasts. 'But she's dead!' he gasped. 'I killed her.'

'You almost killed her,' corrected Mirabel. 'She's in a coma. But Lucy ain't dead. And nor's the baby she's expecting.'



'Hello, love. You're back early.' Ali looked up from her book and smiled. Calico jumped off her lap and ambled over to wrap herself round Jo's ankles.

'So how's my Glory Girl?' asked Paul.

Jo pulled a face. 'Don't call me that, Dad.'

'Was Sam there?' Jo nodded. Her face was tight and closed. Ali studied her anxiously. 'What's up?'

'Oh nothing. Just my best friend isn't my best friend anymore and she blabbed all my secrets to Beth, of all people...'

'That doesn't sound like Sam.'

'Turns out I don't know her as well as I thought I did.'

Ali sighed. 'She's got a lot on her plate, what with her dad being so ill. You have to make allowances, Jo.'

'I've got a lot on my plate too,' Jo snapped. *Like promising to heal Sam's dad,* she thought. She felt sick.

'Anything particular bothering you?' said Paul. 'You know you can always talk to us.'

Jo exploded. 'Can talking get rid of these Blaschko lines? I don't think so. Or make Sam my friend again? Or help Howard get better? No, I thought not. So there's not much point in talking, is there?' Jo turned and went towards the door, then turned back again, her face furious. 'And stop trying to emp me, Mum. Mind your own business.'

Paul and Ali listened as Jo flounced upstairs and slammed her door. There was a long silence.

Eventually Paul spoke. 'That went rather well,' he said. Then he giggled guiltily. Ali glared at him but despite herself, a smile crept across her face.

'How long does adolescence last?' she asked. 'I'm exhausted already and it's only just begun. I seem to have turned into the enemy overnight.'

'Thank goodness we've got each other,' said Paul.

'Goodness has nothing to do with it, dearie,' said Ali in a sultry tone of voice. She smiled up at him. 'Fancy an early night?'

Paul was across the room like a shot. 'Race you upstairs, Jezebel,' he said.

So neither of them heard Smokey quietly slip into Jo's room half an hour later.

'You took your time,' grumbled Jo, trying to blot out the sight she had seen, through Smokey's eyes, of

Beth's upturned face as he bent to kiss her goodnight. It seemed the latest gift came with quite a high price tag.

'Lighten up,' said Smokey flatly. 'We need to find out about this prophecy.'

'Aunt Lethe is bound to have a copy,' said Jo. 'She keeps very careful records.'

'Right. I'll get into her study when she's off making some poor sod wish they'd never been born and have a good look round. Should be a piece of cake.'

'Would you like me to come along?'

'Nah. Better on my own. I'll emp you when I find something.'

'It's good to be working together again, Smokey.' Jo smiled, consciously trying to lighten up. He smiled back. Her heart skipped a beat.

'Yeah. S'pose it is. Right. I'm off. Goodnight.' And he was gone.

'Goodnight, Smokey,' said Jo to the empty air. 'I didn't want a goodnight kiss anyway.'

Chapter Eight – Treachery

Two days later Smokey was watching the entrance to Lethe's mansion from the private park opposite her front door. Her chauffeur Sebastian waited at the wheel of her elegant indigo and silver limousine.

The evening sky was overcast and grey, with a soft spring rain falling. Smokey was hidden in a grove of silver birches. He had chosen the spot carefully. It was perfect cover for him to blend into the near-invisibility that was his stock-in-trade.

It came as a shock, then, to hear Beth cheerfully calling his name as she crashed through the undergrowth towards him. He swore under his breath. How did she do it? Ever since the night at the church hall she seemed to sniff him out no matter where he was concealed. She was becoming a liability. But, he conceded, a very attractive liability. He smiled.

'Whatever are you doing here?' she asked.

'I could say the same to you,' he replied.

'You first,' she said flirtatiously.

'To tell you the truth I don't want to cross paths with the chap in the car. We've got a bit of a history. I'm hiding from him.' It wasn't a complete lie, by any means.

'Sebastian? How do you know him?'

'Again, I could ask you the same question.'

'Oh, Jo told Sam how he can get into people's dreams and Sam told me. He is so creepy.' Beth broke off and squealed excitedly. 'Oooh! There's Lethe Lacuna? Isn't she beautiful? I'd heard she was in a terrible accident and would be in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. But she looks absolutely radiant. It's a miracle.'

'Isn't it,' said Smokey dispassionately as he gazed at the woman he had tried to kill.

'I'm going to get her autograph,' said Beth, and she dashed through the trees over to the car. Lethe looked surprised, but smiled her most dazzling smile and obligingly signed the piece of paper Beth waved at her.

They exchanged a few words then the limousine pulled smoothly away.

Beth watched her go, then went back to the birch grove, calling Smokey's name. But he was nowhere to be seen. She smiled.



'So where did you spring from?' The questioner handed Hawk a stick of gum.

'I'm just passing through,' said Hawk evasively. He sized up the boy in front of him. He saw a scrawny kid with a mop of black curly hair, denim blue eyes and a broad grin.

'Just like the rest of us then. All on the run from something. All keeping our secrets close. You can call me Bob.'

'Hawk.'

'It's alright here. You'll have to work hard, though. We all do. Don't cross the Pastor. Don't lay a finger on Gleam. Oh, and watch out for Nick, the kid with the bullet tattoo. Thinks he's the reincarnation of Nathan Slaughter.'

Hawk was seized with a sense of foreboding. He knew the story of Nathan Slaughter. Otherwise known as Jibbenainosay, Quaker by day and Indian-killer by night. There's a very old book. *Nick of the Woods*.'

Bob nodded. 'By Robert Montgomery Bird. Well, our Nick reckons he's a distant relative of old Gibbering Nancy. He's got a thing about the book, a thing about your people and a real mean streak.'

'Already picked up on that. But thanks for the warning.'



Smokey systematically searched through Lethe's sumptuous study. He worked swiftly and carefully, replacing everything he looked at. He was in his element as the evening shadows deepened around him but eventually he admitted defeat.

Jo, I can't find anything about a prophecy.

An old memory suddenly came to Jo from the days when Lethe had held her captive. ***Have you looked behind the panelling?***

Smokey looked carefully at the wonderful medieval linen-fold carved wooden panels that lined the room. He started to press carefully in certain key places. At last there was a very satisfying click, and a section of the panel slid to one side.

He whistled. ***Wow. Have a look at this.***

'This' was a large wall chart with five columns, lots of initials, some squiggly symbols and some dates.

I can't make head nor tail of it, Jo, but there's something strange about it. Look. Here's my initials right next to my birthday.

I can see mine, as well, Smokey. How odd.

Jo! Someone's coming...

A peal of laughter rang out as the shadows in the study fled, banished by the powerful searchlight held by Lethe Lacuna. She stood triumphant and magnificent in the doorway, flanked by Titus Stigmurus and, unbelievably, Beth. Smokey was dazzled, half-blinded and barely able to think as the glare beat mercilessly down on him.

Smokey! Keep looking!

Lethe laughed and hugged Beth close to her. 'Well done, my dear! You played your part to perfection. I have such high hopes of you.'

Smokey tried to emit a warning about Beth, but all Jo heard was white noise and all she could see was white light.

Smokey! Concentrate on the chart!

'Smokey,' purred Lethe, a radiant smile illuminating her beautiful face. 'We meet again. It's been so long. So much has happened since you tried to kill me and imprison dear Titus here. But now I have you exactly where I want you. There will be no sly slipping away into the shadows for you now.'

Suddenly her smile slipped and with a snarl, she lunged at his face, blood-red nails like talons, ready to slice his face. Titus gripped her wrist.

'No, Lethe. Those days are past. You know I have made a compact to forswear violence.'

'Indeed you have, Titus. I however, have not. On the contrary, I have made a compact with my self-respect to make this little runt suffer for his sins. I think he needs time to reflect on the error of his ways.' She laughed at some private joke.

'Be merciful, Lethe,' said Titus. His face was stern and sorrowful. 'We can use Smokey's talents for good, just as we are doing with his sister.'

Lethe was furious. 'Did Bridget ever truss you up, naked and degraded, in a cellar full of gunpowder? I think not. Did Bridget confine me to a wheelchair, facing life as a cripple? She did not. I promise you, Titus, I will offer this little devil mercy... when he has repented sufficiently to beg for it. Sebastian!'

The sinister chauffeur was by her side in seconds.

'Smokey has skulked in the shadows for too long,' mused Lethe. 'It is time he saw the light. Take him to the Mirror Maze.'

Even as he was dragged roughly away, even as the light jumbled his senses, even as the glare half-blinded him, Smokey kept his eyes fixed resolutely on the wall chart in front of him.

Jo was absolutely frantic. She kept emping Smokey, but there was no response. What had happened? And why wasn't he emping her anymore?

She looked at the rough copy she had made of the wall chart Smokey had been studying. She'd had a perfect view of it through his eyes, then it was hard to see as the glare reflected from it, and finally there was nothing. She had no idea what had happened to him and was worried sick.

Jo's dad called up the stairs. 'Jo! It's Beth on the phone!'

'What does she want?' muttered Jo ungraciously but she went and picked up the phone anyway.

'Jo! I just wanted to say how sorry I am for being so mean to you.' She giggled and lowered her voice. 'I want to know all about your adventures with Smokey.'

I'm sure he's got a thing for me and, well, I think he's a dream. The thing is, I'd really like us all to be friends. I'm sure Smokey does as well.'

'When did you last see him?' demanded Jo. 'Is he alright?'

'Why not ask him yourself? I'll put him on. Smokey?' There was a pause. 'Goodness knows where he's gone. He was here just a moment ago,' dissembled Beth. 'Anyhow, he's fine. We're going to the pictures later. Fancy joining us?'

'No way – I mean, no thanks, Beth.' Jo made an effort to be less churlish. 'I've got some homework to do for tomorrow. Say hi to Smokey for me.'

She hung up. So Beth was the reason for him going all dark on her. Well, good luck to them. One thing was certain. She wouldn't be hanging around the lovebirds like a great big spare part, whatever Beth might say.

'You OK, love?' Ali popped her head round the living room door.

Just for a moment Jo longed to run into Ali's arms and tell her about Smokey and Beth. She felt ominously close to tears. But if she started, she might never stop. She mustered a smile. 'Fine, thanks, Mum.' She turned to go.

'Oh, Sam called round earlier. She said she's looking forward to seeing you soon. I'm so glad you've patched things up.'

Jo's heart lurched as she remembered her promise. 'Me too,' she mumbled, and she ran upstairs.

Ali watched her go with a sinking feeling. 'Oh Jo,' she murmured. 'Whatever have you done?'



That night Jo found it hard to sleep. There was no need now to fear Sebastian and his talent for entering her dreams and tracking her down. She was not on the run anymore and her memories these days were genuine, not the false ones put in her mind by Lethe. Even so she was full of foreboding and sadness. How could she keep her promise to Sam? How could she bear watching Smokey with Beth? What had happened to all the children who had been imprisoned by Titus

and Lethe? Was Titus genuinely repentant? And above all else, who and where was her brother?

She gave up trying to sleep and looked again at the copy she had made of the wall chart in Lethe's study. The first column showed the same four symbols recurring over and over again. They seemed vaguely familiar, but Jo couldn't quite bring to mind where she had seen them.



Jo thought about asking her parents about the chart, but that would inevitably lead to a whole conversation about Smokey that she just didn't want to have.

She searched her memory, remembering the two occasions when she experienced the beginner's luck so derided by Lethe.

She had held a lotus flower formed of pure white light. A thousand delicate petals shimmered softly, as flashes of rainbows gleamed from within. At the heart of the flower was a silver star. Jo had felt a healing power course through her body and she tried with all her concentration to find that power again. But there was nothing.

At last she felt tired enough to sleep. She went back to bed, and dreamed. Far away a boy was singing softly and the beauty and sadness of the melody made her cry in her sleep. Now the singing grew louder and more insistent and the beat of the music became the beating of her heart. She knew this dream.

Once again she saw shadowy figures crouched round a campfire. As before, orange and gold sparks flew up into the darkening sky, a sky roiling with turbulent, fast-moving clouds. In the far distance, a range of black hills and a single mountain made a dramatic backcloth. Then the skies cleared and in the pearly light of a full moon her mother, aunt and grandmother were standing in front of a conical shaped tent, smiling and beckoning her forward.

Aunt Lethe reached out her hand, but when Jo touched it, she felt weak and her legs buckled. In an instant her mother and grandmother were at her side. They raised her to her feet and she felt her strength returning. 'But I have to do this alone,' she said to them, and Lethe laughed.

A holy man raised a red-painted buffalo skull high above his head, silhouetted by the moon. She saw a boy, about her age. In the flickering firelight he was alternately dark and bright; in the moonlight he was shadowy then shining. His eyes smouldered with anger as he stared into the fire.

'Smokey?' she said to the boy in her dream and he looked up at the sound of her voice. But it wasn't Smokey.

The music stopped abruptly. High above her head a red-tailed hawk wheeled, then flew away.

When Jo woke up, she felt clear-headed and knew who to ask for help. She remembered her parent's old tutors. *Matthew and Mary* thought Jo happily. *They will know what this is all about. I'll pay them a visit at the weekend.*

Chapter Nine – Consequences

The following days seemed interminable to Jo. It felt as if the weekend would never arrive. She kept out of Sam's way as best she could, feeling terrible but delaying the moment when she would be revealed as a fraud. She resisted Beth and her oh-so-friendly invitations to go along to the Glory Gang meeting or hang out with her and Smokey. She had no desire whatsoever to tag along with 'love's young dream'. Whenever her parents tried to strike up a conversation she pleaded homework that needed doing. She went to the library and pored through medical encyclopaedias and books that no-one had opened for a very long time. But her search was fruitless. She found nothing to help her.

The days dragged on and by the end of the week spring had given way to summer. The days seemed even longer.

And for Smokey, curled like an unborn child in a corner of a maze of dazzling mirrors and pitiless light, the days were never-ending.

'Maize-muncher.' Nick stared directly at Hawk. 'Blanket ass.' There seemed no end to his list of racist insults.

'Just ignore him,' said Bob urgently. For days now he had felt the tension rising in Hawk, seen the anger boiling behind his eyes. 'We need to rehearse our song. Jeremiah won't tolerate second best. The performance is less than a week away.'

'That can wait,' said Hawk decisively. 'This can't.' He walked over to Nick. He cut to the chase and bunched Nick's collar in his fist, yanking him to his feet. He pulled hard until their faces almost touched. His voice was icy with rage.

'Exactly what kind of a fight is it you want? Do you want me to match your insults, word for ignorant word? How about, *you're so ugly, you could back a buzzard off a gut-wagon? Or you've got a ten dollar Stetson on a five-cent head?* Or shall I just punch your

tombstone teeth down your treacherous throat? Choose your weapons, and let's settle this once and for all.'

By now all the kids knew something was up. They clustered round, pushing and shoving to get a better view.

'I'd choose bullets against bows and arrows any day,' sneered Nick. 'But that ain't no contest. I want to beat you fair and square. How about a horse race?'

Hawk felt confident and agreed readily. 'Yes. Bareback or not?'

Nick shrugged. 'I'm easy. You choose.'

'Saddles. Bareback gives me an unfair advantage.'

Nick nodded. 'Your choice. Now I get to choose...' A wide grin spread across his freckled face. Hawk realised too late that he had been set up. '... and you get to ride Gleam.'

Jo spread the copy of the chart out in front of Matthew and Mary, covering the newspaper Matthew had been reading. Sergeant the cat strolled over and immediately sat in the middle of the paper, purring deeply, demanding to be the centre of attention.

'Scat, cat,' said Mary, fairly fondly. He scatted. From the safety of Matthew's lap he glared at Mary. She didn't appear too perturbed.

'How did you get hold of this?' asked Matthew, settling into his battered old leather armchair and lighting his pipe.

'Um, I got it from Smokey.' Jo didn't want to go into details.

'And how did Smokey get hold of it?' asked Mary sharply.

She might be ancient, thought Jo, but she doesn't miss a thing.

Just you remember that, young lady. And remember, I've never had the slightest scruple about going where I'm not invited. There was a pause, then: That's better. No point in having the ability to shield if you don't use it.

Jo grinned ruefully at Mary, as formidable as ever. 'You know Smokey,' she shrugged. 'Slips in and out of the shadows like a hot knife through butter.'

'Hmm. Looks like your handwriting to me.'

'It is. His is so awful, I made another copy. There are a few gaps, though.' She remembered how one minute the chart had been easy to read through Smokey's eyes, then the sudden glare made the task much more difficult.

'So what do you think it means?' asked Matthew.

Jo pointed to the fourth column. 'Well, this is my birthday, and in the last column, my initials. Same for Smokey, a bit further down the page.'

'J.A.?' queried Mary.

'Jacob Ashe,' said Jo, although it was impossible to think of him as anything other than Smokey.

'If the fourth column is birthdays' said Matthew slowly, 'then I think the third column is the date of conception – all these dates are more or less nine months apart. So the last column is for children...' he paused to draw breath and Jo jumped in excitedly.

'Then the other two columns must be mums and dads! That makes sense – there's A.L. on my row. Ali Lakota. So these symbols in the first column must represent the fathers. But...'

'There's only four fathers,' said Mary slowly. 'And over a hundred children. Quite some going.'

Jo stared at the chart. 'So this squiggly one with the arrow must be my dad. But what does it mean? I'm sure I've seen it before.'

Mary reached for the newspaper. 'Look at this,' she said, pointing.

'Horoscopes?' queried Jo. 'Wouldn't have thought you were interested in your stars... Oh. I see what you mean! It's the signs of the Zodiac! And that's Sagittarius.'

'When's your dad's birthday?'

'December the first. So yes, it's his star sign. But...'

'Not only that,' said Matthew, following his own track. 'I think Lethe was having a little joke about your dad's Native American heritage. Bows and arrows.'

'Oh. Difficult to think of Aunt Lethe having a little joke. But...'

'And don't forget the symbols of the Apostles,' mused Mary. 'Sometimes Paul is associated with the horse, and isn't Sagittarius also called the Archer? Half-man, half horse?'

Matthew nodded and smiled. The intellectual exercise clearly appealed to him. He started to follow a meandering train of thought. 'It doesn't have any bearing, but Paul is also represented by a...'

Jo could wait no longer. 'We can't have got this right,' she interrupted. 'Because if we have, it means my father conceived eleven other children the same day he conceived me! Not to mention all these others at different times!'

'Interesting,' murmured Mary, but she was still pre-occupied with the puzzle. She pointed out another one of the symbols. 'This one's Scorpio, with a nasty little sting in the tail. That'll be Titus, of course.'

Matthew laughed. 'Oh yes. Tityus Stigmurus. He likes little jokes too.'

'Tityus? I thought his name was Titus.' Jo felt bewildered.

'It's a play on words,' said Mary briskly. 'Look it up.'

'If all the fathers connect with Lethe, then one of these two could be Quinn,' said Matthew. 'What was his first name?'

'Luke,' answered Mary promptly.

Somehow Jo had never imagined Quinn called anything other than, well, Quinn. It was as bad as Smokey having a proper name. She felt mildly put out.

'You didn't think his mother had him baptised as just Quinn, did you?' teased Mary.

'The symbol of Luke, who wrote the last Gospel, is a winged ox,' said Matthew, still tracking down the symbols. 'Taurus the Bull would be the nearest Zodiac symbol.'

'So Titus is Scorpio, Paul's Sagittarius, Quinn was Taurus and there's one other,' said Mary. 'Something to do with Capricorn. The Goat.'

There was a very long pause. Jo felt the atmosphere change subtly.

'Capricorn is your sign, isn't it, Matthew?' said Mary eventually.

His face was ashen, then slowly turned to flame. 'Yes,' he whispered, bowing his head. 'She once called me the Old Goat.'



'Are you ready, Tonto?' Nick leaned nonchalantly against the barn door. Hawk had to admit he looked impressive from his black Stetson hat to his Cuban heeled boots of inky black Spanish leather. Gold spurs jangled as he walked.

The Pastor had taken the railroad, as he put it, to the city across the plains to conduct some urgent business. He was not expected back until evening. The opportunity was seized and the route of the race had been planned.

Hawk nodded. He felt sick at the enormity of what they were about to do. But he would not, could not, back down and he was not about to give Nick the satisfaction of seeing his fear. He gathered up all his pride and anger until it showed in his face as arrogance, and led the way to the paddock.

All the choir members were lining the route. Hawk knew that bets had been placed on the outcome of the race and that the onlookers were fairly evenly divided, but he was not interested in anyone else's opinion. He concentrated on communicating with Gleam.

Nick was riding Lucifer, a powerful, highly-strung black gelding. He swung into the saddle and laughed down at Hawk, who was quietly whispering to Gleam.

'That mare ain't interested in your Injun secrets. Are you ready to race? Or are you just chicken?'

Don't get rattled. Don't let him get to you, thought Hawk and he put his foot in the stirrups. He was an experienced horseman, but he had never felt anything so profound as the connection between himself and Gleam. She was superb, and he smiled to himself as they trotted through the open five bar gate round a sharp bend and into a vast meadow. *This is going to be*

a piece of cake, he thought, then he sternly counselled himself against complacency. *Stay focussed.*

He willed himself to relax into the saddle until he felt completely at one with Gleam. His hands lay lightly on the reins and he knew that Gleam's responsiveness needed the gentlest touch imaginable. He noticed with distaste that Nick was brandishing a slender riding crop with an ostentatious gold collar. Lucifer's ears were back and his eyes wild.

Stay focussed. Forget Nick and his Wild West fantasies. With his body relaxed and his mind alert Hawk felt more alive than he could ever remember.

The starting pistol fired and they were off, racing neck and neck across the field. The warmth of the sun, the wind on his face, the drumming of hooves and above all, the sense of speed and danger, brought Hawk more joy than he had ever believed possible.

Gleam moved like no other horse he had ever known. Hawk gave her free rein, exultant and exhilarated. The trees flashed by, a kaleidoscope of light and shade.

At times Hawk was ahead; at others Nick was in front. Once Hawk almost forgot there was a race at all as the sheer joy of the ride filled all his senses. Then he remembered how much he wanted to win, and he urged Gleam on.

He felt as if he could ride forever. Gleam showed no sign of flagging. They made a wonderful team. Into the home stretch now, returning to the paddock. Hawk was aware that he was out ahead.

Nearly there, he whispered and they rounded the final bend. The onlookers cheered and stamped their feet, but Hawk's blood turned to ice as he saw, looming directly ahead, a closed five bar gate where there should have been an open entrance. Even worse than that, however, was the sight in the middle distance of the Pastor, staring directly at him before breaking into a run. Of Nick and Lucifer there was no sign.



Matthew's tired old face was lined and drawn. 'I swear I never slept with Lethe.' Mary looked impassive. Jo was deeply embarrassed, yet fascinated simultaneously. 'But something happened, all the same.'

He remembered a summer evening nearly fifteen years ago when he was meant to be marking exam papers, but the sound of some students playing tennis, laughing and joking, led him away from his desk to his study window. He watched them for a while; Ali and Lethe, Paul and Quinn. So young. So beautiful. So talented. And watching them closely, as always, was the intense, brooding, unnerving Titus Stigmurus.

Matthew felt weary to the bone as he contemplated the inevitable slide towards old age and loneliness. His lovely Rosie and their boys were gone after a terrible accident; dear Mary had vanished without trace. He drew his hand across his eyes as the tears unmanned him.

A little later there was a knock at the door. He looked up, and Lethe was standing there, vivid and gorgeous beyond words. Her copper hair shone with youth and health; her green eyes flashed with promises of secrets and mischief. Her shining skin smelt of salt and honey.

'I saw you at the window,' she said softly. 'I thought you looked so tired. I've brought you a glass of wine. A pick-me-up.'

'Why, thank you.' He could not take his eyes off her. She handed him the glass and he drank deeply. The wine was fragrant and heady. He smiled in appreciation.

'My secret recipe.' She drew the curtains, and put on some soft music.

And then she began to dance.



A moment of hesitation was all it took. Hawk felt the bond between himself and Gleam falter as the great golden horse sensed his fear. Even as the gate loomed closer he felt time slowing to a crawl. As if from a great distance he saw Gleam lying twisted and

broken on the track. He watched as the Pastor raised his rifle to put her out of her misery. Her wonderful golden eyes looked straight at him, then misted over.

Don't imagine the worst or you will make it happen.

Grey Wolf's voice filled Hawk's head. The words came winging from the past, when he was a small boy, trembling and fearful of some long-forgotten terror. The words had brought no comfort then but now, at last, they struck home.

Hawk sobbed once, then used all his strength, all his energy, all his power to will Gleam over the gate. He had no thought of any danger for himself and whatever consequences would follow, he was mindful of only the moment. All his concern was for Gleam. Just a brush of her leg on the bar would send her spinning out of control and he could not allow that to happen.

You can do it, he whispered, to himself and her, and the miracle happened. She soared like an eagle and together they flew over the gate.

Now the future came rushing towards him. The Pastor, much closer now, was shouting as he ran, his face wild with fury. The once cheering onlookers were silent, refusing to meet Hawk's gaze. From the corner of his eye he saw Nick and Lucifer trotting sedately into view, for all the world as if they had just returned from a gentle hack. Nick feigned bewilderment. 'Whatever's happening here?' he asked. But Hawk saw him grin at one of the bystanders, presumably the accomplice who had shut the gate. Hawk's sharp hearing picked up Nick's muttered thanks to his sycophantic acolyte. Then Nick saw Hawk make the connection and smirked.

The smirk was the last straw. Hawk was seized with a longing to repeatedly smash Nick's face until the smirk was gone. Then he would hunt down the accomplice. The savage urge to inflict pain coursed through his hands to the very tips of his fingers in a spasm of fury and loathing. But now was not the time. Gleam was his priority.

Hawk mastered himself and brought Gleam to a halt. He dismounted, stroked her soft nose, thanked her and loosened her girth. Then he led her to the stable, where he ensured she was calm and settled. He carefully removed the saddle and rubbed her withers and neck. He sponged away the glistening sweat with refreshing water, and checked her feet for stones. He gave her some water to drink, cool but not cold, praised her once again, then turned to face the music.

He was completely unprepared for the lariat which came from nowhere and snaked tightly round him, pinning his arms to his sides. A grim-faced Pastor gave the rope a yank and strode away. Hawk stumbled after him, humiliated and angry in equal measure.

'I never touched her,' said Matthew. 'But yes, I wanted to. The drink she gave me kept me rooted to the spot while I watched her. I could not take my eyes off her. Her dancing bewitched me.'

'Like Salome,' observed Mary.

'Salome?' queried Jo. Mary rolled her eyes. 'I'll look it up,' muttered Jo.

Matthew continued his story. 'I slipped into a trance and dreamed of making love, and when I came round she was gone.'

'How do you know you didn't actually make love to her?' demanded Mary.

Matthew answered simply. 'Because it was you I dreamed of. She could never replace you. Not even in a dream.'

There was another long silence, until Jo spoke hesitantly. 'The thing is, if we are right about this chart, and L.L. stands for Lethe, as it must do, then Matthew, you and she have had, ooh, a dozen children.'

'I think I would have known,' murmured Matthew, and Mary raised a small smile. For a moment she looked profoundly sad, then she rallied.

'Well, I'd be surprised if that self-centred twister has ever given birth once, let alone a dozen times,' said Mary vindictively. 'So we are missing something vital.'

Another silence followed as the three of them tried to make sense of it all. Then Matthew gasped. He looked horrified.

'It's so simple. What does Lethe do?'

'Where shall I start?' asked Mary. 'She's a cold-hearted killer, for openers.'

Matthew didn't argue. 'Above all else, she's a scientist,' he said simply. Mary looked at him sharply, then realisation dawned. Like Matthew, she looked appalled.

Jo felt excluded, cross and stupid. 'What's so simple?' she demanded.

'We know how she did it,' said Mary, slowly and grimly. 'Test-tubes. Probably never made love to anyone in her life. She just gathered eggs and sperm and harvested a crop of children in her laboratory.' She turned to Matthew. 'You poor, gullible men were nothing more than sperm donors for Lethe's great project.' Matthew's face was a study in conflicting emotions. Mary turned to Jo. 'And that's how each man fathered so many offspring, because...'

'I get it,' said Jo hastily, heading off a lecture on the nature of reproduction. She was thinking furiously. *So perhaps Dad didn't betray Mum after all. Though is wanting to do something just as bad as doing it?* More thoughts flooded into her mind. *So I have all these half brothers and sisters, not just the one Lethe talked about. I wonder if I have met any of them? What if Smokey is one? And Beth?* She looked at the chart again, searching for Smokey's details. There was a blank in the space where the zodiac symbol for his father should be. She found herself fervently hoping that Smokey was not closely related to her.

Something else occurred to her. It was with a sense of relief she saw that her mother's initials only appeared once, next to her initials. Then, half afraid, she searched for a combination of her father and her aunt. As she suspected, there was just one entry for her aunt, presumably the brother Lethe had spoken of when she thought she was dying, but there was a blank where the symbol of the Bull, Archer, Goat or

Scorpion should have been and another blank in the final column where there should have been initials. She made some deductions. *So Smokey isn't Lethe's son, anyway. But he could be Dad's. Oh dear. This is very complicated.*

'I think we are spot on about this chart,' said Jo reflectively, 'but I still have one enormous question.'

Mary and Matthew looked at her expectantly. She just said one word.

'Why?'

'Why? What in the name of hell-fire were you thinking of, boy?' The Pastor's voice was dangerously low. He kept punching his right fist into the open palm of his left hand, echoing the beating of Hawk's heart.

Hawk chose his words carefully. 'I wanted to prove I could race Gleam,' he said. It was beneath his dignity to include the contemptible Nick in his confession. He had no intention of explaining to the Pastor that he had been set up. He would deal with Nick himself. 'I know I should apologise, but how can I say I am sorry about something so wonderful?'

'So you are not sorry. By God, you will be. Gleam could have broken her leg. You know what happens to lame horses? They get shot. Would you have been sorry then?'

'I would have been more than sorry.' Hawk stood his ground, searching for the right words. 'I would have been devastated. But she didn't break her leg.'

'No credit to you.'

Hawk dared to disagree. He was in such hot water, a degree more hardly mattered. 'Some credit to me, I think. I know I should not have ridden her without your permission, and for that, I apologise. But I know I rode her well.'

The Pastor grunted. 'I should horse-whip your sorry ass from here to Kingdom Come. Or set you on the highway with a one-way ticket outta here – destination Perdition. But I have a much better idea. You're gonna hate this punishment more than you can imagine. Go and get Nick.'

'Nick?' echoed Hawk warily.

Suddenly the Pastor lost it. He turned on Hawk, furious. His face was white with rage. 'Do you take me for a fool, boy? You know my power. Why do you think I came back early today? Because there I am, about to board the train, and I hear every word of your mindless, reckless plan. I don't normally sully my ears eavesdropping on the puerile, inane fantasies of foolish children. But the clamour was so loud I could not blot it out. And it was about Gleam. My precious, irreplaceable Gleam. So I had to come back.' His voice cracked with emotion, then he recovered himself. 'Now go and get Roy Rogers. And when I'm done with the pair of you, there won't be enough left of you to snore.'

Jo repeated the question. 'Why? Why go to the trouble of creating all these children?'

'You've heard of designer babies... children bred to order,' said Mary. 'Maybe it's something like that.'

'Well, I'm one of them, and I don't feel much like a designer baby,' frowned Jo, thinking ruefully *I'd have airbrushed out the freckles for a start.*

'More like she is creating some kind of master race,' said Matthew. 'Titus was always a big fan of Hitler.'

'I feel even less like a member of the master race,' objected Jo. 'Mind you, I've always thought it weird that a short, dark-haired, brown-eyed man planned a master race of tall, blue-eyed blonds. Why create a master race you can never belong to?'

'Far better to rule them than to belong to them,' observed Matthew.

'Perhaps all these children have things in common that we haven't worked out yet.' Mary was following another train of thought.

Jo thought of the Blaschko lines. 'Something to do with twins?' she ventured.

'Just possibly, said Mary doubtfully, 'after all, your aunt and mother are twins, but we don't know about the other mothers. Certainly this last column only shows single births.'

'I was one of twins,' persisted Jo. 'But my twin died in the womb. So there's only my initials on the chart.' *And I absorbed my dead twin's genes. So I'm a chimera. I wonder what my twin would have been like?* 'It must be to do with the prophecy,' she added.

'What prophecy?' chorused Matthew and Mary.

'Something to do with Titus, and life's blood, and GLORY,' said Jo.

'Who told you about a prophecy?' asked Mary.

'Um, Smokey...' mumbled Jo.

'He certainly gets around a bit, does Smokey,' said Mary sharply. 'And who told him?'

'He sort of overheard it,' said Jo, knowing that Mary would not stop until she heard the whole story. So she told them about Titus's precious piece of stained paper and the conversation Lethe and Titus had about the prophecy.

'This is your territory, Matthew,' said Mary. 'You lectured on ancient prophecies. I seem to remember Lethe was very keen on your classes.'

Matthew blushed and coughed. 'Yes. She was a very attentive student. I still have my lecture notes.'

'Of course. You never throw away anything,' said Mary fondly.

'I'll go through them later tonight.'

'You do that,' smiled Mary. 'And I'll help you.' Her smile broadened. 'Old Goat'

'I suppose you put all the blame on me,' sneered Nick as Hawk stalked ahead of him.

'I never mentioned you. But he knows anyway. He's going to give us hell. And when he's finished, I am going to give you hell. You are going to regret that little stunt with the gate.'

The Reverend Obadiah Moon stood with his back to them in front of a huge stained glass window showing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Pestilence. War. Famine. Death.

Nick started to say something but the Pastor wheeled round.

'You don't get to talk. You get to listen. You both damn near killed Gleam. If you'd broken your useless necks I wouldn't have given a mother-loving damn. But if anything had happened to Gleam... You disobeyed me and you don't deserve to be here. But I believe in mercy and I sure as hell believe in atonement. You get one last chance. You're gonna work together all day, every day, because you are gonna put together a performance that will be the best thing this state has ever seen. You will consult with Jeremiah about the music and you are gonna plan the itinerary. You'll arrange the rehearsal schedule, ensure everyone turns up, book the halls, plan the lighting, the set and the electronics. You will apply for all the necessary licenses. You will produce posters, programmes and press releases that will be second to none. There will be pre-publicity, publicity and post-publicity which will mean everyone will be talking about the Heavenly Blues Gospel Choir tour. You'll arrange the transport, sort the catering, put out the chairs and you'd better make damn sure that the coffee cups are set out in time for the interval. The only thing you won't have to do is raise the funds. You will keep me fully informed with a daily report and you will not cut corners. You'd better learn to delegate. The theme of the show will be Repentance. Every night, as you drag your waste-of-space carcasses to bed, you will be exhausted to the bone. If you want to stay here, those are the terms. So what's it gonna be, boys? Yes? Or no?'

Both boys looked sullenly at the floor. Hawk wondered if it would be possible to work with Nick without throttling him. He assumed Nick was thinking much the same about him. There was a silence.

'There'll be no more Cowboys and Indians, either. You won't have any spare energy for fighting. You'll both keep civil tongues in your heads.' The Pastor looked directly at Nick. 'And disciples of Nathan Slaughter are not welcome in my church.'

Hawk was thinking it might be preferable to just pack up and go back on the road. Or he could head back to the tribe with his tail between his legs. Then he

remembered how it had felt to ride Gleam and he knew that, more than anything, he wanted to experience that again. Whatever it took, he would prove himself worthy.

His mind made up, Hawk looked directly at the Pastor. 'Thank you. I accept.'

They both turned and looked at Nick. He was clearly struggling with his thoughts, weighing up the options. When he did say 'Yes' it was through clenched teeth.

'Come and have a coffee,' called Ali as soon as Jo opened the front door, 'and tell me all about Mary and Matthew.'

Jo really wanted to go straight to her room and think about all they had discussed. But there was something in her mother's voice, a trace of wistfulness, almost completely concealed, that touched her heart.

'They don't change much,' she answered, making herself comfortable on the sunny window seat. Calico came purring over to her and settled down on her lap. *How long since I did this?* She made a mental note to spend more time with her parents, (and Calico) feeling sad that life had never quite got back to being comfortable and normal since she returned home after Lethe abducted her.

'So why did you want to see them?'

Jo had her answer prepared. 'I'm planning a project for school on belief and faith, and I'm doing a section on prophecies. I know Matthew is an expert...'

'He is known all over the world,' interrupted Ali, proud to have been taught by him. 'No-one else can touch him. Are they well? I do worry about them now they are getting older. They have been through so much.'

'They're both a bit frail, but they seem so happy together. I bet they never dreamed they would meet up again.'

'We never know what life has in store,' said her mother. Her face lit up as Paul walked into the kitchen. 'Speaking of which, you're back early!'

'Best session I've ever produced. The singer didn't throw a hissy fit; the musicians were tight and more or less sober, even the drummer! All I had to do was sprinkle some fairy dust over it. It's going to be huge. So I decided to come home and celebrate with my best girls! Let's paint the town red! But first, listen to this demo...'

Jo laughed as Paul turned up the volume and whirled Ali round the room but suddenly her laughter faded. Sam was at the window, knocking loudly. Her face was distraught. Jo ran out to her.

'Oh Jo, Dad's much worse! I've tried to be patient, and wait until you're ready, but I can't bear to see him suffer. Please come.'

Ali and Paul followed Jo into the garden. Ali held Sam close as she sobbed her fears for her father. Jo stood by feeling helpless and afraid.

Sam raised her tear-stained face and spoke directly to Jo. 'I beg you, Jo. Please keep your promise.'

Jo avoided her mother's questioning gaze. Her mouth felt dry. 'I'll do my best,' she mumbled, and she and Sam ran across the garden. Ali and Paul were close on their heels.

Howard lay rigid in his bed, his eyes wide and staring. Sam's mum stood at the window, crying quietly. 'I think he was hallucinating,' she said. 'If only he would say something. I feel so helpless.'

Ali gently led Sam and her mother away, leaving Jo alone with Howard. *Concentrate*, she told herself fiercely, but she felt like a fraud. *There is no going back. No more evasion. The time is now.* She sat by the bed, and reached for Howard's hand. It was stiff and cold, the flesh dry and pale with prominent blue veins. Unable to think of anything else to do, she cradled his hand in both of hers, trying to massage some warmth into the icy fingers.

Partly because the silence was unnerving, partly because an old instinct took over, Jo began to sing softly. She sang a song her father had sung to her – an ancient Lakota chant. She travelled deep into the heart

of the music, her eyes fixed on the window as the full moon appeared in the darkening sky.

The room around her faded and once again she saw the campfire and the dark cloud-strewn sky flecked with silver stars and golden sparks. She gazed into the stern but kindly face of the pearly moon, and sang for dear life.

She sang until there was nothing but the song, running through her like a river, pouring into Howard's shuttered heart and shattered mind. She sang until she could see the fear and darkness he was lost in and she sang even though his darkness was so deep and so vast she feared she would be lost there as well. She did not notice that her mother and father were with her, joining in the song, but she felt the power of the music swell and grow. The enchantment filled the room.

Jo lost track of time as exhaustion threatened to engulf her, but her ancestors lent their voices to hers and the song went on. She did not see Sam and her mother enter the room, wide-eyed and silent, because all she saw now was the moon, shining and huge, banishing the darkness.

The song soared and the moon shone. And now the moon was silver and pearl, crystal and cloud, and its rays were diamond bright with flashes of rainbow light. For a moment the moon became the healing lotus that Jo had briefly conjured before and then everything went black.

Nick pushed past Hawk, wanting to get out of the room, away from the Pastor, as fast as he could. Hawk turned to follow him, but he wasn't quick enough and the door slammed in his face. Hawk felt a lightning bolt of savage rage run through him and he yanked open the door, intent on revenge. To his fury, the Pastor held him back. His grip was fearsome, and Hawk winced with pain.

'We start work tomorrow,' gasped Hawk, defiant. 'But tonight, he's mine.'

'Tonight nothing,' snarled the Pastor, tightening his grip. 'You feel that fury in your blood? That power? Well, that's owed to me. It's not a tenth of what I felt when you put Gleam at risk, but I didn't squander my valuable energy punching your good-for-nothing lights out. You don't waste yours on Nick. You use it. You learn to ride your rage before you even think of riding my horse. Now get outta here.'

Hawk mustered all his dignity, and began to walk away. As he reached the door the Pastor called him back. 'One more thing,' he began, and Hawk clenched his fist with impatience, just wanting to get out of there before his emotions got the better of him. Nevertheless, he forced himself to turn and face the Pastor. He arranged his features into some kind of acceptable expression, and waited.

The Reverend Obadiah Moon looked at Hawk, and considered his words carefully. He watched as Hawk broke out in a sweat. He held back as a pulse ticked in Hawk's jaw. He observed the effort it took Hawk to stand there and contain his rage. He took his time, and then some. The silence seemed interminable. He made sure Hawk had mastered himself, then he delivered a judgment.

Three words. Three life-changing words. 'You rode well.'

The first thing Jo saw when she came round was her mother's face, so strained and sad Jo had to look away. Her father was rocking her in his arms as if she were a little child again. Both her parents were crying.

'How is Howard?' she croaked, barely able to speak. 'Oh Mum, I should never have promised I would heal him.'

'Hush, Jo,' whispered Ali gently. 'He is peaceful. A little better.'

'We did it, then.'

'Did we? I thought it was probably God.'

Jo looked away, unable to meet her mother's eyes. 'I feel terrible.'

Ali looked weary beyond words. 'There is always an exchange, Jo. There is always a price to pay.'

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Chapter Ten – A Letter Arrives

Samantha put her head round the door. 'You're looking better,' she smiled. 'Thank goodness. I've been so worried about you.'

'I really tried to help,' whispered Jo. Three days had passed and her throat was still sore. 'How is he?'

Sam thought hard before replying. 'He is so much calmer now, and sometimes he smiles when I walk in the room. I thought I heard him say my name this morning.'

'I hoped to make him really well,' said Jo. 'But Mum says we must be patient. This is just the start, she says.'

'Jo, he is better than he was. I believe he will get even better. That is down to you. I will never forget that.'

'Mum says it was down to God. She thinks that if I can heal, it is because God is working through me. She thinks we came with our love and hope and heritage, and God gave us a miracle.' Jo's voice was flat and expressionless.

Sam looked closely at her friend. 'Is that what you think, Jo?'

'I'm not sure I believe in God,' said Jo hesitantly.

'I do,' said Sam decisively. 'Even more so now. That's why I like the Glory Gang so much. We really talk about all this stuff. I wish you'd come along. We've formed a choir and we're going to go on tour and you've got such a beautiful voice...'

Jo managed a weak smile. 'Not sure I feel like singing ever again!' Then the smile disappeared. 'Look, Sam, one of the many reasons I don't want to join the Glory Gang is Beth.'

'Because of Smokey?' Sam was very astute.

'Yes, partly.'

'Don't worry – they've been keeping a pretty low profile. Beth says he's fallen out with his sister, Bridget, so he's keeping out of the way. In fact, I haven't laid eyes on him since that night he danced with you.'

Jo was silent for a while, then came to a decision. 'It's not just about Smokey. I don't like her because...' she faltered, then carried on. 'Sam – how could you have told Beth all our secrets?'

Sam looked horrified. 'But I haven't!

'You must have done.' Jo was close to tears. 'She knows about the bloody Blaschko lines, and emping. I've not told anyone but you.'

'You have to believe me, Jo.' Sam's voice was urgent. 'I have never broken our secrets. Never. I don't know who told her, but it wasn't me. On my dad's life.'

Jo's tears fell unchecked but now they were tears of relief. A great weight lifted from her as Sam hugged her and smiled her familiar, wonderful smile.

'How's my girl?'

'Great, thanks, Dad.' Jo was sitting in the garden. 'I feel a little bit better every day.'

'Good. Are you ready for the whatever-were-you-thinking-of conversation?'

Jo pulled a face. 'Will you let me off if I say I've been there and done that with Mum?'

'No. Because she can talk with you about all the gifts from her side of the family – the memory arts that she and Lethe have... plus emping, and healing and deep-reading. But I need to tell you about my side of the family. The music comes from us, among other things. You've inherited some of our abilities. We really need to plan how to manage all this talent you have. That is probably the only thing I can agree about with your dear Aunt Lethe.'

Jo didn't like to think about what 'manage all this talent' might mean in practice but she quickly forgot about that as Paul began his story. She snuggled up against him and listened with interest. Normally her dad kept things about his childhood pretty close to his chest so this felt special. All she had were fragments of information about his background and she longed to learn more.

'As you know, my mum was a single parent. I was a war baby. So no dad. Quite a lot of us in that boat, as

it happened. Anyway, before I came along, Mum was a Spitfire pilot in the Air Transport Auxiliary. She didn't take part in combat, but ferried new and refitted planes to RAF bases – freeing up the fighter pilots during the Battle of Britain. Mum loved it – and that's when she met my dad. Have you heard of the Navajo Code Talkers?'

Jo shook her head. 'Well, in both world wars, the Indian language was used as the basis for secret codes to confuse the enemy. Worked pretty well, too. The main tribe was the Navajo, but there were Lakota Code Talkers as well, and my dad was one.'

He was sent to London on a secret mission. That's when he and Mum met. It was love at first sight. She told me he had a meeting with members of the government in one of the Cabinet war rooms in the Deep Level Shelters. They even sheltered from the bombing in one of the Tube stations. That's one of the reasons I'm so fascinated by the Underground – I might have been conceived there!'

Jo remembered being on the run through disused London Underground tunnels and shelters. She shivered.

Paul carried on. 'Mum never tried to excuse what happened between them and she never pretended it didn't happen. She was very honest – I didn't get the 'Your daddy was a hero who died fighting for his country' line. It was wartime, passions ran high and they fell in love – but he was promised to a woman from his tribe and he went back to her. By the time Mum found out I was on the way he was long gone.'

'So he didn't know he was going to be a father.'

'No.' Paul sighed. 'Mum went home to her parents. They were scandalised, first, because she was pregnant and unmarried, and second, because it was obvious when I was born that my dad was a Native American. She hadn't quite got round to telling them that. Back then there was a lot of prejudice around mixed-race couples. But they were good people, and they loved their daughter, so they just got on with it. Fortunately they loved me too and they helped raise

me so Mum could keep flying.' He looked sad. 'And after she died, when I was twelve, I don't know what I would have done without them.'

'Did you ever meet your father?'

'No. Mum told me a little about him, and always said she would understand if I did want to contact him, but something has always held me back. When I started in the music business I changed my name to Paul Lakota, partly to acknowledge him – and, if I'm honest, partly because I wanted a name that would stand out from the crowd.'

'Will you ever track your dad down?'

Paul smiled. 'Maybe. You know that tracking and locating lost things are my special talents – I think a lot of that comes from him. In the 70s the American security forces created a special tracking unit called the Shadow Wolves, all Native Americans, and my father was an adviser.'

'What is his name?'

'His name is Sunkmanitu Tanka,' said Paul. 'It means Grey Wolf.'

'So I am a quarter Native American!'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Wow. And my grandmother could fly a plane. Wow again. And I've got her lucky locket.' Jo touched the pretty silver heart at her throat. 'Which originally belonged to her mother – my great grandmother.'

Paul shook his head. 'Wrong side of the family, Jo. The locket is Lakotan. My father gave it to Mum. It belonged to his mother and, for all I know, her mother before that, back into the mists of time. It is very old. I've no idea if it's worth anything, but my mother said it was almost as precious as me!' He smiled, but Jo saw his eyes mist over and steered the conversation away.

'Didn't you tell me once that Grandma Ethel had an amazing memory?'

'Yes – but she had to train it. She devised a special method for remembering things. She and my father would have been quite a combination if they'd stayed together.'

Both Paul and Jo had been so absorbed in their conversation they hadn't noticed that Ali had joined

them. 'It's a tremendous legacy, Jo. A lot for you to cope with. There's so much to learn.' Jo looked suitably daunted. 'But not just now,' said Ali hastily, 'later on, when you are really well. Oh, the post just arrived – there's one for you – looks like Matthew's writing – and one for me.'

Inside Jo's envelope was a Get Well card from Matthew and Mary, with a P.S. *This might interest you.* 'This' referred to a folded piece of paper inside the card. Jo opened it carefully. The page was densely packed with very small writing. It was the heading that made her jump.

THE WOLFBLOOD PROPHECIES

'What is it, Jo?' Ali looked up from her letter. Her expression was troubled.

'A Get Well card – and some notes for my project. How about your letter?'

Ali sighed. 'Quinn's sister, Louise. She's dreading sorting out his things, and wondered if I would help her. Of course I will, but...' Her voice trailed off.

'I'll help,' said Jo immediately. 'If you'd like me to.' *I owe you*, she thought. *I could do without feeling guilty all the time. And it will be great to see Louise again.*

Ali's smile lit up her face. 'Thank you,' she said.

'I'll be glad to help,' said Jo. 'I thought the world of Quinn.' She noticed an unfathomable look pass between her parents and realised they had no idea that she had tricked Quinn into being very indiscreet about all their tangled relationships at college. *Best keep it that way*, she thought, enjoying her secret knowledge.

As soon as she was on her own in her room, Jo settled down to read her letter.

Dearest Jo,

What a wonderful challenge you set us! I have been looking back through my papers, and I think I have found the prophecy that has so exercised Titus and Lethe. When I was a young man, travelling in North

America, it was told to me by an itancan or chief, and I jotted it down as quickly as I could after our encounter. It was one of the prophecies I referred to when I was teaching your mother and aunt. My translation of the dialect is perforce, a little sketchy, but I think you can get the general idea from the fragments below.

THE WOLFBLOOD PROPHECY

The son of the wolf will live for ever... renewed through the blood of sacrifice... under the sign of the hooked cross... rolling thunder and clouds of glory... steeped in sin and will seek repentance... a mistress of memory will ??? (I think the missing phrase is "tame him" but it is difficult to be sure)... when two become one she will bear him the Child of Glory... the Child will be branded with secret signs (must mean Blaschko lines, I assume)... the Child of Glory will lead the Rainbow Warriors in a time of war and destruction... Some tantalising possibilities there!

Many Native American tribes have prophesied the coming of the Rainbow Warriors to save the earth from environmental destruction. I don't think the environment is much of a priority for Lethe and Titus somehow. I imagine their agenda is the same as ever – to harness the energy and talent of the young to their own ends. Wealth, power and control. I often think of the kind of world they want us all to live in, and I shudder.

But I digress. A Rainbow Warrior does not fight others, but battles within to find their own truth. My itancan friend spoke of the rainbow being a bridge between us and the Creator. Wonderful imagery.

Well, dear Jo, I very much hope you will come to tea soon and share your ideas about this with us. It is very exciting.

*With fondest love,
Matthew.*



Jo and Ali were very quiet on the train to Camden. So many terrible things had happened to her there, but

Jo thought that meeting Quinn had been worth it. She smiled to herself, remembering the Goth Princess transformation he had created for her.

Ali noticed her smile, but even if she had known the reason for it, it is doubtful she would have agreed with Jo's conclusion. She had never forgotten the terror she knew when Jo was lost to her. Apart from that, she had her own reasons for dreading returning to Quinn's shop.

As they walked through the market, jostled by the cheerful, colourful crowd of shoppers and sightseers, Jo spotted Quinn's sister by the boarded-up shop. She waved, and ran to join her. Louise undid the heavy-duty padlock and they all went in.

Jo was braced for multiple images of Bob Dylan. 'The Bobster', as she called him, was her mother, and Quinn's, favourite singer. She remembered a cardboard cut-out of Dylan holding Quinn's final message to her. RUN.

However, nothing prepared her for the sight that met her eyes. The shop was almost bare. Anything of any value was long gone. The place was stinking and filthy and as they walked in, someone ran out of the back door, leaving it swinging on its hinges. And every wall in the place was covered with drawings so disturbing that Jo had to look away. *Wheezy*, she thought, and shivered, remembering the Ferals, the homeless kids she had met when she was on the run.

'Looks like most of the work has been done already,' she said, trying to sound positive. 'There's hardly anything left to clear away.'

'The new tenant moves in the day after tomorrow,' said Louise, dismayed. 'We can't leave it like this.'

'I'll get the paint,' said Ali. 'Cover up these dreadful drawings, for a start.'

'I'll make a start on the sweeping up,' said Louise.

In spite of herself, Jo's eyes were drawn to Wheezy's pictures. He had a terrible talent for depicting evil. Jo could not look away, however much she wanted to, and then she realised the awful truth. The pictures were about her. Smokey, Titus, Lethe and the

ghastly Madame Mirabel were all there. The fight to the death with Lucy, beneath the Roundhouse, was shown in heart stopping detail. The children experimented on at CUT were portrayed with a clarity that made her wince. These nightmare pictures showed her a terrible part of her life and her knees buckled.

Jo heard her mother returning, and suddenly realised that she did not want Ali to study the pictures. She sprang to her feet and firmly took hold of the paint and brushes. 'I need to do this,' she said. 'Please don't argue, Mum.'

Ali heard the determination in Jo's voice, and nodded once, before going to tackle the rooms upstairs.

Jo worked carefully and methodically, obliterating the pictures with dazzling white paint, banishing the memories – until the next time they would surface. A part of her knew the pictures were outstanding and she felt a touch of guilt, but the satisfaction of making them disappear far outweighed any regrets.

She had nearly finished. The only thing left was an old fireplace which had long been bricked up. She set to, painting the bricks, and soon realised that several of them were loose. *I'd better get some filler*, she thought, and she took out the loose bricks, intending to clean them off and put them firmly back in place.

Funny. These bricks are shorter than the others. Jo frowned, and peered into the hole she had made. There was something in there!

She reached carefully into the space, flinching as she touched cobwebs and dust, and drew out an old tobacco tin. It had been painted with a picture of the young Bob Dylan, his crazy curls surrounded by psychedelic swirls. She opened the tin carefully.

Inside was a dried sprig of forget-me-nots, an enamel badge with a rainbow and a dove inside a peace sign, a faded red ticket marked The Tunnel of Love, a lock of copper coloured hair, and a letter addressed to Ali.



During the journey home Ali was silent. The painted tobacco tin had been tucked into her handbag without comment. Jo suspected she wasn't going to get much of an explanation of the contents, but she was full of curiosity. How long ago had the tin been hidden there? And how old were the contents? And most interesting of all, what was in the letter? Jo dropped a small conversational line, to see if she could catch any fish.

'I noticed there was a ticket in the tin for the Tunnel of Love,' she began. Her mother blushed crimson.

'It was when we were at college,' she said after a long pause. 'Lethe had taken up with Titus – we called him her *Sugar Daddy* as he was so much older than her. She really hated that.' Ali permitted herself a small, malicious smile. 'Anyway, he was quite the wealthy business man and had his fingers in lots of pies. He owned several companies, including a funfair. Called himself Mr. Sting. Always had a thing about scorpions, did Titus. His associate called himself Colonel Slaughter, so they were Slaughter and Sting and the *Lost Funfair of Forgotten Dreams*. Now I think about it, I'm sure it was a cover for some horrible grand plan of his. Titus has never been short of grand plans. But that's what I think with hindsight – back then it was great fun. He gave us all free passes and it was... exhilarating. Although, again, looking back, I realise it was a lot more sinister than most funfairs.'

'I've always found them a bit scary,' said Jo. 'But you expect that. It's part of the enjoyment.'

Ali agreed. 'True. The exciting place between being scared and having fun. Your dad hated it and wouldn't set foot in the place after the first time. "Freaks and flea circuses," he'd say. But Quinn and I, well, for a time, we found it totally compelling. That's the thing about being in love – Oh, Jo, don't pretend to be surprised. I know you know.' Jo looked embarrassed and said nothing. 'Everything seems wonderful and magical. All your senses are enchanted and enhanced. So the scary things like the Mirror Maze, were really scary. What you saw reflected there could haunt you forever. The freaks came from your worst nightmares.'

I still dream of Wolf Boy. His real story would make you weep, I expect, and I suppose the funfair gave him somewhere he could belong, but I was fascinated and repulsed at the same time.'

Ali was silent again. 'So what was the Tunnel of Love like, then?' prompted Jo. Again the blush.

'I have never experienced anything so romantic,' said Ali eventually. 'It was no ordinary fairground ride.' She changed the subject.

'Where are we?'

'Next stop Hampstead,' answered Jo.

They both remembered the last time they had taken this journey. And then it happened again.

Help me.

'Oh, no.' thought Jo in disbelief. 'Now what?' She concentrated hard as the train went deeper underground.

Help me. Help me.

Jo's face was a study in disbelief as realisation slowly dawned.

Smokey? What's wrong? Where are you?

All Jo could hear was a kind of fractured whimpering. ***Smokey – please. Open your eyes so I can see where you are.***

Too painful. Jo. The link was almost gone.

Just for a moment, Smokey. I'm going to find you. I promise.

Jo saw a brilliant, blinding, dazzling flash, then nothing.



One minute Beth was walking out of the church hall, the next she was pinned up against a stern and sorrowful stone angel.

'Where the hell is he?' demanded Jo.

'Stop it! You're hurting me!' squealed Beth.

'Good. Now you tell me where Smokey is, or I will hurt you far more than you can believe.'

'What is your problem? He's off somewhere with the rest of the Glory Gang. I'm meeting him later.'

'Don't lie to me anymore, Beth. I know he's in terrible trouble.'

'You're just bluffing. I'm not telling you anything.'

'Your choice, then.' Jo tightened her grip.

'I have powers too, you know.'

'Mine are stronger. So where is he?'

'Nowhere you can find him, Freckle Freak.'

'Wrong answer.'

For the second time in her life Jo deliberately hurt another human being. She concentrated very hard, picturing a tight metal band round Beth's head; a band with rivets and screws and bolts. She tightened the bolts. Tears began to run down Beth's cheeks.

'I said, *Where is he?*

Beth was weeping uncontrollably, but would not answer. Her eyes were full of fear as she struggled to resist.

Jo was ruthless. 'You will tell me.' The band tightened.

Beth screamed in agony but still refused to speak. She fought to control her words, but the pain overwhelmed her thoughts.

Please stop! I can't stand it!

There was absolute silence as Jo registered that Beth could emp. Her mind worked like lightning as she realised the implications.

You've been spying on us. For my aunt.

Beth whimpered pitifully – her shield rendered useless by her pain and fear.

On a tide of rage Jo swept into Beth's devious mind and pulled out the memory of Smokey's capture. Lethe's command echoed in both their minds.

Take him to the Mirror Maze.

When Jo was done she turned on her heel and walked away. Behind her Beth lay collapsed, crumpled and weeping.



As Jo opened the sitting room door she saw her mother quickly put an envelope in her pocket. *No time for that now.* 'Hey, Mum. I've been wondering what happened to the *Lost Funfair?*

'It was shut down years ago,' said Ali. 'It's been condemned and boarded up ever since.'

'Why did it close?'

'Two reasons, really. There was a terrible accident. Three children were killed. And the other reason was to do with the people who owned the land.'

'Didn't Titus own the land?'

'No – he owned the rides and sideshows. There had been a traditional funfair on the land for the best part of a hundred years but Titus put in one particular exhibition which the land-owners really hated. They found it offensive and revoked the lease.'

'But everything's still there? The Mirror Maze? The Tunnel of Love?'

'As far as I know. Why do you ask?'

'I thought it would be really interesting to go there – it would make a brilliant art project.'

Ali laughed drily. 'Indeed it would. Pity it's so far away.'

'Where is it?' asked Jo anxiously.

'Didn't I tell you? It's in America. Tucked away in a remote corner of one of the Lakota reservations. Another reason why your dad wouldn't go there.'

Chapter Eleven – America

Bridget smiled at Jo. The smile did not quite reach her eyes. 'I am delighted you would like to join the choir, Jo. I am sure the Glory Gang has lots to offer you and we could really use someone as talented as you to do the work of the Lord.'

Jo decided to put her cards on the table. It made her squirm to sail under false colours. 'I'm not really a believer, Bridget,' she began, but Bridget laughed with delight.

'Then it will be our pleasure to lead you onto the path of righteousness. And that path will take us to wonderful places, Jo. The GLORY Foundation is organising something wonderful right now! You have no idea!'

Oh, but I do, thought Jo grimly. *And that is the only reason I am joining your stupid choir.* She thought back to the last meeting of the Glory Gang.

Sam had been so persuasive. 'Please come, Jo. It would mean so much to me. I think you would like it if you gave it a try.'

'Oh, Sam, I'm sure I won't fit in.'

'You will if you are with me. I'm one of the section leaders now. Oh, Jo – it's so exciting! There are Glory Gangs all over the world now! It's spread like wildfire. Just come along and you'll be made really welcome.'

'Well... OK. But I'm not wearing a satin party frock.'

Sam laughed. 'You've got that pretty dark blue T-shirt with the silver butterfly on. That would be perfect. And you can wear it with your jeans. You'll look great!'

So they went together. And Sam was right. Jo was warmly welcomed and found herself enjoying the music and the discussion far more than she ever would have expected. There was no sign of Beth, which was a relief. Jo was glad to see Sam so happy again, and to feel that their friendship was back on track.

But the real object of Jo's interest was Bridget, Smokey's sister. Jo hoped that Bridget might be an ally in her mission to rescue Smokey. It had been very easy, and quite shocking, to deep-read her.

There was nothing at all in Bridget's memory about her family. Clearly she had been wiped by Lethe, as once Jo and her dad had been. Of her time at CUT, helping Lethe with her diabolical experiments, there was nothing. All Jo could find was a simple religious conviction, child-like devotion to Titus and Lethe and a total involvement with the Glory Gang and the choir. *She's been brainwashed*, thought Jo. And right at the forefront of Bridget's thoughts were plans for the choir to tour with youth choirs from all over the world. Starting with America.

'So what do you think the prophecy means, Jo?' Mary looked every inch the rigorous academic she had been before Lethe ended her career and ruined her life.

'A werewolf has a child with a woman who can control memories and that child saves the world.' Jo's tone was flippant, but she knew it was a sound enough answer. Mary laughed. 'So my dad's father is called Grey Wolf and he advised the Shadow Wolves: my mum can help people remember the things they have forgotten, and that makes me high on the list of candidates for the ridiculous title of the Child of Glory.'

'Presumably all four fathers tie in with wolves in ways we don't yet understand. How about your father, Matthew? Any wolf-ish connections?'

'It's so tenuous as to not be worth discussing,' said Matthew with a degree of irascibility. 'It's the same principle as horoscopes – you can make anything fit if you want to badly enough.'

'Nevertheless,' said Mary, persistent as ever, 'you have thought of something?'

'My father's nickname was Bane. He was a toxicologist, and specialised in researching the effects of aconite. Otherwise known as Wolfsbane.'

Mary looked thoughtful, searching her memory. 'I remember,' she said triumphantly. 'Keats. *Ode on Melancholy*.

*No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;*

So maybe one of the dozen offspring Lethe foisted on you is the Child of Glory, Matthew. That would certainly let you off the hook, Jo.'

Jo could see that Matthew was deeply embarrassed and rather irritated. She deliberately moved the conversation on. 'How about the hooked cross? What does that mean?'

'Ah,' said Matthew, clearly relieved to be on safer ground. 'That's the swastika. All of us have been affected by the swastika.' Jo shuddered. Matthew noticed and continued. 'It's not Hitler's personal creation, you know. It had a long and honourable history before it was debased by the Nazis. In Sanskrit, *svasti* means *well-being*. The suffix *-ka* can intensify the meaning, so *swastika* translates as *that which is associated with well-being*. People wore it as a good luck charm.'

'I didn't know that.'

Matthew was on a roll. 'It was a widely used Native American symbol. To the Hopi it represented their wandering clans; to the Navajo it represented a whirling log, a sacred image representing a legend that was used in healing rituals.'

Mary had been lost in thought. 'It seems to me,' she said, 'that the details of the prophecy are only meaningful if Lethe and Titus believe them to be so. And clearly they do – their lives seem dedicated to finding – no – creating this Child of Glory. And then controlling him or her.'

'But even if the prophecy should come to pass, and there ever is such a child,' objected Matthew, 'Titus and Lethe must surely realise it could just as easily be born to a man and a woman that they have never met, in a place they've never heard of, at a time already gone or yet to come.'

Mary continued with her train of thought. 'That's true, but the fact is, they have convinced themselves that their deductions are correct and their conviction makes them a danger to you and all these other children. And that, young lady, as you very well know,

is why your parents will not let you go with the choir to America. They do not trust your aunt and they do not believe in Saint Titus the Penitent. And I don't blame them.'

Jo gave a deep sigh. She wondered, not for the first time, if she should tell her parents, or Matthew and Mary, about Smokey, but she knew they would stop her carrying out her plan to rescue him, saying it was too dangerous. She did not want to watch from the side-lines as someone else did the job she was determined to do. The danger did not deter her in the least; it made her feel alive again. She'd had a taste of adventure, and now ordinary life seemed very humdrum. So she said nothing about Smokey and carried on making her plans, determined to get her own way eventually. She had to go, and nothing would stop her. At all times Jo made sure her thoughts were well-shielded, particularly from her mother.

For all of her whining, sulking, flouncing, shouting, arguing and bargaining, Jo had met with complete resistance on the part of her parents. Reg was beginning to wish he hadn't come.

'Honestly! Nothing's going to go wrong! You all went to America and you were fine!'

Ali and Paul exchanged awkward glances. Jo continued, seemingly oblivious to their discomfort.

'I don't see why I should miss out. Sam's going, even though her dad's ill.'

'Your father and I were much older than you are when we went. It was part of our college course. It was a cultural exchange.'

'But so's this! It's not like I'm going on holiday.'

It was Reg who broke the deadlock.

'Why don't you go along as well?' he asked Paul and Ali, in a reasonable tone of voice. 'It is a great opportunity for your girlie.'

Jo held her tongue. Having her parents tag along wasn't what she'd had in mind, and it didn't fill her with enthusiasm, but if that was the price to pay, so be it.

Reg hadn't finished. 'The fact is, I could do with some help. The Vermin are moving their operation to America. Oh, I know they're not called VMN anymore, but whatever they call themselves – The Gory Gang, or some such nonsense – they haven't really changed. Wherever they go, the Righteous are needed. We need to mobilise in America. Build solidarity. There has to be a recruiting drive and that's my job.' He turned to Paul. 'I could use someone on the inside there, someone I can trust implicitly.' Then he looked at Ali. 'And I need you, or your girlie, to get inside the head of whoever the traitor is on my team.'

Ali remembered her sister's scathing remark to Titus. *Your informant took you for a fool.* Someone – one of the Ferals or one of the Righteous, had betrayed Jo's whereabouts to the Vermin when she was on the run. Unexpected rage flooded through Ali when she remembered Jo's ordeal, and the suffering her family had endured. 'We'll do it,' she said, with a force that surprised everyone, including herself.

'I'm not sure if they will let parents come on the tour,' frowned Sam, when Jo told her the news.

Jo sighed. 'I'd like to see them try and stop my mum. She's transformed into Boadicea.'

'And your dad's coming as well?' Sam was intrigued.

'He's offered to make some recordings of the tour,' answered Jo, 'and maybe he'll look up his long-lost father.'

'Did you say Reg is going to the States as well?'

'Just coincidence,' shrugged Jo artlessly. The less said about Reg's plans the better. 'He won't be on the GLORY Foundation private jet, that's for sure!'

'It's so exciting,' laughed Sam. 'I can hardly wait! And you – well, you're transformed.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, you've been a bit gloomy and glum since –you know ...'

'I know. But now we've got a new adventure to look forward to!'

'Goodness, Jo – I would have thought you've had enough adventure to last a lifetime.'

'I must have developed a taste for it,' said Jo lightly.



The indigo blue and silver aeroplane gleamed in the morning sun. The excited group of youngsters made their way across the tarmac, with the more sedate adults bringing up the rear.

'These uniforms are fabulous!' said Sam, twirling as she walked. The girls were dressed in deep blue skirts and jackets, with silver grey blouses, and the boys wore indigo suits with silver shirts.

Jo was torn. She really didn't care for uniform, but even she had to admit that the designs seemed to flatter everyone, regardless of their size and colouring. Wearing a skirt felt very strange after her habitual jeans, but the silky fabrics were stunning. So she too gave a twirl, and laughed as they boarded the plane.

Jo stopped laughing, however, when she heard Beth call out, 'Sam! I've saved you a place!' Jo had been so much looking forward to being with Sam during the flight. She saw straight away that Sam felt anguished at being torn between two friends and decided to let it go gracefully.

'It's OK, Sam,' she said quietly. 'We can sit together on the return journey.' Sam flashed a smile of pure gratitude. Beth flashed a smile as well. A smile of pure triumph.

Jo sat by the window and looked across as the adults made their way to the steps. She very quickly realised why the uniforms were so attractive. Holding on for dear life to Titus was an enormously fat old woman with an improbable bouffant blonde wig and peacock eye shadow above silver false eyelashes. Madame Mirabel, the amazing theatrical costumier. Jo was intrigued to see how tenderly Titus held Mirabel's arm as she climbed the steps. Clearly Mirabel hated flying.

Jo could see Bridget, Paul and Lethe among the gaggle of grown-ups making their way onto the plane.

She caught a glimpse of her mother and waved, but Ali didn't notice. She was having a heated discussion with Lethe, and both women looked furious.

Ah well, thought Jo with only the slightest twinge of conscience, and she tuned in to the argument. Since she had returned home she had noticed that her ability to pick up on other people's thoughts sometimes, as now, extended to their conversations. Her aunt and mother were so angry they couldn't maintain their shields. Jo eavesdropped shamelessly.

'Frankly, Alithea, your presence on this expedition is tiresome in the extreme. It is an essential aspect of the project that these young people broaden their horizons independently of their family ties. The development of autonomy within a supportive framework is a key factor in their transition to fruitful maturity.'

'Don't bullshit me, Lethe. Save your pseudo-scientific jargon for the morons you get to bank-roll your power-crazed fantasies. The fact is, you want to control my daughter because you want to mould her in your own image.'

'It would be a tragic waste were she to be moulded in yours, Alithea. You have never realised your full potential, and neither will Jo unless she is given firm guidance, rigorous challenges and sufficient support.'

'You are hardly fit to lecture me on child-rearing, Lethe. Your record in that area is abysmal. What kind of mother rejects her own baby?'

'The child was sub-standard. I had no choice.'

'Of course you had a choice. And there was nothing wrong with your baby.'

'Your narrow terms of reference limit your understanding. The child was a mistake, and the father I selected was, on consideration, inadequate in every way.'

'You bitch. You bloody bitch.'

'Poor Alithea. So long ago. So insignificant in the great scheme of things. But you won't let it go. You won't forget it.'

'No, I won't. I'll never forget how he cried. I wish I could...'

Jo was horror-struck. ***No, Mum! Don't invite her in!***

But it was too late. Lethe smiled with predatory satisfaction.

'Thank you, Alithea. I thought you'd never ask.'

If I can inflict pain, perhaps I can protect, thought Jo, trying not to panic. She concentrated on visualising an aura of light around her mother, hoping to invoke the healing lotus, but she was powerless in the face of Lethe's greatest talent, the ability to create forgetfulness if invited. She felt the magnitude of her aunt's power as she attacked Ali's memory and Jo realised her protection was nothing more than threadbare rags and patches.

Lethe looked up at Jo's anguished face, and laughed in triumph. Ali seemed almost unchanged, except for a slightly puzzled expression and a worried frown.

Mum! Fight her!

But Ali made no response.

'That's better,' said Lethe. 'Now get on the plane.'

Ali obeyed. At the top of the boarding steps she turned to her twin. 'Why, Lethe,' she giggled. 'That really is a lovely outfit you are wearing.' She smiled a dazzling smile and linked arms. 'Come on, Sis! We are going to have such an adventure!'

Chapter Twelve – Plans, Prayers and Pilgrims

Sam frowned as she looked out of the dormitory window. The sky was clear and blue; the immaculately tended grounds were a mass of summer flowers. During the tour they had stayed at several schools, empty for the long holiday; *Summer Lawns* in Oregon was by far the most sumptuously appointed, modelled on an English Georgian mansion, with garden walks, copses, lakes, follies and a chapel. Sam spoke hesitantly. 'Jo, I think you need to take a look at this.'

Jo groaned. 'It's my mum, isn't it? What's she doing now? Cartwheels across the lawn? Climbing trees? Practising being a cheerleader?'

Despite her jokey tone Jo was at her wits' end. In the twinkling of an eye her calm, sensible mother had turned into a giddy, giggling girl. Only Lethe, Paul and Jo knew why. Most of their fellow travellers were too caught up in the excitement of being in America and the whirlwind timetable of rehearsals, costume fittings and performances to notice much out of the ordinary. Some wondered privately if Ali had taken to drink or drugs - others put it down to hormones.

Jo and Paul talked it over every chance they had. They tried jogging Ali's memory, playing the Bob Dylan songs she loved, showing her photographs of their cottage and Calico, reminding her of special family occasions. Nothing worked. Lethe had done a thorough job, reducing her twin to a twelve-year old who idolised her big sister and hung on her every word.

Jo had confronted her aunt at the first opportunity. 'Put it right,' she demanded.

'Manners, Jocasta,' chided Lethe gently. 'I am afraid you over-estimate my abilities. I can confer forgetfulness, but it is your mother's special talent to restore memory. How deliciously ironic that she is unable to remember that!'

'Don't call me Jocasta,' said Jo, through gritted teeth. 'Why do you have to spoil everything?'

'I have my reasons, Jocasta. All great causes demand sacrifice. It is not always easy to hold so much power, as you will undoubtedly learn.'

'I don't believe you,' said Jo flatly. 'I think you just did it for fun.'

'There is that,' replied Lethe, reflectively. She smiled. Jo found the memory of that smile deeply disturbing.

Sam interrupted Jo's train of thought. 'Isn't your dad worried about your mum?'

You bet, thought Jo grimly.

Jo knew Paul had also confronted Lethe and there had been the mother and father of a row. Afterwards Jo found him pacing back and forth, his fists clenched, his face furious.

'I'll swing for her,' he snarled.

'I know how you feel, but what good will it do? Aunt Lethe won't reverse the spell whatever you do. We have to concentrate on Mum.'

'At least your mother's happy,' Paul had said. He suddenly looked defeated.

'She's completely scatty,' said Jo, trying to lighten the mood. 'I feel like her mother, not her daughter! It's all: *Don't forget your glasses! Have you remembered your hanky? Time you were in bed, young lady!* Honestly!'

Paul smiled in spite of himself. 'Welcome to the wonderful world of parenthood. What happens when you emp her?'

Jo grimaced. 'It feels like her head is full of candy-floss.'

'Funny you should say that. She couldn't get enough of the stuff last time we were here.'

'What did happen last time, Dad?'

'It was before your mother and I got together. I hardly knew her then. I went along hoping to find out more about my heritage, but I got more than I bargained for.'

There was a pause. Paul had been reluctant to say more.

'What do you mean?' nudged Jo.

'There was a horrible exhibition based on some old book about Nathan Slaughter. He was a fictitious Indian killer. It was truly gruesome; someone had really gone to town with waxworks of dead children. There were mutilated bodies everywhere and in the middle of it all was this evil bastard carving crosses into their corpses.'

Jo shuddered. 'That's vile.'

'Worst of all were the people laughing. It was presented as entertainment and they just lapped it up. I'd never seen such ignorance. Sometimes I wish I could forget.'

'Dad! Don't say that! What if Aunt Lethe hears you?'

'That's not going to happen again, Jo. In any case, we've both been wiped by Lethe and we managed to get through it. Your mum will find her way back to us somehow. We just have to be patient and act like everything's normal.'

Jo had nodded despondently. 'Like you say, at least she's happy.'

'Trouble is, we don't know why Lethe did it,' said Paul. 'It might just have been pure spite, but I bet there's more to it than that.'

'You think she's planning something? Me too,' said Jo. She drew a deep breath. 'Dad, I need to tell you about the Wolfblood prophecy.'

After she had finished, Paul looked shell-shocked. 'Are they out of their minds? Presumably they are convinced you are the Child of Glory...' Jo pulled a face and started to protest. Paul carried on speaking anyway. 'Get real, Jo. I'm not saying you are, or that there even is a C of G, but Lethe and Titus believe it and want to use you in some way we haven't worked out yet. She's put your mother out of action so she won't be able to protect you.'

'So she'll come for you next,' said Jo grimly. 'Don't let her in, Dad.'

'Easier said than done,' mumbled Paul. 'Your aunt is very clever. She tends to get what she wants.'

Including you, thought Jo, remembering all that Quinn had told her. Jo knew her father couldn't emp her, but he looked awkward and guilty then, as if he knew that she knew. It had been an uncomfortable moment.

'C O G,' Jo had spelt out, wryly. 'Just a cog in Aunt Lethe's machine. I don't think so!'



Jo was suddenly aware that Sam was looking at her oddly. 'Jo – aren't you worried? Your mum's acting weird and it's like you don't care. And you won't discuss it with me. I think she's having some kind of breakdown. My great-granddad went all doolally – but he was really ancient. Mum said it was like a second childhood. 'Course, it was Alzheimer's. Is that what's happening to your mum? Only early? Don't you think she should see a doctor, or a psychiatrist?'

Jo sighed. 'Sam, I *am* worried about her. But it's complicated...'

'So try me. I'm not stupid, you know.' Sam looked cross. 'We're friends. We should share things.'

Suddenly Jo felt an overwhelming desire to talk about it all. She took a deep breath.

'You're right. The thing is...'

That was as far as she got. The dormitory door burst open and Beth came in. She ignored Jo completely and pulled Sam to her feet, laughing as she did so.

'You have to see this, Sam!' she said excitedly. 'The Heavenly Blues choir's just arrived, and there's a couple of gorgeous guys...'

Sam looked torn. 'You coming, Jo?' she asked loyally, despite knowing the answer would be *no*.

Sure enough, Jo shook her head. 'I'll see you later,' she said. 'Have fun.' Then they were gone. Jo couldn't decide whether she was glad or sorry not to have had a heart-to-heart with Sam after all. On the whole she was relieved and she smiled to herself at the thought that Beth had actually helped her out. The smile faded at a spiteful emp from Beth. **Loser.**

Jo ran through a list of possible rejoinders. They all seemed very lame, but the desire to rattle Beth's cage was suddenly very strong.

Smokey says Hi. The emp was a complete lie as Jo had heard nothing more from Smokey. She was confident, however, that neither had Beth and it gave her a spiteful little thrill to put Beth's nose out of joint. She was very surprised by Beth's response.

We need to talk. Please.

Titus smiled warmly as he addressed the Glory Choirs. 'Welcome to the final stage of this wonderful – dare I say – *glorious* venture. GLORY choirs from all over the world have been performing in venues great and small during the past few weeks, gradually gathering together to prepare for the most amazing experience any of you will ever have... and that's a promise! Our tour will climax at the brand new GLORY Foundation headquarters where the facilities are world-beating.' He paused, then chuckled. 'Well, they will be just as soon as the contractors have completed their labours... They are working day and night to bring my vision to fruition!' He smiled benignly. 'Now, let's meet the wonderful team who will make our dreams come true and answer our prayers for love and peace!'

He really means it, thought Jo. He is completely and utterly sincere. Amazing. She studied the people on the podium. Mirabel was watching Titus anxiously, occasionally darting venomous glances at Lethe who was standing next to a tall, bony man wearing a long coat as black as midnight and a dusky leather Stetson hat. Lethe looked particularly beautiful, putting on a full-scale charm offensive, but his expression was unfathomable. Next to him stood the boys Beth had so admired. One looked vaguely familiar to Jo, but she could not place him. She studied them carefully. *One thing's for sure. They really hate each other. Wonder what that's about.* Her father was busily adjusting the sound levels, all the time casting anxious glances at Ali, who was sitting in the front row, squealing excitedly and wearing her favourite outfit of the moment – a

skimpy, swishy, inky-blue satin creation by Madame Mirabel – a cheerleader’s skirt and top, decorated with silver pom-poms. *Oh, Mum*, thought Jo, suddenly drained and exhausted with the worry of it all. Right then a flicker seemed to cross Ali’s face and Jo dared to wonder if her mother had sensed her concern and was beginning to recover. She tried a cautious emp.

Hey, Mum!

Nothing from Ali, but quick as a flash Beth was there. ***Please talk to me, Jo.*** Immediately Jo shielded and concentrated on listening to Titus. He was introducing the jolliest, twinkliest man Jo had ever seen. She found herself smiling just to look at him.

‘The musical director for our final, gala performance will be the hugely talented Jeremiah Leroy Brown, supported at all times by his trusty assistants Hawk and Nick!’ Jo sneaked a glance at Beth, fully expecting her to be gazing adoringly at the good-looking boys flanking Jeremiah. To her astonishment, Beth wasn’t even looking at the stage. In fact, she seemed to be crying. Jo was momentarily flabbergasted but soon recovered. *Tough. Not my problem.* ‘And finally, an old friend from way back, the Reverend Obadiah Moon, who will lead us in a prayer to bless our venture! Thank you, Pastor.’

The tall man stood up slowly, raising his arms. A hush fell. His voice rang out. ‘Bow your heads, brothers and sisters,’ he commanded, and everyone did so. Everyone that is except Jo... and her aunt. Just for a moment their eyes met. Lethe raised one elegant eyebrow, her face a study in amused scepticism. *She knows I don’t believe*, thought Jo. *And neither does she.*

Lethe’s smile broadened briefly, then her expression changed to angelic piety and she closed her beautiful eyes. Her copper eyelashes swept her silken skin and she bowed her head. Jo looked away then, and was transfixed to find herself looking directly into the coal black gaze of Obadiah Moon. To her amazement, he seemed to be smiling at her. Flustered, she dropped her gaze, and he began his prayer.

'Let your music be an offering to the world, bringing harmony, healing division and shining light into the darkest places of the soul. Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way. Above all, to God be the glory. Amen.'



Beth pounced as they streamed out of the auditorium for a five-minute break. She caught Jo completely off guard and pulled her into a side corridor.

'Look, just listen,' she pleaded. 'Together we can help Smokey. I know you don't trust me, but I'm going to drop my shield and tell you what I know. You'll soon see if I'm lying to you. Your aunt trapped Smokey. She caught him snooping in her study, dazzled him and then they took him to the Mirror Maze, wherever that is. I pretended he and I were together so you wouldn't realise he had gone.'

'This is not exactly news. I seem to remember persuading you to tell me this at the time.'

Beth flinched at the memory. Jo was silent. Beth became more agitated. 'There's more to it. I was there,' she admitted. 'I helped your aunt catch him. The thing is, I... I set him up.'

This was news to Jo. She was furious. 'Why would you do that, if you're so keen on him?' Jo's tone was icy.

Beth searched for the words. 'First, I wanted to impress Lethe. Second, she said that once Smokey had been re-programmed, I could...' She faltered.

'Go on.'

'She said I could have him.'

Jo started to laugh derisively. '*Have* him? Like a plaything?' The anguish in Beth's eyes stopped her short. 'Don't you realise he won't be worth having once she's finished with him? He'll be a zombie. Like his sister, in fact.' Beth looked puzzled. 'Bridget is Smokey's sister.'

'Oh. I didn't know.'

Jo sighed, exasperated. 'Beth, there is so much you don't know. So when do you get to unwrap your new toy?'

Beth flinched. 'Lethe keeps saying it won't be long, but I overheard her telling Madame Mirabel that Smokey could rot in hell for all she cared, and I don't think she's ever going to set him free. And I can't bear it. Please help me find him.'

'What makes you think I can find him?'

'You like him every bit as much as I do. Maybe more. We both want to find him. We'd make a pretty powerful team. I want to help.'

Jo thought hard. 'Well, that's one possibility,' she said at last. 'The other possibility is that you and Lethe are setting me up, for some reason, like you did Smokey, and that you are still working for her.'

Beth bit her lip. 'How can I prove I'm on your side?' she asked.

Jo gave the matter a lot of thought. Then inspiration struck. 'Titus keeps a piece of blood-stained paper in his wallet. There's something special about it. Bring it to me, and maybe, just maybe, I'll start to trust you.'

Beth looked ashen. 'But that's impossible!'

Jo shrugged. 'Did you think it was going to be easy?'

Jo slipped in to the rehearsal a few minutes late, looking for the rest of her choir. No-one seemed to have noticed her as she slid into the second row next to Sam. Beth followed shortly after. There were six other choirs all milling about. Hawk and Nick were arranging the rehearsal.

'Back two rows,' checked Hawk. 'Sunrise Serenade from Decorah, Iowa. Welcome, guys. In front of them, all the way from Chile – the Chilean Glory choir. Recepción a América. Espero que usted disfrute de su estancia.'

'Wonder how long he practised that for?' whispered Sam. 'Isn't he gorgeous?' Jo smiled. She couldn't help noticing that Hawk was like a magnet to the other girls.

She didn't get it, though. He didn't exactly leave her cold, but neither did he set her pulse racing. *Wonder if there's something wrong with me*, she thought idly, before concentrating on the introductions.

Hawk continued checking the floor plan. 'From Cabo San Lucas in Mexico, we welcome Yuca. In front of them, Shellflower, all the way from Turkey! Hogseldiniz, Heavenly Blues are next – that's my crew. We're from South Dakota and I have the honour of coming from the Itázipcho tribe. Tanyán yahí yélo. Which means, 'I'm glad you came.'

Most people were relaxing now, enjoying Hawk's welcome and beginning to get excited about the performances to come.

Hawk risked a joke. 'We Heavenly Blues have been singing the blues on a journey of repentance. Well, that's been the theme of our concerts so far. It's a long story. Needless to say we've been practising hard. Reckon we've learned our lessons!'

Jo was suddenly alert. Everyone was laughing, except for Nick. Even if she hadn't just intercepted the vile insult he emped to Hawk, his furious face would have been a giveaway. She saw Hawk fight to ignore the slur. His knuckles whitened and she could feel, even share, his urge to punch Nick. He gained control and carried on.

'Well, we have paid our dues, as the Pastor says, and done repenting. These final concerts have the theme of, what else, Glory. It's going to be the celebration to end all celebrations! Now, two more choirs – from the UK – Morning Glory. Awfully glad you could come, old beans.'

Everyone groaned at Hawk's atrocious English accent. Jo grinned and caught his eye. Without thinking, she emped him.

That was terrible.

Hawk looked startled for a moment, then responded briefly. ***I'll work on it.***

'And finally, from Garland, Texas, we have Wild Purple. Sure glad you could make it!'

Sam had been thinking. 'I reckon every choir is named after a particular flower from their country and when we're in costume, we'll make the colours of the rainbow,' she whispered to Jo. 'It'll look amazing!'

'Rainbow Warriors,' said Jo, then her heart lurched as she remembered Matthew's notes on the Wolfblood Prophecies.

The Child of Glory will lead the Rainbow Warriors in a time of war and destruction.

She thought furiously. *Is this all one big charade to make the prophecy seem to come true? But if so, surely even Lethe can't make something evil out of the Rainbow Warriors...* Jo tried to remember what else Matthew had written.

Many Native American tribes have prophesied the coming of the Rainbow Warriors to save the earth from environmental destruction...

'Jo!' hissed Sam urgently.

Jo jumped, and realised there was an uneasy silence where a moment ago there had been relaxed laughter. Hawk had handed over to Nick, and he was glaring straight at her.

'I said,' he snarled, 'that I do not appreciate people coming late to my rehearsals. If you don't have the discipline we need here, Ginger, I suggest you get yourself back across the pond.'

Jo longed for a smart remark to spring to her lips, but nothing came. She flushed bright red. Hawk gave her a rueful smile. **Ignore him.**

He's a moron, she flashed.

A moron who can emp, warned Hawk.

At that moment, Nick looked Jo straight in the eye and, in that instant, Jo saw his damage. Feeling angry and reckless, she fired an emp in his direction. **I know your nasty little secret.** She was gratified to see Nick look startled, before regaining his composure and continuing with the rehearsal.

Chapter Thirteen – The Crystal Cave and the Clock Tower

Jeremiah Leroy Brown beamed at the massed choirs. 'It is a great privilege to work with you. You have a lot of hard work ahead, but if it isn't pleasurable as well, there would be no point. My good friend Hawk told you our theme is Glory which means, according to my dictionary, adoring praise or worshipful thanksgiving. Now, each choir already has two songs of praise in their repertoire. We will learn those songs from each other, and that will be our programme. So all of you already know at least two of the songs. While we are practising, I will be looking out for exceptional performers – I want some extra-special soloists as part of the grand finale. So let's get you and your voices warmed up! Your voices are precious and you need to look after them. I am sure you already know that. But we need to work on relationships. You are going to have to get to know each other so you can work together and trust one another. While you are learning, you might make a mistake, and you need to be confident that that's OK and no one will give you a hard time. There's no place in my choir for meanness and superiority. Teamwork, tenacity and talent. That's the formula. Now. Find a partner. Someone you don't know, and spend a few moments getting to know each other.'

Jo hated this kind of thing. There was always the fear that no one would choose her, or she would approach someone and they would turn away. She saw Nick make a beeline for Beth. Then she caught Hawk looking questioningly at her and she relaxed and smiled. He walked across to her, his hand raised in greeting.

'Hau kola!' he said. 'Hello, friend. Everyone calls me Hawk.'

'Hawk from the Itázipčho tribe,' said Jo. Hawk smiled, and refrained from correcting her pronunciation. 'I'm Jo Lakota.'

Hawk's smile faded abruptly. 'You're kidding me.' Jo looked puzzled and shook her head. 'But Lakota is my tribe – it's not usual to have a tribe name as a surname... It is considered disrespectful.'

Now Jo looked puzzled. 'I thought you said you were Itázipčho?'

'There are seven Lakota tribes. Sičhánǰu. Oglála. Itázipčho. Húnkpapha. Mnikhówožu. Sihásapa. Oóhenunpa. Surely a girl with a name like yours would know that.' Hawk suddenly seemed hostile, and Jo was sorry about that. She decided to give him the bare facts.

'There's no disrespect here, Hawk. My dad's father came from your tribe, but they never met. It was wartime... When Dad started in the music business, he wanted a name that would mean something and stand out, so he chose Lakota. He meant it as a tribute to his origins. He is so proud to be part Native American and so am I.'

'Well, watch out for Nick,' said Hawk, relenting slightly. 'He hates me and my people – correction – *our* people – and it looks like he has it in for you already. He is one mean son of a gun. Watch your back.'

Jo grimaced. 'So how come you are working so closely together if you can't stand each other?'

'A long story – like I said, it's all about repentance and atonement.'

'Times up! Change partners!' Jeremiah Leroy Brown called everyone to circulate. Jo and Hawk were soon separated by the swirling mass.

Hawk, can we talk about this later?

Yeah. OK. See you in the Grotto after supper. Eight fifteen.



The rehearsal had been over for some time, but Jo resigned herself to the knowledge that the good-natured teasing would go on for ages. Jeremiah Leroy Brown had singled her out in glowing terms, calling her 'the young lady with the beautiful Titian curls and the voice of an angel.' She had been so embarrassed at the time, but even so, something deep in her was thrilled

at the generous praise. And it was better than being called *Ginger*.

After supper Jo went looking for Hawk to continue their conversation. She slipped out of a side door and walked across the grass. The evening was cool and she shivered slightly as the shadows of dusk fell across the grounds. In the distance she heard the clock tower strike eight o'clock. Ahead of her was a small chapel. The stained glass windows glowed in the gloom. As she passed the open door she heard familiar voices, and stopped to listen.

'Why, Obadiah, I do declare you are still the most stubborn man in Christendom,' said Lethe, doing her best Scarlett O'Hara impersonation. 'The Glory Foundation is offering you a seat on the board, and an inordinately large amount of money to help your rag-tag collection of villains, vandals and vagrants and you go all high-and-mighty on me! Well, fiddle-dee-dee.'

The Pastor laughed sardonically. 'You forget how well I know you, Lethe. I somehow doubt that you are doing the Lord's work. Titus, maybe, much to my surprise. But not you. And as for the money, I'd rather have my independence. Like I always say, if you want to go fast, go alone.'

'And if you want to go far, go together. We did go far once, Obi.'

'We sure did. You're one hell of a woman, Lethe, and I remember every moment of our time. But hell was the operative word. It's over. When the tour's done, we'll go our separate ways, sugar.'

'How does it go? *Great balls of fire. Don't call me sugar!* Just don't say you don't give a damn, Obi, because you do. I can see it in your eyes.'

'Yup. Can't sleep for thinking of you, Lethe. I don't deny it. But you chose the path of wickedness, Lady Midnight, and I won't walk your road.'

Lethe's voice was little more than a whisper. 'Maybe I've repented. Shouldn't a man of God reach out to save a miserable sinner?'

'Oh, my. So many ways to tempt a man, and I reckon you know 'em all. But I've learned my

limitations. I'll pray with you, Lethe, but I can't save you. Only God can do that.'

Lethe lost patience. 'I cannot say being saved looks like much fun, Obadiah. Well, it's your loss. Believe me, there will be no second chances. You will be rotting in your wilderness and I will be creating Paradise on Earth.'

Lethe turned on her heel and walked out, her head held high, her face defiant. She went, unseeing, straight past where Jo was hiding in the shadows, and laughed in scorn and triumph as she left. Only Jo could see the single tear on Lethe's cheek, and hear an almost inaudible intake of breath as Lethe stifled a sob. Despite herself, Jo found herself wishing the Pastor would follow her aunt. She stayed where she was, hardly daring to breathe, waiting for Obadiah to go. She emped Hawk. ***Be with you in five minutes.*** That was a mistake.

'Better make that ten, young lady. You and I need to have a conversation. Come on out where I can see you.'

Jo stepped sheepishly out of the shadows. Obadiah stood tall and angular, a gaunt silhouette in front of the stained glass windows. His voice echoed round the chapel. 'So are you on your momma's road, or your aunt's?' he demanded.

Straight to the chase, thought Jo. Her mouth was dry and her knees were weak but she mustered all her courage and looked directly at the Pastor. 'I'm on my own road,' she answered.

Obadiah laughed. 'A good, straight answer. Can't stand mealy-mouthed hypocrites. And Jeremiah Leroy Brown tells me your singing is exceptional. Who taught you?'

'Mum and Dad are musical,' Jo began, then she said impulsively, 'It just seemed to come from nowhere.' She told him about singing to Sam's dad and the healing lotus.

'So you're a healer and it just comes from nowhere?' His voice was quizzical and challenging.

'Mum says it comes from God,' faltered Jo, 'But...'

'But you don't believe in God.'

Jo shook her head.

'Mighty good job God believes in you, then. Special place in His heart for the honest unbeliever. So in your scheme of things, where does all this power you have come from?'

Jo tried to explain. 'I feel I can connect to something... There's this great life-giving well of love and goodness and kindness, and this terrible pit of death and destruction and cruelty, and I want to make sure I'm part of the light, not the darkness.'

'Sounds like God and the Devil to me.'

'Those aren't the names I use. I just say good and evil.'

'And do you trust yourself to know which is which?'

'Sometimes. And sometimes I have to work out who I trust and listen to what they have to say.'

'And do you trust me?'

The question unnerved Jo. In fact the whole conversation unsettled her. Even so, her response was clear, and immediate. 'Yes,' she said. 'Yes, I do.' *Like Quinn*, she thought.

'Then let me help you. You can start by telling me who Smokey is. We'll talk about Quinn later. And your poor, crazy momma.'

Jo jumped, then felt indignant. 'You're poking about in my thoughts.'

The Pastor shrugged. 'Yup... just a little. You'll have to learn to shield better.'

Jo was annoyed. 'No need for me to tell you anything, then, if I'm just an open book.'

'Don't worry. I only took a look at the first couple of pages. You never even noticed me. Thing is, I'm pretty darn good. I'm specially good when it comes to the things that really trouble folk. The rest is just chitter chatter. So tell me about Smokey.'

Jo found herself pouring her heart out. When she stopped talking, Obadiah was silent for a long while. Jo studied him intently.

'You know where he is. You've been there,' said Jo slowly. She could see memories stirring in his mind,

'You've been to the *Lost Funfair of Forgotten Dreams*; The Mirror Maze... the carousel... and the Tunnel of Love...'

The Pastor struggled to shield his recollections and feelings, dammed up for so long, but their power was greater than he could contain.

Jo could see him – young, strong and handsome – his eyes shining, laughing and teasing as he gazed at the stunningly beautiful young woman in his arms. They were floating on inky black water in a golden, gondola with a pink, heart-shaped, velvet quilted seat, festooned with Cupids and red roses – and just about to disappear into a tunnel twinkling with red and pink fairy lights. Sweet, soft music was playing. Jo looked puzzled. 'Was that my mother or my aunt?' she asked. 'It's hard to tell, sometimes.'

He sighed. 'It was Lethe. I think she had a season ticket for that particular ride... me, and Quinn, your father, Titus, to name but four. We all fell for her, but it took me a long time to cotton on that she wasn't looking for love.'

'I don't get what you all saw in her,' said Jo petulantly. 'She's plain wicked.'

'Well, plain she ain't. Anyway, attraction's all chemistry and mystery. Who knows what you see in Smokey? I wager he's no saint...'

Jo blushed and changed the subject. 'So you know where the fairground is?'

'Yup, I surely do. It's over a thousand miles away, but before you charge off like the cavalry, we are headed right towards it. They've built the GLORY Foundation headquarters real close to it. I'll take you there just as soon as the last show's finished. That's a promise. So don't you go trying to find it on your lonesome. And right now, there's someone waiting for you. We'll talk again. Now scoot.'

Jo scooted.



By the time Jo reached the Grotto, there was no one there. She emped an apology to Hawk, then

waited, hoping he'd come back. She shivered in the chill night air. As she waited, she looked around in wonder at the walls of the cavern. Every inch was covered with crystal quartz, shining and sparkling as the light of the moon shone through the entrance. Jo spotted an intriguing notice.

Could this be the legendary Lost Crystal Cave of Oregon, discovered a hundred years ago by cowboys sheltering from a terrible storm?

As Jo's eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, she saw there were candles everywhere. She took a box of matches and lit some of them. The crystals reflected the candlelight in a brilliant blaze, bright and glittering like diamonds, edged with rainbows. Jo stopped for a moment to look at the breath-taking spectacle before her. As she tilted her head to one side, she realised how quiet everything had become. All of her worries began to fade as she felt herself comforted by a soft wave of tranquillity and calm. She was so enchanted that she didn't hear the footsteps behind her.

'Well, if it ain't Squawking Squaw,' sneered Nick. Jo could smell brandy on his breath. 'Planning a pow-wow with Big Chief Shit-for-brains? Squawk and Hawk. I've got a message for you. He's been – held up. So we've got plenty of time for you to tell me about all these powers I've heard so much about.'

Beth told him, thought Jo, resignedly. What the hell is she playing at? Well, she can come and make herself useful. Beth – I'm in the Grotto. And I know where Smokey is. That ought to attract her attention. She frowned. She hadn't felt any connection when she emped Beth. *That's funny – something's not right...*

Nick leaned in close and snarled at Jo. 'So what's this so-called secret you know about me?'

Jo thought furiously. *I am such an idiot. That's called my bluff. I only glimpsed him for a moment. Still, there's bound to be something. Just a question of lifting a stone in his nasty little mind and seeing what*

crawls out. She started to deep-read him, but to her dismay nothing happened. He looked at her sardonically.

'This had better be good,' he said.

Jo tried emping Hawk for help, but all she got was white noise in her head. She tried not to panic. Maybe Obadiah would connect? But again – nothing.

Now Nick was so close she could feel his breath on her cheek. His put his hands on her waist and laughed in her face, pressing her against the sharp edges of the crystals. She flinched from the smell of the brandy, and the closeness of him. She remembered hurting Sebastian and Beth. Feeling sick at heart because she had told herself it would never happen again, she tried to visualise the metal band round Nick's head. But again, there was nothing. Her powers weren't working!

Now Jo was truly frightened, but she forced herself to appear calm. *Think*, she told herself fiercely. *Use your brain. What is it he thinks I know?* Her mind was working overtime and raced through a host of possibilities. Then all but one slipped away.

She squared up to him and pushed him away, holding his gaze calmly, speaking slowly and clearly. 'I know about your mother,' she said. There was a frozen moment when the expression on Nick's face told her she had hit the mark, then he lashed out at her and everything went black.

Shivering in the cold glare, Smokey forced himself to open his eyes just a slit. The glare seared his vision but he persisted until eventually, his eyesight grew accustomed. He could just make out a crumpled, grey body lying in front of him. As he forced himself to focus he suddenly recognised himself as a ghastly reflection. He recoiled in horror and in so doing, closed his eyes.

When Jo came to she was alone. She tasted salty, sticky blood and her head was spinning. Slowly she staggered to her feet. She could tell some considerable time had passed as most of the candles had burned

down. She went out into the cold night air, breathing deeply as her head began to clear. She could hear someone calling her name and at the same time someone else was trying to emp her. Her head was still muzzy, though, and she struggled to make out the message.

'Jo? What's happened? You're bleeding!' Jo's eyes swam back into focus. It was Beth who had spoken. She seemed genuinely concerned, but still Jo could not trust her.

'Just a nosebleed,' she mumbled. 'What are you doing here?'

'Looking for you!' said Beth. 'I'm so glad you're alright.'

'Thanks.' Jo tried to sound gracious. 'Have you seen Hawk?'

'Not for a while,' said Beth. 'We can look for him together, if you're up to it.'

'I think he's trying to emp me, but I can't make it out. Are you picking up anything?'

Beth shook her head. 'No, but I've noticed there are some places where emping just doesn't seem to work, and this is one of them. Perhaps it's something to do with all the quartz. I dunno. Anyway, let's go and look for Hawk.'

Jo felt fragile enough to accept Beth taking the lead.

'Let me tell you what I've found,' continued Beth.

'You've got the paper?' asked Jo, incredulous.

Beth shook her head ruefully. 'No way. He guards it like the Crown Jewels. But this morning I spied on him and Mirabel together. He looked like death warmed up and he gave her the paper. It's some old drawing. Mirabel fiddled about with something I couldn't see, muttered some gibberish, then she pricked her wrist and let a few drops of blood fall on the paper. She was blubbing away and suddenly the lines on the paper started to shine and his face was all lit up and he began to look well again. So it's got healing power.'

'I already knew that,' said Jo ungraciously, then she added, with a little more generosity, 'I didn't know it was a drawing though. And Madame Mirabel knows

how it works. Titus tried, but he couldn't do it on his own. Smokey saw him.'

'Did he? Well, I bet he'd like to get his hands on it. He hates Titus.'

Jo was slow on the uptake. 'Why would Smokey want it?' Then realisation dawned. 'Oh. But that would be murder.'

Beth shrugged. 'Whatever. Anyway, I kept my side of the bargain...'

'Not exactly. But it doesn't really matter. I'll tell you what I know, but it's not much. The funfair where they've got Smokey is on an Indian reservation...'

'Well, that narrows it down,' said Beth sarcastically. 'There's hundreds of reservations.'

'That's right. Can't go chasing all over America looking for a boarded-up funfair. A friend of mine is pretty certain he knows where it is, but I need to be sure.'

'Hawk, I suppose.'

Jo shook her head, but clearly Beth did not believe her. 'My friend, who is absolutely not Hawk, has promised to take me there after the last performance. I'll keep you posted.' Jo wasn't at all sure that she really would include Beth in any rescue attempts but figured it didn't do any harm to keep her sweet in the meantime.

They walked on in silence towards a grove of trees.

Hawk? Where are you?

The answer was clear as a bell. Jo was so relieved that the loss of her abilities was only temporary.

Locked in the Clock Tower.

'I know where Hawk is,' said Jo, changing direction, heading for the lake.



Moonlight shone on the rippling water, silhouetting the reflection of the tall, slender tower. Jo ran to the arched doorway. 'Padlocked. And no sign of a key.'

'Here – let me.' Beth took two small metal objects from her pocket and fiddled with the keyhole. 'Surprising what you can do with a couple of paperclips...'

After a few tense moments there was a very satisfying click as the lock sprang open. Beth opened the door with a flourish.

'Cool,' said Jo, and ran through the door, calling for Hawk. Ahead of her was a spiral staircase. With Beth close behind her she ran up the stairs, until they reached the belfry. There was Hawk, gagged and tied to a wooden rail. Jo saw the clock movement, driving weights, and linking lines. Four bells directly above gleamed in the moonlight.

'We need to get out of here fast,' gasped Beth, tugging at the knots securing Hawk. 'There's not a moment to lose. It's almost nine o'clock.'

Jo felt slow-witted. On seeing Hawk, bound and gagged, she had been bombarded with disturbing memories of finding Titus and before him, Lanying. She was all fingers and thumbs as she tried to help.

The bells will deafen us. Hawk's emp was urgent, even more so because he knew there was a risk he would lose forever his gift of acute hearing.

As understanding dawned, Jo was galvanised into action. Her fingers moved swiftly and the ropes fell away. She could sense the clock mechanism beginning to vibrate, ready to strike the hour. 'Run,' she gasped, and they all took to the stairs, almost tripping over each other in their haste to get as far away from the bells as possible.

They spilled out of the door and tumbled onto the grass, catching their breath, as above their heads the bells boomed.

'What are you doing here?' Hawk sounded furious as he glared at Beth.

Beth was bewildered. 'Helping rescue you,' she replied.

'I don't think so.' He looked as if he wanted to hit her.

'What on earth's going on?' asked Jo. Hawk turned and looked at her. She could see the fury in his eyes.

'I was on my way to meet you. I was a bit early so I took the scenic route by the lake. I saw her and Nick, giggling and whispering. I carried on past – next thing

I knew someone jumped me and I blacked out. When I came to – well, you know the rest.'

'And you think it was Nick? I swear I didn't know what he was planning!' Beth's voice was anguished. 'I was only with him for a few minutes. You've got to believe me!'

Jo didn't know what to make of it. Right then Beth was coming across as completely sincere, but in spite of that Jo wasn't convinced that she was entirely trustworthy. She said nothing. Hawk was still furious.

'So what were you laughing about then? Looked like you were plotting something.' He had strained hard to hear them but something had blocked his ability to eavesdrop.

Beth looked awkward. 'He'd made up a stupid poem. About the two of you. It was kind of mean, but it... well, it made me laugh.'

'Perhaps you'd like to recite it,' said Hawk, his voice icy.

Beth swallowed hard. 'It's something like,

*Ginger Squawk
And half-breed Hawk
Went out to hunt a buck.
He said, 'Hold this,'
She said, 'You wish,'
He said...*

'Yes. Very witty,' interrupted Jo hastily.

'There's loads more verses. Hunt a turkey, a wild-cat... chicken... You get the picture.'

'Indeed,' said Jo. 'Beth, I think it's probably best if you go now.'

Beth slowly nodded. She looked awkward yet relieved.

Once they were alone, Jo turned to Hawk.

'So what exactly is Nick's problem? I mean, everyone else seems to get along fine.'

'He's just hillbilly trash who hates American Indians.'

'What did they ever do to him?'

'I know what I'd like to do to him,' growled Hawk. 'Him and his dumb poem. It's not like I remotely fancy you, anyway.'

'Well, thanks,' said Jo, surprised to find herself feeling a bit hurt. 'I don't remotely fancy you, either.'

Hawk looked at her as if noticing her for the first time. Jo watched the ticking pulse in Hawk's jaw as he harnessed his anger.

'Sorry. I didn't mean it to sound so rude,' he said apologetically. 'It's just that the other boys keep on about you...'

'They do?' *That sounded over eager. Don't be so pathetic, Jo!* She just had to ask. 'So what do they say?'

Hawk looked excruciatingly embarrassed. 'My mate Bob says you're real neat and kind of mysterious. And pretty. And interesting. And I'm not arguing. You are all those things. They keep teasing me about you – reckon we'd make a good couple because of the Indian heritage - but when I'm with you I just feel friendly.'

Jo said nothing.

Everyone else in the dormitory was asleep. Jo lay wide-awake, thinking back over an eventful day. Jeremiah Leroy Brown thought she had beautiful Titian curls and the voice of an angel. The Pastor clearly approved of her, doubts and all, and Bob, for one, thought she was neat and mysterious. And pretty. And interesting. All in all, not such a bad day.

Chapter Fourteen – The Foundation

The convoy of seven buses, each one a colour of the rainbow, swept through the massive, golden gates. Wrought into the gleaming metal were the words THE GLORY FOUNDATION. Ahead lay a complex of beautiful dramatic modern buildings, vibrant with mosaics, smoked glass and filigree tracery. The vast grounds were landscaped into formal, symmetrical gardens with illuminated fountains, follies, avenues of trees, bowers, rockeries and classical statuary.

The sky was ablaze with the fiery colours of the setting sun, turning the fantastic cloud formations to red and gold and orange. The clouds were like nothing Jo had ever seen. Five great consecutive rolls stretched across the sky from one side to the other with no ends in sight. As they drove beneath them everyone craned to look up.

Jo glimpsed a wilderness area and a cascading waterfall, tumbling into a canal which snaked its way throughout the parkland, reflecting the flame colours of the evening sky. She remembered being on the run in disused Underground stations, hungry and filthy, not so long ago, and marvelled at the contrast between her life then and now.

'Look,' said Sam, as they passed an open-air arena lined with terraces of seats. 'There's the amphitheatre. It's enormous! This is so scary. There must be room for thousands of people. Scary – and exciting. But it's sad as well – because then it will all be over.'

'We'll still have a couple of days here after the concert,' Jo pointed out. 'Lots of free time to explore.'

Sam was bubbling with excitement. 'We've got to find our rooms – our very own rooms – hooray, no more dormitories! Then we need to unpack – I feel all crumpled after hours in the plane – change for the welcoming speeches in the Great Hall and then supper! It's bound to be something delicious! This place just oozes class and luxury – then tomorrow it's costume fittings. I bet Madame Mirabel will come up trumps.'

'Oh, I'm sure she will,' said Jo, inwardly marvelling at how an evil old woman who had created costumes for homeless youngsters, including her, to fight for their lives as a means of entertainment, had somehow become a National Treasure.



The assembled choirs and other audience members chattered excitedly as a procession of dignitaries, led by Lethe and Titus, filed onto the stage.

'There's Hawk,' said Sam. 'With those two Indian chiefs. Don't they look amazing?'

Jo agreed. Most of the guests on the stage wore neutral colours; beige, greys and blacks. The two old men in their full ceremonial regalia stood colourful and proud.

Jo consulted her programme. 'It says here they're wearing war bonnets made from the tail feathers of the golden eagle. Each feather was the reward for an act of bravery. Sometimes red dye was used to commemorate a particular deed. Wow. Look at all those feathers! They must have been very brave!' She carried on reading aloud. 'The Lakota made food, cups, needles, scraping knives, and sleds out of buffalo and they made their clothing out of buffalo hides, sometimes decorated with quillwork, whatever that is. Oooh! It looks like Hawk knows them. I've never seen him look so happy!'

As she found out more about her heritage, Jo developed a hunger to find out all she could about the history of the Lakota people. She carried on reading the programme notes to herself.

Some pieces of quillwork are over two hundred years old. The round, hollow porcupine quill has a barbed point at one end. The quills were flattened and dyed with various vegetable dyes. Each region had its own distinctive dyes. The western Sioux used red, made from buffalo berry and dock root; yellow, made from wild sunflower or cone flower petals boiled with pieces of decayed oak bark or with the roots of cattail;

black, made from wild grapes and brown, made from hickory nuts or black walnuts.

The origin of traditional quillwork is explained by a Sioux legend in which a mythical "double woman" –twins – came in a dream to a Lakota woman to teach her the use of quills. In the 1800s beads tended to replace quills.

Jo smiled at the thought of the "double woman", then, prompted by the mention of twins, looked around the crowded room for her mother.

Sometimes the resemblance between her mother and aunt was so close it amazed her. Certainly, her aunt had used their likeness to create all kinds of mischief in the past. But now, Lethe embodied sophisticated elegance and allure, whereas Ali was as gauche and awkward as a teenager. Jo knew she wasn't crazy, as the Pastor had suggested, but sometimes she could see why he thought that.

Jo finally spotted Ali in the technical booth with Paul. He had his back to the stage, talking with the sound and lighting technicians. He turned round to adjust the sound levels, and briefly caught Jo's eye. *He looks tired,* thought Jo. *He must be terrified Mum will never get back to normal.* She waved to them, and they both waved back, Paul with a rueful smile, Ali bouncing up and down in her cheerleader's outfit, with white ankle socks and her hair in bunches, waving pom-poms. *It's like having a kid sister. It would be fun if it weren't so weird.*

Jo thought about the twin she had never known, the twin whose DNA she had absorbed before birth. *I could have been a "double woman"! Wonder if my twin was a boy or a girl?* Then with a jolt she remembered Lethe's words. ***Jo, you have a brother. You have to find him. Find your brother.*** Life had been hurtling past, full of rehearsals and meetings and journeys and performances, and it had slipped to the back of her mind.

Jo was still watching her parents. Paul was making notes on the programme, when something he read

clearly startled him. He stared at the programme in disbelief, then at the stage, his eyes wide with amazement. Jo followed his gaze. He was staring at the older of the two chieftains, his face frozen with shock. As Jo looked from the younger man to the older, she realised in a tumultuous rush of emotion that Paul was looking at the father he had never known and she was looking at her grandfather.

She longed to run and join Paul and share this momentous revelation, but right on cue Hawk began to sing the Lakota Honouring Song. A great stillness fell over the auditorium and Jo was trapped, unable to move and break the spell. Normally she loved to hear the beautiful, stirring song but now she was impatient for it to be over. When the last note died away a profound hush fell over the room before wild applause broke out, then Titus stood up. Jo resigned herself to waiting, quietened her thoughts, and concentrated on his welcoming speech.

He talked with warmth and feeling about the path that had led him to found the Glory Foundation. He did not spare himself when he talked of the wrongs he had done, but neither did he dwell on them. He spoke of his need for repentance and atonement, and his vision of a generation of young people following the path of the Lord he had found so late in life. He consigned *VergissMeinNicht* to the dustbin of history and described the Glory Foundation rising like a phoenix from the ashes and destruction of the past. He paid generous tribute to Lethe, then he turned to Grey Wolf and Silver Lightning.

'Honoured Itancans, I have amassed great wealth in the decades that have passed since first we met. My wealth has come in part from land I own originally seized from your tribe by the United States government, using forced treaties, when the railroads were first built. On that land, under skies resplendent with the rare, rolling Morning Glory clouds for which this region is famed, I have built this miraculous complex, the world headquarters of the foundation I have dedicated to the glory of God.'

Titus paused, holding his rapt audience in the palm of his hand. In the silence a memory stirred in Jo's mind. *Rolling thunder and clouds of glory*. She struggled to find the source of the words but before it could surface, Titus continued, his voice resonant with emotion and sincerity.

'The Glory Foundation is built on land that is legally mine but I have come to believe, morally yours. So I ask you to join me here in a great and equal partnership, creating a place where your history and wisdom will be respected and your philosophies shared with people of good intent and faith the world over. Let us heal the terrible wounds that have been inflicted here; the wounds that have divided nation from nation, neighbour from neighbour.'

He could say no more – a thunderous ovation drowned out his words as the Chieftains sealed the agreement. However, Jo, ever watchful, observed that a small minority, including Nick, was tight-lipped and silent.

The next morning Jo was on her way for her costume fitting when Paul sought her out.

'How would my Titian-haired angel like to have lunch with her old man and some old friends?'

'I don't know about this angel you speak of, but I would certainly like to. Would one of these old friends be Reg, by any chance?'

'It would. Did you just read my mind?'

Jo laughed. 'No – it was a guess. We always planned to hook up over here sometime.'

'Well, Reg and Brenda are still convinced that the Glory Foundation is a cover for some power-crazed, world-domination plot, so they're coming to have a look round – all out in the open, as well. They had a special invitation from Titus, saying he had nothing to hide and would like to bury the hatchet and work with The Righteous.'

'Hmm. I expect Reg would like to bury the hatchet as well. Probably in Titus's head.'

There was a long pause, then Paul, looking happier than he had for longer than Jo could remember, picked her up and whirled her round. 'And after that, I have the most wonderful surprise!'

What was Jo to do? Feign ignorance and feel a hypocrite, or say she knew what the surprise was, and rain on his parade? As it turned out, Madame Mirabel opened the fitting room door and saved her from having to decide which path to take.

'I ain't got all day, Your Highness...'

'See you later, Dad,' said Jo, and gave Paul a big hug. Once he had gone and the door was closed Jo turned, unsmiling, to face Madame Mirabel. Her words were welcoming, on the surface, but malice glittered in them like razor blades.

'Well, well, Stripey Girl. Ain't it just like old times?'

'I sincerely hope not,' said Jo coldly. 'Let's just get on with it, shall we? Don't waste your time trying to be a dear little old lady round me.'

'Thank Gawd for that. It's a terrible effort, all this sweetness and light malarkey. I miss me old ways – proper out of practice, I am. Now I wonder... what was it with you? Oooh, yes. I remember. Nasty, slithery snakes...'

Jo gasped as Mirabel conjured up the sensation of a snake coiling round her and crushing the breath out of her. She struggled to speak, determined to outface the vindictive old woman.

'It goes both ways, Mirabel. I've done a lot of looking and thinking since we came to America. And now I know your weak spot and I'll use it if I have to.'

The crushing stopped and Mirabel looked quizzically at Jo.

'Well, go on then. Amaze me.'

'You carry this special memory with you,' said Jo confidently. 'It's wartime, and you're wearing a red cotton dress with little white hearts on. Same material as that patchwork pin-cushion you take everywhere. And you're with your sweetheart at the fairground, waiting to go on one of the rides. He's a soldier. Very handsome. You both look so young and happy.'

Mirabel sat down quickly. Her heart was racing, and she struggled to catch her breath. Tears streaked her mascara, leaving silver runnels in her face powder.

Jo continued, unrelenting. 'Oh, the water's pretty murky and smelly, and the boat is just a rough, leaky old wooden thing; the music is tinny and half the fairy lights aren't working, but you don't notice any of that. All you can see is your soldier boy. You took a ride in the Tunnel of Love, and for you the ride never stopped. You've been keeping your love alive ever since.'

Mirabel looked up sharply. 'What do you mean by that?' she demanded.

'I mean the memories have never died,' said Jo innocently. 'What did you think I meant?'

'Hmm.' Mirabel was not completely reassured, as Jo had intended. She wanted to rattle the old woman as much as possible, but since her bruising encounter with Nick she was trying to learn not to overplay her hand. Before, she had dimly sensed the addictive possibilities of secrets; now she was savouring their power, danger and mystery. Mirabel continued, a defiant note creeping into her voice. 'You don't see as much as you thinks you do, little girl. You just sees a rickety old ride, but my soldier boy went on to build me a proper Tunnel of Love, with pink velvet seats and real gold Cupids and ruby red roses. Mirabel's Dream, he called it. I don't reckon no-one'll never do that for you, Stripey Girl. Well, you got me all of a doodah, so it's round one to you, I s'pose. Now what?'

Jo had a horrible feeling she had played her ace too early, but she masked her doubts and spoke with authority. 'No more snakes, for a start. I've hardly begun searching your memories, Madame Mirabel, and I can use them to hurt you every bit as much as you can hurt me, and more besides. So leave me alone. And that goes for the people I care about as well. And since that's pretty much everybody, you'll just have to carry on being a sweet, apple-cheeked old lady. But don't bother pretending with me. I haven't forgotten. Now let's get started.'

Mirabel composed herself, dabbing at her eyes with a lace-trimmed handkerchief. 'You be careful what you digs up when you go poking about in other people's minds,' she warned, although it was less of a warning, more of a veiled threat. 'You might uncover something you can't handle.'

'I'll cross that bridge when I get to it,' said Jo. 'So what's my costume going to be like?'

In high dudgeon Mirabel unfurled a roll of delicate, shimmering, silvery fabric, which gleamed and reflected prismatic flashes of rainbow light.

'It's beautiful,' gasped Jo, impressed in spite of herself. She had never seen anything like it.

'A little bird tells me you're the star of the show, which is why you get to wear an outfit made out of some bleedin' brand new miracle fabric what is an absolute nightmare to sew. But it is a bit special. For once your hoity-toity aunty cooked up something useful in that laboratory of hers. I'll grant her that much.'

'Aunt Lethe invented this?'

'Very particular she was that only you was to wear it. Oh, the rest of them will look stunning, but you've got to be outstanding, apparently. Her Ladyship has spoken.'

'It's just a couple of solos,' muttered Jo, suddenly embarrassed.

'Well, you've got to look the bee's knees, which means I've got my work cut out. Thank Gawd you gave up on the Goth look. That had no class whatsoever. Made you look like a bleedin' panda.'



It was so good to see Reg and Brenda again. They sat in the sunshine, eating delicious food at another part of the Glory Foundation Franchise, *The Glory B Diner*. They were springing up all over the world, with mouth-watering menus, including Alabama pork ribs with a sweet and spicy glaze, prawn and chorizo jambalaya, sweet potato gumbo with cornbread, southern fried chicken with cream gravy and sweet corn mash, cherry pie, chocolate cherry knickerbocker

glory, pear and blackberry cobbler and sweet pumpkin pie.

'I think I've died and gone to Heaven,' sighed Reg contentedly as he finished the last spoonful of his cherry pie à la mode. 'Glory Be, indeed.'

Paul smiled. 'I have to say, Reg, that however hard I try, I can't fault the Glory Foundation, much as I would like to. It really seems to be doing good work in the world. I see nothing but good intentions.'

'We all know where good intentions lead,' said Brenda darkly. 'How can anything involving Titus Stigmurus and Lethe Lacuna lead anywhere but to Hell?'

Jo studied Brenda with interest. Part of her shared Brenda's suspicions, but that wasn't what fascinated her. There was something very special about Brenda's relationship with Reg. It didn't seem to be based on romance or dominance, but a comfortable, shared vision of fairness rooted in a deep, unswerving loyalty, an almost tangible loyalty that shone from Brenda with a steadiness that seemed unshakeable.

Brenda became aware of Jo's intense scrutiny, and smiled a smile as open as the skies. They chatted together about the rescue operation of the children imprisoned and corrupted by CUT. Brenda had played a vital role in that and other Righteous operations.

'I'll never forget what the Vermin did to those kids,' she said vehemently. 'I'd like to believe in atonement, Jo, but how can Titus and Lethe ever atone for what they did? Why should they lead wealthy, privileged lives, free to travel wherever they want, when they consigned so many to a living hell? That's not justice.'

'So what would you do with them?' asked Jo. It was a question she had often asked herself.

Brenda sighed. 'There's a vengeful side to me that wants them to suffer forever in a rat-infested dungeon.'

'So no mercy, then?'

'Mercy and hate don't make good bedfellows, Jo. I really struggle with this. Because I can't bear it if they get away scot-free, but if I let the vengeful side win,

I'm on my way to being like them. And that's unbearable, too.'

'Well, speaking of unbearable, here comes Titus now,' said Reg sardonically, watching as his former Nemesis strolled across the grass.

Brenda's words disturbed Jo, stirring up her own feelings of inadequacy in the face of evil. She was brooding intently as Titus came over to their table, as affable and genial as a vicar at a wedding, cheerful, charming and chatty.

To Jo's surprise, despite her earlier words, Brenda seemed genuinely pleased to see him. *That's odd*, Jo thought. She frowned.

'You look worried, Jo,' said Brenda, smiling kindly. Jo quickly shielded her thoughts. 'Is it because of your mum?'

Jo struggled to respond.

'Why don't you tell me about it, love? Doesn't do to keep things bottled up.' Brenda reached across and patted her hand.

That did it. Jo hadn't realised how much effort she had been putting into staying emotionally afloat. She dimly perceived that an overwhelming burden of responsibility and fear was just on the periphery of her being, threatening to engulf her. There was so much she wanted to discuss with Ali, but all Ali wanted to talk about was make-up, clothes, and boys. To her horror, an unstoppable sob welled up from deep inside her as she realised how much she missed her mother's wisdom and when Brenda reached out and wrapped her in a comforting embrace, Jo offered no resistance.



The afternoon rehearsal went well enough. Jo's heart wasn't really in it, but most of the time was spent on technical issues so no-one really noticed her low spirits. They were rehearsing for the first time in the amphitheatre and Jeremiah Leroy Brown had chosen seven soloists, one from each choir. He directed them to very specific positions.

The seven choirs were ranked in seven semi-circles on the terraces. At the top were the Sunrise Serenade

singers, on the row below stood Chilean Glory, then Yuca, followed by Shellflower. Heavenly Blues came next, then Morning Glory and finally Wild Purple. As Sam had worked out, once everyone was wearing their robes, the effect would be that of a huge rainbow.

Large square marble slabs covered the apron of the arena – seven of them were streaked with gold and arranged in a crescent shape. Jo stood on the fourth slab, in the centre. A slender metal stem at the front of each slab rose waist-high, fanning out at the top to create a music stand.

Jeremiah pointed out a handle on each side of the fan. 'Now hold on,' he said, grinning, 'and see that music really can lift your spirits!'

The introduction for the final song, Van Morrison's *Gloria*, began playing. 'Hold tight,' advised Jeremiah again, and to everyone's astonishment the seven slabs slowly began to rise. The soloists held on for dear life, slightly shocked and a bit wobbly at first. Their singing was raggedy, to say the least.

The two slabs on the outside stopped rising, but the remaining five continued moving. Then the next two outside slabs stopped, and after a pause so did the last two, leaving Jo, feeling sick and queasy, moving ever higher, until at last, to her great relief, everything was still.

'Cue the lights!' commanded Jeremiah Leroy Brown, and as well as feeling shaky, Jo found herself dazzled. She was not at all sure that being so far off the ground was enjoyable, but she could see straight away how dramatic it was. As the first verse ended, the lights were dimmed, then a follow spot came on the first soloist as the letter G was sung, then the seventh lit up on on L, followed by the second (O), sixth (R), third (I) and fifth (A) until all seven singers, including Jo, the fourth soloist, were illuminated for the word GLORIA.

It took several more trial runs before Jo began to relax and enjoy herself. The excitement was beginning to build now, with less than two full days, packed with practices and costume fittings, before the final performance.

After the rehearsal the singers had a free evening. There was a full programme of activities on offer, including films, discos and discussions, but Jo had a very special event lined up. She was going to meet her grandfather.

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Chapter Fifteen – Family History

'Are you nervous, Jo?' asked Paul as they drove to meet Grey Wolf.

'Yes. What if I say or do the wrong thing? What should I call him?'

'How about Tunkasila? It's Lakotan for Grandfather.'

Paul smiled at his daughter, proudly wearing the silver locket that had belonged to her great-grandmother. 'It will be very emotional, Jo. Just a handful of family at first, so we can all get used to this.'

'Were you nervous, Dad? When you first made contact with him?'

'You bet.'

That morning Paul had met privately first with his father, then Summer Moon and other tribal elders. He had not expected to be so moved or so welcomed. He had read of the notorious Indian Adoption Project in North America between 1941 and 1978, when thousands of Native American children were taken from their families. When, as adults, some of them made contact with their birth families, the reunions had not always gone well. Suppose Grey Wolf did not want to acknowledge his son? But Paul's fears proved unfounded. Tears flowed freely as the two men embraced and talked.

'I had no idea you existed,' whispered Grey Wolf, his voice cracking with emotion. 'Your mother was a woman of great courage and beauty. My love for her ran deep with the passions of summer. My love for Summer Moon runs deep with the passions of spring, autumn and winter. I cannot give her the summer and she strives to accept that. It is a deep sadness that she could not bear me children, but time has taken away much of the sting. And we are blessed with Hawk. When he came to us we were far from young, but our hearts opened to him and will never close, as our hearts open to you and those you love.'

Grey Wolf had looked deeply into his eyes. 'In time there will be a welcoming ceremony for you, my son,

to celebrate your home-coming and heal our wounds. We will hold Hunkapi, or the Making of Relations, a ritual brought to us by White Buffalo Calf Maiden, when we acknowledge that all living things are members of the same family. There has been pain in our separation and our lives have been diminished by loss. But the wheel of the year has turned for us and the seasons will show us their wonders. We will flourish like the sacred cottonwood tree. We will feast and dance and be whole again.

*To dance is to pray,
to pray is to heal,
to heal is to give,
to give is to live,
to live is to dance.*

But now it is time for our tears to flow so our hearts can be cleansed of our sadness.

On his journey back that morning, warmed by the love of his new-found family, his emotions heightened, Paul realised just how alone he had been feeling since leaving England. He was surprised and ashamed to find a deep anger within him, directed towards his wife. *I need you, Ali, to help me get through this, and where are you? Away with the bloody fairies, that's where. Well, it's time you grew up and came home.*

He realised with a shock that after a brief time of desperately trying to pull Ali back to the world of grown-ups, he had almost completely adapted to her child-like state, tolerating her in a kindly enough manner, but embarrassed to be seen with her and no longer taking her seriously or discussing their family life together. Ali did not appear to notice anything wrong.

Lethe, however, had certainly noticed. She had sought him out early on during the tour. She found him one night sitting alone in a darkened lounge, nursing a glass of whiskey.

'May I join you?'

'Could I stop you?'

'That was less than gracious, Paul,' chided Lethe gently. She lit a scented candle, and the warm glow emphasised her beauty. Her hair gleamed like burnished copper; her green eyes, flecked with gold, danced with mischief. 'Pour me a glass of champagne, and let us drink to days gone by and a weeping willow by a silver stream.'

Paul closed his eyes, trying to blot out the sight of her now and the memory of her then. 'You don't want me, Lethe, so don't pretend you do.'

'You under-estimate yourself, Paul.' Her voice was low and seductive.

'Lethe, you always want what Ali has. Until you get it.'

Lethe had moved very close to Paul then. She gently stroked his face and whispered very quietly, 'Why do you think I made sure Ali was out of the picture on this trip, Paul?'

He opened his mouth to reply but her soft lips covered his before he could speak.

He felt himself drowning in desire. His wife had become as an innocent child, wanting to hold hands and go roller-skating, and he was lonely to the depths of his soul.

I'm not just fighting Lethe, he thought. *I'm fighting me.* With a bleak heart, made just strong enough by sheer force of will, Paul pushed Lethe away. 'Please go,' was all he said but there was a harshness caught in his voice.

Lethe stood up, and smiled slowly. 'Of course. After all, I have what I came for.'

Paul looked puzzled. 'And what was that, exactly?'

'Certainty.'

'Don't talk in riddles, Lethe.'

She walked to the door, then turned, framed in the doorway, edged with light from the hallway, elegant and unruffled.

'I know you still want me.'

And she was gone.



The old man held Jo's face in his hands. His grey eyes were clear, seeing deep into her soul.

'The ancestors have blessed you with many talents, granddaughter. May you use them wisely. More wisely than your foolish old Tunkasila.'

Summer Moon took Jo's hands in hers and smiled. 'My counsel is, dare sometimes to be a fool, child. Otherwise you will not be part of the human race. We are all foolish, flawed creatures.' She smiled at Jo, but her smile was also for her husband. She studied Jo carefully. 'Your locket is beautiful. It looks very, very old.'

'Thank you. It belonged to my great-grandmother.'

Jo saw Grey Wolf look away quickly and remembered too late that the locket had been his gift to her grandmother when they were lovers. New layers of meaning began to grow around the silver heart. It seemed to become even more precious. She felt him watching her; then to her surprise he emptied her.

The locket is a powerful and ancient talisman, Jo. It will serve you well. Guard it closely.

'Remember how I located it when you were lost last year?' Paul had not noticed the slight pause in the conversation, but Summer Moon had. She was frowning as she studied the locket. Jo sensed her sadness, which she could understand, and disapproval which she could not. Jo realised that this meeting was not easy for Summer Moon for several reasons, some of which she could only dimly glimpse. In a moment, however, the old woman had regained her composure and she steered the conversation away from the locket.

'So you are a tracker, Paul? A talent you have inherited from your father and his father before him. In the 70s, Grey Wolf was a member of the Shadow Wolves.'

Another echo of the prophecy, thought Jo. The son of the wolf will live forever...

'We tracked drug-runners and illegal immigrants. I would rather we had been tracking buffalo, elk and deer. The government gave us the latest high-tech

equipment,' smiled Grey Wolf, 'but our traditional methods were better than anything.'

'I'm afraid I can only track objects,' said Paul.

'Your wife must find that useful!' smiled Summer Moon. 'I am so looking forward to meeting her.'

Jo could see her father had no idea what to say. She stepped in smoothly. 'Mum's not well at the moment, but when she's better she will be thrilled to meet you all.'

Summer Moon was not easily fobbed off, however. She cut straight to the heart of the matter. Jo realised the old woman had a formidable strength and depth of perception. 'You are deeply worried about your mother, child. I sense your concern. What has made her ill?'

Jo spoke hesitantly. 'It's in her mind – like a curse...'
Summer Moon turned to her husband. They spoke briefly in Lakota. She turned back to Jo. 'I am a healer – *Wapiye' Win* – a spirit calling woman. Perhaps I can help. Please bring your mother to me tomorrow.'

The next day began early with a costume fitting. Jo stared at her reflection in the long mirror in Mirabel's sewing room. Little flashes of coloured light seemed to dance around her like fireflies. Narrow panels of midnight blue satin contrasted with the silvery prismatic fabric, creating a gown of breath-taking beauty and simple elegance. Jo found herself wondering, not for the first time, how such a wicked old woman could produce such exquisite workmanship.

'Natural talent,' said Madame Mirabel, smiling spitefully. Jo jumped, realising she been so entranced with her reflection she had dropped her shield and Mirabel had been reading her. 'Oh, yes, I can give you a run for your money, my girl, and don't you forget it. And I would dearly like to find out just what it is you think you knows about me.' Mirabel's conversational tone took on a sinister edge, as she put her face close to Jo's and lowered her voice to a hissing whisper. 'Now, when you, your ma and your auntie go poking about in people's heads, it's quite a civilised business, all things considered. But I plays a bit rough, Stripey

Girl, and don't you forget it. Right now I've got to make sure you look bleedin' fantastic on the night. Titus wouldn't like it if his star performer was a bit bashed about and zombie-like. But after the show is done and dusted, you needs to watch out because this ain't over, not by a long chalk, and I'll be coming after you.'

Jo said nothing, refusing to rise to the challenge, refusing to acknowledge that a tight knot of fear had lodged in her gut. Mirabel continued talking as she made minor adjustments to the hem. 'And the way I sees things, what with your mum being off her head, Gawd love her, and your dad being a bit preoccupied with fighting off that hussy what is no better than she ought to be, and your little friend Smokey all shut away where no bugger can find him, there ain't really no-one looking out for you.'

Jo forced herself to stay steady, her face expressionless, even though Mirabel's words cut her to the quick. The vicious old crone continued relentlessly. 'And you reckons you knows where Smokey is, and maybe you're right, but I'll tell you a funny thing – places can get lost. Just like memories, just like people. A person can swear they knows the way, but somehow the road they remember don't end up where they expects. It's a proper mystery.' For some reason Mirabel cackled to herself, as if at some private joke. 'So that little bleeder might be banged up for a long time, which is no more than what he deserves after what he done to my – to Mr. Titus. You ain't going to find him that easy. But me – I could find him in a twinkling. I got special knowledge, and special power what you can only dream off. You'll be begging me for help before this is over. And if you're thinking you can call my bluff talking about my soldier boy again, just remember this. I been playing poker since before you was born, and I don't play by nobody's rules but mine. I've lived a long time and this I knows. Old and cunning beats young and cocky every time.'

'Every time except the last time,' said Jo, faking a confidence she was far from feeling.



After the fitting Jo went looking for her mother. On the way she bumped into the Pastor.

She came straight to the point. 'Last time we talked, you said you would help me. Well, I want to go onto the reservation and take Mum to the healing woman. Dad's busy with the sound checks for tomorrow, and we need a lift. Please will you drive us there?'

'I surely would, but I have a better idea than that. You ever ridden a horse?'

Jo shook her head, suddenly feeling very apprehensive.

'You'll soon learn. Only one rule round horses. Don't go falling off. Your mamma was a neat rider when she was young – I reckon she'll jump at the idea of a ride.'

The Pastor was right. Ali was beside herself with excitement at the suggestion and shortly afterwards the three of them were trotting gently away from the Glory Foundation campus. The Pastor looked completely at one with Gleam, and Ali was soon right at home in the saddle, riding confidently at his side and chattering excitedly about her beautiful dark brown horse with unusual white markings. 'Snowflake's an Appaloosa,' smiled the Pastor. 'She's pretty good-natured, with a lively streak. Nothing you can't handle.'

'What about Jo's horse?' asked Ali. 'His coat is golden, like Gleam's, but he's got a dark mane and tail while hers are almost silver.'

'Gleam's a palomino and Patch is a buckskin. He's a good old boy – just right for a beginner.'

Jo was too busy holding on for dear life to join in the conversation.

'Reckon you'll be mighty relieved to get there, Jo,' teased Obadiah. 'Well, you can quit worrying. Patch here's got enough horse sense for the pair of you. Just relax and enjoy the ride. You're doing alright.'

Jo tried to take his advice. The scenery was breathtaking, with the tree-covered Black Hills of Dakota in the far distance. Some distance from the hills was a mountain. Obadiah noticed Jo looking at it. 'That's Inyan Kara – a sacred site for the Lakota people.'

'It seems familiar,' she said. 'But it can't be.'

'You've probably seen a picture in a book – the hills are pretty famous because of the Gold Rush in the 1880s. The Lakota believe the Black Hills are rightfully theirs – illegally seized by the U.S government in 1876. In 1980 the Supreme Court said the government should pay the Lakota for the land, but they won't accept the money. They'd rather have the land back. The money's sitting in a bank account. Over seven hundred million dollars.'

'Wow.' Jo had not realised, but while the Pastor was talking, she had gradually begun to relax and trust in Patch's evident placid nature. Even so she was very pleased when she saw Summer Moon and Grey Wolf coming to meet them. They greeted Obadiah affectionately. Ali was introduced, then the two men went off together, talking nineteen to the dozen about old times.

'A good man,' observed Summer Moon, looking at the Pastor. 'Few of his kind tolerate our beliefs and customs.' She looked shrewdly across at Ali, who was tethering the horses. 'Today will be a gentle introduction to the healing work I do. Perhaps another time your mother will come to me, and ask, of her own free will, to be cured. Meanwhile, I can see a big problem, Jo. Your mother is happy with the way things are. She did not choose this path, but it suits her very well to stay a child and cast off the burdens of maturity and feel free again.'

Jo thought this over. 'But grown-ups have so much freedom,' she objected. 'Kids have to do whatever other people say.'

'And adults have to do what is necessary. I think your mother is having a lot of fun. Who would want that to end?'

'Life's not all about fun,' mumbled Jo, and even as she said it, it sounded true enough, but lame and dreary.

'You are not wrong,' said Summer Moon kindly, 'but a wise person makes room in their life for the possibility of fun and joy. However, your mother has completely escaped from the weight of responsibility;

that is so intoxicating and exciting, she will not lightly take up the reins of adulthood again.'

'Is it selfish of me to want her to be my Mum again?' This question had been troubling Jo.

'It is natural.' Summer Moon seemed to answer the question and sidestep it simultaneously. She called across to Ali. 'Would you like to sing and pray with me, Alithea?'

Ali came skipping over, all smiles, unquestioning and eager to experience something new. Jo sighed, suddenly feeling a hundred years old and burdened with worry. *It's not just grown-ups who find responsibility tough*, she thought mutinously as they walked towards the healing tent.

Once inside the tipi, they sat on furs, animal hides, and traditional woollen rugs, made with the colours of the four directions – black for the west, red for the north, yellow for the east and white for the south.

The vanilla scent of sweet grass incense had a hypnotic effect. Summer Moon smudged Ali with a smouldering wand of sage, then wrapped her in a star quilt. She bowed her head to pray, then began to sing the traditional doctoring song, appealing to the spirit world on Ali's behalf, invoking the guiding spirits.

As the song became more intense, it seemed familiar and Jo found herself able to join in. She knew that Summer Moon was approaching a trance state, waiting for guidance from the spirit world. Together their voices soared and reached a crescendo. Then the tent began to shake, a sign that Summer Moon's guardian spirits had arrived to help.

With her eyes shut, Summer Moon touched Ali gently with a quartz crystal, then, holding the crystal in front of her face, she opened her eyes and used it as a lens to study Ali. In her other hand she held a silver framed mirror, and she looked intently at Ali's reflection. Jo could see that the mirror reflected, not Ali, but Lethe.

Still Jo and Summer Moon sang; now the song was a low, throbbing chant and Ali's eyes were closed. Her face relaxed, and for the first time since they left

England, Jo looked at her mother and saw a woman, not a child.

Now Jo's eyes became heavy, as the sweet grass and sage, the chanting and the softness of the fur all lulled her into a deep sleep. She dreamed she was in a cave of crystal, diamond and mirror, blazing with candle light, and every facet of every crystal reflected first her mother's face, sunny and smiling, and then her aunt's, calculating and triumphant. From far away she heard a voice saying, 'Quartz is the master stone – the healing stone.'

Dreaming, Jo said, 'But quartz takes away my power.'

'Your spiritual resistance takes away the true power of the quartz. Open your soul.'

'I cannot believe what I cannot believe.'

'We are not asking you to believe. We are asking you to open your soul.'

Jo walked out of the crystal cave. Night had fallen. Far away a boy was singing softly and the beauty and sadness of the melody made her cry. Now the singing grew louder and more insistent and the beat of the music became the beating of her heart.

The holy man raised a red-painted buffalo skull high above his head. 'I know this dream,' she said, and walked towards the distant campfire, towards the boy who was singing. Orange and gold sparks flew up into the dark sky. Morning Glory clouds rolled across the heavens.

By the light of the moon, in the flickering firelight, Hawk watched her approach. She was alternately dark then bright; shadowy then shining. He stood up and looked at her. 'Open your eyes,' he said. 'Open your eyes, Jo.'



'Open your eyes, Jo.' Summer Moon was shaking her gently. 'Time to wake up.'

Jo was sleepy and groggy still. Her voice was croaky. 'How's Mum?'

'Relaxed. Happy. With the horses, waiting for you. Perhaps she is a little changed. But your aunt is a

mistress of the dark arts, and her power is great. For now your mother has given up fighting her sister. There is more healing work to be done, but only when she is ready. Meanwhile I have given her a turtle amulet, a traditional form of protection for girls and women of our tribe. For you, I have made a gargle from sage in case your throat is sore when you need to sing, and some Lakota ointment.'

'Thank you for the gargle.' Jo looked puzzled. 'But I am not sure I need any ointment...'

Summer Moon laughed. 'Today was your first time on a horse?' Jo nodded. 'Believe me, tomorrow you will need the ointment. Oh, and one more thing.' She handed Jo a bundle of dried leaves with red flower heads. 'This is mugwort. It can stimulate psychic awareness and prophetic dreams. We also believe that when mugwort is burned it makes the bad spirits sick, and they move away.'

Chapter Sixteen – Mistakes

No-one had ever seen Jeremiah Leroy Brown frown before. They were so used to his beaming smile and gentle encouragement that his quiet displeasure was more distressing than if he had ranted and raved. An awkward silence fell as he surveyed the choirs. Everyone remained stock still. The singers. The orchestra. The brass section. The woodwind section. The pianist, the drummer, the guitarist and the bassist. Even the cheerleaders. The whole ensemble waited anxiously. When eventually he spoke, the uneasiness intensified.

'There is an old superstition in the theatre. *A bad dress rehearsal means a good performance.* I have never believed it; now I find myself devoutly hoping it to be the case.' He paused. You could have heard a pin drop. 'That was terrible. What has happened to your discipline? I have endured fidgeting and giggling between songs. Beginnings have been ragged instead of crisp – final notes have been treated like an optional extra. As for your enunciation – *don't you* seems to have become *don't chew*. Furthermore, when Laura Branigan sang *Gloria*, she did not say, 'I think they've got the aliens...' The key word is *alias*. Please stop changing the meanings of our songs. Thanks to Madame Mirabel, you all look wonderful – although the soloists' robes need to be a little shorter, please dear lady, so that they don't catch in the mechanism as the pillars rise. We don't want anyone leaving their clothes behind as they ascend.'

A nervous giggle was quickly stifled as Jeremiah glared at the offender, before continuing.

'Now. There will be a short break, and we will run through the entire programme again. This time you will do justice to your magnificent robes and the time, expense and faith that has been invested in you. Tomorrow morning there will be final adjustments to your costumes and in the afternoon there will be a brief session of voice exercises and warm-up with the final sound check, but mainly you will use the day to

relax and prepare for the performance tomorrow night. You will not let yourselves down.'



By the end of the rehearsal everyone was subdued and bone tired. Jo felt crestfallen, suddenly afraid that the show, particularly her solos, would be a disaster. She was pleased and relieved, then, when Hawk caught up with her on the way to her room and praised her singing. 'You did well, Jo. And I've got a bit of news for you, too. I overheard Beth and Nick talking about something to do with you.'

Hawk omitted to mention that he had been a good half mile away when he overheard this conversation.

'Something to do with me? I hate to think what those two would be saying...'

'Well, first off, Nick said, *You're right. There used to be a fairground somewhere on this reservation.*'

'Should have realised she would keep searching,' said Jo, suddenly despondent.

'Then he said his grandfather was a showman – name of Colonel Dwayne Slaughter. Apparently, he ran a waxwork show called *Nathan Slaughter, Indian Killer*. Played all over the country funfairs with no trouble, according to Nick, but when it came here it went down like a lead balloon – hardly surprising, really – and the show was shut down. Then Nick said, *I've still got all the old fairground posters. This is the right reservation, for certain*, and Beth said, *Great! I'm going to get there before Jo does!* So what's all this about, Jo?'

Jo hardly knew where to begin. She felt so tired – too tired to talk. 'Tell you what,' she said wearily, 'Come in so I can sit down before I drop. I'll think about it, and you can emp me. Just this, mind. Nothing else.'

Once inside her room Jo flopped into the armchair and closed her eyes, concentrating on Smokey's capture and imprisonment by Lethe, and Beth's part in it all. She remembered her mother telling her about the fairground, and The Pastor promising to help her find it. Her plan had been to keep the story short and simple, but once her eyes had closed, she found herself

drifting off, almost asleep, forgetting about Hawk. Her thoughts grew deeper, wandering back to when first she met Smokey, returning again and again to the memory of his arms wrapped around her.

When she awoke in the small hours of the morning, still curled up in the armchair, cold and cramped, Hawk was gone. He'd left her a note.

Jo – I've lived on this reservation all my life, and know it like the back of my hand. I've never come across any fairground. I'll ask the Elders but I don't know how you're going to find your boyfriend. Sorry. Hawk.

Jo climbed into bed, too tired to think about it anymore. There was a brief, wide-eyed, hot moment when she wondered, blushing with embarrassment, how much Hawk had discovered about her before he left, but exhaustion prevailed and she quickly fell into a dreamless sleep.

'Jo! Wake up!' Sam's voice was urgent.

'Still asleep,' grunted Jo, and burrowed under the covers. Sam shook her vigorously. 'Jo! This is important. Wake up! Beth and Nick have gone missing. Titus has called a meeting – you've got two minutes.'

Jo was wide-awake in an instant, scrambling out of bed and pulling on her clothes. When she drew the curtains she was surprised to see daylight – it still felt like the middle of the night.

The rumour machine was in full swing by the time Jo reached the assembly hall. All around her people were trying to guess what had happened. Everything from elopement to abduction by aliens, and all points in between was being discussed excitedly.

When Titus walked on stage, the frenzy of chattering ceased. He spoke briefly and to the point.

'By now you all know what has happened. Search parties are combing the area and we are sure we will soon find our runaways. In the meanwhile our day will continue exactly as planned. One more thing. If you have any idea where Elizabeth and Nicholas might have gone, it is your responsibility to report what you know,

even if you were sworn to secrecy. We will keep you informed of any developments. For now, that is all.'

'What on earth have they done?' said Sam. She sounded worried. 'Any ideas?' She looked questioningly at Jo, then frowned slightly. 'What's up, Jo? Are you OK?'

'I'm a bit stiff,' said Jo wryly, with a great deal of understatement. 'I'm not cut out for horse-riding. Save me a place at breakfast – I need to get something from my room. Back in a mo.'

Jo climbed the stairs as quickly as her aching limbs would allow, remembering that Summer Moon had warned her she would be glad of her special ointment.

When she came back out of her room, Hawk was waiting for her. He came straight to the point. 'We'll have to tell them,' he said grimly. 'There are parts of the reservation that are really dangerous.' He could sense Jo's disbelief. 'For crying out loud, Jo. Not everyone is wise and welcoming to strangers like my family. There are lawless areas – really rough places where rape, murder and violence are just a normal part of life. There are outlaws, banished from the tribe by my father and uncle. They are worse than your worst nightmares, Jo. If they catch Nick and Beth...' He shook his head, imagining untold horrors. 'We can't keep quiet about this.'

Jo struggled with herself. 'But if I tell them I know about the fairground, they will know I've guessed where Smokey is. And Lethe will have him moved somewhere else and then I'll have to start all over again.'

'And if you don't tell them, can you live with what might happen to Beth and Nick?'

Jo thought hard. *I don't even like either of them, she thought resentfully. Bet they wouldn't care a hoot if it was the other way round.*

Hawk watched impassively as she battled her way towards some resolution. 'I'll tell the Pastor what I know,' she said finally. 'But I'm not telling Lethe or Titus.' *Or my parents, she thought, because they will just try and stop me finding Smokey.*

'Let's go and find him, then.' Hawk crinkled up his nose. 'What's that smell? Smells like... Summer Moon's special ointment...'

Jo tried to look non-committal, and he burst out laughing. 'Come on, Bandy,' he said, and in spite of herself, Jo laughed.



'Looks like she jumped the gun on you,' said the Pastor, after Jo and Hawk had told him what they knew. 'Well, at least we know where to look.'

'We do?' asked Hawk. 'Well, where exactly?'

The Pastor drew a rough map of the reservation, shading an area on the furthest edge. 'Long time since I been there, and it ain't easy to find, but that's the general direction.'

Hawk grimaced. A thought struck him. 'Well, now. I wonder...'

'Wonder what?' asked Jo.

Hawk was thinking on his feet. 'There's one place where the fairground might be hidden – behind a ten foot high stockade on the edge of the reservation. A bunch of Lakota thugs and killers live there. Outlaws. I was telling Jo about them. Never seen any sign of the funfair, though.'

'Maybe you didn't look hard enough,' suggested the Pastor. 'Have you asked your folks?'

'I impeded Grey Wolf. He just said it was an evil place, long gone and best forgotten. He's sent his best trackers after that pair of idiots, though. Don't expect they'll be lost for long. Worse luck.'

'It's not them I'm particularly worried about,' said Obadiah, and Jo noticed a pulse ticking in his forehead. 'They took Gleam.'

Hawk gasped, knowing at once how deeply the Pastor would feel this loss. Jo sensed it also, but less acutely.

We all want something different, she thought. *I want to find Smokey, the Pastor wants to find Gleam, and Hawk... Hawk wants to find this place he's never set eyes on because it bugs him to think he's missed it.* Another thought struck her as Hawk, preoccupied, let

down his guard. *Oh. And it seems Hawk wants to find Beth... Well, well.*

'Meanwhile, we get on with preparing for tonight's concert, and leave the searching to the trackers,' said Obadiah. 'The show must go on. And just in case you are wondering, young lady, I haven't forgotten that I gave you my word to help you find your friend. But first I have to find Glean.'

He strode out of the room. Hawk looked ashen. 'That horse means the world to him. If she falls into the wrong hands...' He couldn't go on.

'Don't even think about it, Hawk. It's out of our hands. We just have to focus on tonight.'

The corridors were silent and deserted as most people were at breakfast. The walls echoed with the sound of voices and derisive laughter.

'So your little helper has scarpereed, then. Trying to find that Smokey. Gawd knows what these gormless girls sees in him.'

Lethe's voice was coolly amused. 'My foolish niece is just as bad. No ambition. Still, there is time to change that. Jo has a great future ahead of her.'

'So you says. So what about Beth? Ain't you worried summat might happen to her?'

'I suppose it might. Still, she has rather served her purpose.'

'You ain't changed a bit, have you? Still as cold as ice.'

'Someone needs to keep a cool head around here. There is so much at stake. Beth and Nick are the least of my concerns.'

'Hmm. I hears the trackers found an old map left behind in Nick's room. Showed the reservation and the fairground. There were some old posters as well. Colonel Dwayne Slaughter, my eye. Plain old Dwayne Matthews when I knew him.'

'Yes. I'd forgotten about the boy's grandfather. Did anyone ever hear what happened to his mother?'

'Far as I knows, once she found out she was really an Injun, adopted by white folks when she was a tot,

she left Nick and his dad and went off to find her roots. They said she deserted them, but no Injun could have survived in that family. Mean as hell. After she'd gone Nick's dad and grand-daddy filled that boy's head with pure poison about his mother. They taught him to hate her and all her kind.'

'So what happened to her?'

Mirabel shrugged. 'No-one knows. She's never been heard of since.'

'Hmm. Tragic.'

'So Beth and Nick thinks they knows exactly where they're going.'

'But we know they won't find it, don't we?'

'Oh yes. A proper mystery.' Again that cackle, as if at some private joke. Mirabel sounded thoughtful. 'Funny for you and me to be on the same side for once. You got summat I wants, and I got summat you wants.'

'We've always been on the same side, Mirabel. We both want Titus to live.'

'Not for the same reasons though.' Mirabel's voice was sharp. 'But I didn't mean that exactly. I mean our little arrangement.'

'The less said about that the better, especially as my niece is listening to our every word, and has been for some time. Come along in, Jo. Skulking in corridors is so petty and demeaning. Madame Mirabel needs to alter your gown.'

Jo walked in, mutinous and embarrassed at having been caught eavesdropping. She wondered what their little arrangement was. Lethe studied her critically. 'Goodness. When was the last time you had your hair cut properly? Your mother has no idea.'

'And whose fault is that?' said Jo hotly, facing up to her aunt.

Lethe smiled. 'Surely you do not blame me, Jocasta? How amusing that you should consider me responsible for my sister's incompetence and second-rate choices in life.'

Jo was furious. 'She has a family that loves her, which is more than you can say. She's a better mother than you could ever be.'

Jo knew she had hit home. Just for a moment Lethe's elegant, assured mask slipped and a look of anguish flashed across her face, to be replaced with an expression of fury and malice. With a sudden movement Lethe grabbed Jo's scarred hand and squeezed it viciously. Jo gasped as the power began to ebb from her.

'She's not much of a mother now, is she?' hissed Lethe. She maintained her grip as Jo's knees gave way and she sank to the floor.

'Give over, now,' muttered Mirabel uneasily. 'She ain't going to sing like a nightingale tonight if you carries on like this.'

Lethe struggled to regain her composure and released Jo abruptly. 'Ah yes. What am I thinking of? No harm can come to our star performer. Well, not yet, anyway.' She turned to leave, then spoke directly to Jo. 'Do not cross me, Jocasta. If you would be guided by me you would live a life more wonderful than your wildest dreams. You have too much talent to settle for mediocrity.'

The door closed behind her. Mirabel cocked her head on one side and gave Jo a quizzical look. 'Well, you rattled her cage and no mistake. Perhaps you ain't as green as you're cabbage looking, after all.'

In spite of herself Jo smiled a small smile at the ridiculous expression.

Mirabel's scrutiny continued. 'You looks a bit too pale for my liking. Don't you go fainting on me – Titus would never forgive me.' She rummaged in her pocket and produced a silver hip flask. 'Here, have a swig of this.'

Jo did as she was instructed and promptly coughed and spluttered as the warming liquid gave her system an almighty kick-start. 'Whatever's that?' she gasped.

'Just a little nip of brandy. I keeps it for medicinal purposes. Now stand still while I pins up this hem, then you can bugger off and have a little lie down before

lunch. All right for some, ain't it. I'll just work my poor old fingers to the bone so you can dazzle them all tonight.' Mirabel finished pinning the hem. 'Now off you go. Shoo.' She cackled gleefully. 'Oh yes. Break a leg.'

Jo shivered as she remembered the only other time she had heard the superstitious theatrical expression. It was Mirabel who had said it then as well, just before Jo had been forced to fight for her life. The memories disturbed her. The fight with Lucy had been brutal, but not as brutal as when Titus had shot Lucy at point-blank range. 'Poor Lucy,' she said to herself, not realising she had spoken aloud.

'What's that?' Mirabel spoke sharply.

Jo jumped. 'Just thinking out loud,' she said, and she walked back towards her room, deep in thought. She felt suddenly exhausted, and after drawing the curtains and setting her alarm for lunchtime, she snuggled under the covers and fell asleep within moments.

When the alarm clock went off she awoke feeling refreshed, but still saddle sore. She was glad of Summer Moon's ointment, and then she remembered the special gargle. The gargle tasted as awful as the ointment smelt, but both were remarkably effective. By the time she opened the curtains she was feeling relaxed and revived.

The view from her room was stunning, but the sight that met her eyes was more wonderful than usual. As she feasted her eyes on the dark hills in the distance, she caught a fast moving glimmer of gold and she was overjoyed. She emped Hawk and the Pastor.

They're on their way back! I can see Gleam!

Within minutes she was standing on the terrace with Hawk and Obadiah, all grinning as they watched the golden horse, still a long way off, but getting closer. 'They're alright!' she laughed. 'I'm so pleased!'

Jo watched as the Pastor took off, running toward his beloved horse as fast as he could go, closing the distance and time that separated them. She turned to

Hawk, all smiles, but realised he wasn't laughing any more. He shook his head.

'It's just Gleam. I can't hear Nick or Beth.'

Jo's heart lurched. She hadn't expected to be so relieved that they were safe. She was not as indifferent as she thought. The realisation that they were still out there, without transport or shelter, almost certainly in danger, drove the joy right out of her.

Jo fought off the despair with false optimism. 'Of course you can't hear them. They're too far away.'

Hawk shook his head. 'If they were with Gleam, I would hear them. They must be out of my range. Have you tried emping them?'

'Yes, but there's nothing – just static. How about you?'

'Just the same.'

'There is one thing we could try,' said Jo thoughtfully. 'Come on.'

She set off at a run for the main reception area, and pressed the bell to summon the lift. Once inside she pressed the very bottom button. 'Going down,' she said. 'Sometimes it's as if the signal is stronger deep underground – not always, but it's worth a try. I should have thought of this sooner.'

The lift came to a halt. ***Smokey? Beth? Nick?***

They waited. 'Just a fog,' Jo said, disappointed.

'Try again. In fact, let's try together.'

'OK. We could try holding hands; sometimes that makes it stronger. After three. One, two, three.'

Smokey? Beth? Nick?

The reply, when it came was nothing more than a whisper on the wind. ***Jo?***

Oh, Smokey! Smokey! I know where you are and I'm coming to get you! It won't be long now! Hold on, Smokey!

So tired, Jo...

Again they waited, for what seemed an age, but there was nothing more. Then the lift began to rise as someone summoned it and they emerged to find themselves caught up in a crowd of people heading for the dining room.



After lunch they made their way to the rehearsal room for their final session before the performance. There was an atmosphere of nervous excitement as Jeremiah Leroy Brown took them through the voice warm-up exercises he had been insisting on since they began working with him.

'Your voice is precious and should be protected and exercised. You may be blessed with natural talent, but it must be nurtured. Choose challenge, not complacency, but do not take risks. It is so easy to damage your vocal chords, and not at all easy to make repairs.'

Jo willed herself to concentrate. She deliberately banished her worries to a distant place so she could fully focus on preparing for the performance. She might have originally joined the choir as a means to finding Smokey, but to her surprise it had come to mean a great deal to her. She wanted the concert to be outstanding.

'We begin with breathing deeply. Breathe in, place your finger to your lips and say "Shhh" gently and steadily until all your breath is gone. Relax and allow the new breath to enter easily and naturally. Repeat five times, then relax.'

More exercises followed – slow, measured breathing first, then the aptly named Motor Boat exercise, which usually led to outbursts of giggling as the singers put their lips together in a kind of pout and exhaled, vibrating their lips whilst going up and down the scale. Jo caught Sam's eye and laughed. 'It tickles,' she whispered.

Jeremiah Leroy Brown laughed as well. 'Oh, for a camera. Who would have thought that blowing a raspberry could be so useful in loosening the lips and warming up the vocal chords? Now we move onto my pet subjects – articulation and enunciation. So many people use the words carelessly and interchangeably, but they are not the same. Miss Lakota – perhaps you would care to remind us of the difference between them?'

Jo grimaced. This was so hard to remember, let alone understand. She recited what she had learned as best she could. 'Enunciation is the articulation of sounds with the organs of speech.'

'Very good. And articulation?'

'Um, it's about actual words.'

'Indeed. A distinct utterance. Distinct is a key word. I want the audience to hear all the words, not a half-hearted, mumbled collection of sounds. You must stand up straight and lose any foolish self-conscious notions about how you look. Do not be afraid to show your teeth and exercise the muscles of your jaw and lips as well as your tongue. And consider this. The disciplines you have learned have improved your singing to a marked degree. Your voices are stronger now than when you first came to me and your music is more beautiful because of that.'

The afternoon passed pleasantly and the time seemed to move slowly. A light supper was served earlier than normal, to allow for a brief rest before it was time for costumes and makeup.

After supper Jo spent a short time with Paul and Ali. She noticed that Ali was wearing the turtle amulet Summer Moon had given her. From time to time she touched it, as if for reassurance.

'It's so exciting!' squealed Ali. 'Are you excited, Jo?'

'Yes,' smiled Jo, then without warning her stomach lurched and everything seemed to change gear. Her mental clock seemed to speed up and she felt light-headed and sick. She sat down abruptly.

Ali frowned and looked concerned. 'Are you alright, dear?'

Jo was suddenly painfully aware that this was the first time that Ali had shown any awareness of anyone else since they had left England. She fought back her tears, wondering if Summer Moon's healing had begun to make a difference.

'Just suddenly very nervous.' Her voice was a bit croaky.

'Stage fright is the most natural thing in the world,' Paul assured her. 'All performers experience it. Why, Bob Dylan even sang a song about it!' He grinned and hummed a snatch of an old song.

Again Ali frowned, looking puzzled. 'I know that song... something about a lonely kid... caught in the spotlight...' She was concentrating very hard now.

Jo realised she and Paul were both holding their breath and watching Ali like hawks.

'Then there's a bit about starting all over again...'

Suddenly the spell was broken as Ali clapped her hands to her mouth. 'I must go and get ready! See you later!' And she was gone.

'Oh, Dad.' Tears were perilously close as Jo stumbled over to her father and was engulfed in a great big bear hug. His voice was gruff.

'Keep it together, love. You've been so strong – so brave. Don't falter now. I am proud of my girl already, and after tonight I'll be even more so. Now I must dash as I have masses to do but afterwards we are going to celebrate in style!'

No, thought Jo. Afterwards I am going to find Smokey.

She felt a pang of guilt when she realised she had forgotten all about Beth and Nick.

Chapter Seventeen – The Big Show

'S'pose you'll do,' grunted Mirabel, standing back and surveying Jo critically. 'You scrubs up alright, considering. Give me a twirl.'

Once again Mirabel's words activated a ghost from the past. Instantly the phrase catapulted Jo back in time to when Quinn had created her Goth disguise. She ached, remembering him. *Don't think about Quinn*, she told herself fiercely. *Not now*. Even so, she knew beyond a shadow of doubt that he would have moved heaven and earth to hear her sing tonight. The thought comforted her at a profound level.

Jo twirled. The delicate, gossamer gown twinkled and sparkled as she moved, surrounding her with tiny, dancing points of light. She gasped when she saw her reflection in the mirror. She had been transformed from her copper curls to her silver shoes and it felt wonderful.

Mirabel brought her back down from Cloud Nine. 'Well, don't stand there gawping all day! You get out there and make that aunt of yours proud of you!' Despite herself, Mirabel could not quite conceal her pleasure and pride. Jo made a supreme effort.

'Thank you, Madame Mirabel,' she said politely, and went to join the others at the assembly point. She could hear the orchestra tuning up and suddenly felt sick with apprehension and excitement. Her knees seemed barely able to support her, but she made herself keep going.

Sam smiled approvingly. 'You look great, Jo! There's thousands of people in the audience!' she whispered. 'Hawk and Nick did a brilliant job with the publicity.' Jo smiled back, then all whispering ceased as the first notes of the overture began.

The choirs moved into position until only the soloists were left. On cue, they moved to their centre front positions. As she entered the arena, Jo caught a glimpse of the massed ranks of singers and saw, for the first time, the full, vivid splendour of the rainbow robes.

The arena was full of people, all chatting excitedly amongst themselves and all completely oblivious to her. With a gentle tap of the conductor's baton they all settled into relative quiet and turned to look. A thrill of apprehension ran through Jo from her head to her toes.

The sun was low as waves of cloud slowly made their way across the sky, never altering their size or shape. Great consecutive woolly lines rolled overhead, the sinking sun illuminating the underside of each while casting shadow upon the next. An unexpected shower of gentle rain did nothing to dampen the audience's enthusiasm.

Long glittering silver strips fell from the eaves of the awnings and onto the stage. Six enormous spotlights gave off a tremendous heat of their own and as their glare seared into Jo's vision her mind suddenly jumped to thoughts of Smokey. How many weeks now had he endured this same pain? As she blinked away the after image, bright green flecks danced in front of her eyes and trailed across her line of sight.

The orchestra, brass and woodwind sections, the pianist, bassist, drummer and guitarist were all dressed in matching silver and indigo tuxedos. Leroy Jeremiah Brown as conductor wore an indigo carnation and top hat festooned with silver sequins. Madam Mirabel had outdone herself again. The piano and drum kit were deep indigo and the guitar was made of steel.

As Jo waited for the first song to begin, her eyes sought out first Ali, dressed in indigo satin and silver lace, sitting with the cheerleaders; then Paul, concentrating intently in the control booth. He looked up for a second, and smiled straight at her.

Somewhere into the second song Jo realised that any traces of stage fright had completely vanished. She was loving every minute.

As the sun began to set, the mood in the audience settled into calm enjoyment. Rays of gleaming gold settled upon the rolling clouds overhead, now moving past the arena and off toward the horizon. Dusk crept near as twilight fell.

Jo's solo during the final song of the first half went well and her secret fear that she would fall off her pedestal as it majestically ascended was unfounded. She knew she sang the deeply religious hymn without true conviction – nevertheless her doubting heart revelled in the power of the words and the rousing melody. Her voice soared during her favourite verse.

*He is coming like the glory of the morning on the wave,
He is wisdom to the mighty,
He is honour to the brave.*

The audience stamped and cheered as the choirs filed out, still singing *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah* for all they were worth.

As the sun finally set, glittering silver mirror balls were illuminated by the six spotlights. Delicate indigo strips flickered on, edging the stairs, chairs and walkways.

During the interval she and Sam chattered excitedly. 'This material is amazing,' said Sam, admiring Jo's gown. 'I've never seen anything like it.'

'Aunt Lethe invented it.' Jo was surprised to detect a note of pride in her voice. 'It is gorgeous. And so is your costume. Midnight blue and tiny silver stars. So pretty.'

'I'd rather have yours!' Sam smiled. 'Do we get to keep them after?'

The question went unanswered as the signal for them to return to the stage was heard. The spotlights on the mirror balls gently dimmed but the thin strip lights remained, creating a spectral neon outline of the auditorium against the inky night.

The song that opened the second half was an old Gospel number, *That Glory Bound Train*, and Jo could sense the audience's pleasure as they joined in and clapped along. Normally she found large groups of people disturbing, but tonight the mood was exhilarating and she felt buoyed up, wishing the magical evening would never end.

On the edge of the beauty and brightness terrible shadows lurked, but tonight Jo would not let them come closer. The reckoning would come soon enough.

At last the opening chords of *Gloria* burst upon the night. In an instant the spectators were on their feet, smiling and linking arms, joining in wholeheartedly. The pillars rose, the lights flashed, the bass line throbbled and the guitar solos were liquid gold.

Tumultuous applause broke out as the singers stood proudly, acknowledging the crowd's appreciation with dignified bows. One final chorus of *Gloria*, and it would be all over. The lights would fade, the pillars would descend, and reality would come flooding back.

But that is not what happened. The lights flashed in time to a final G... L... O... R... I... A... then faded to black before a final burst of illumination, just as they had rehearsed. But this time was different. While the lights were off, six of the pillars sank to the ground, and Jo's rose even higher. She held on to the handles for dear life. Then she was dazzled as the lights came on again, including something new – a powerful ultra-violet beam shining directly on her.

There was a great babble of confusion, then silence fell as every eye in the auditorium was focussed on Jo. The silence lingered like smoke until a whisper broke the spell. Just five words.

'Behold the Child of Glory.'

The whisper grew louder, and voices all around joined in, softly chanting the words over and over again.

Jo looked round wildly. Had everyone gone mad? In the control booth she could see her father struggling in the grip of a pair of burly security men. Lethe was there, holding a microphone, orchestrating the chanting. Her eyes blazed with triumph. Titus stood next to her, gazing heavenwards, his hands clasped, his face transformed, praying reverently.

Jo cried out to her father – his face was anguished as he looked directly at her but he could not escape his captors. She could see Ali, looking up, puzzled and scared. Jo emped her, just in case. ***Mum! Help me!***

Ali stared at the stage. As if from a great distance she heard a voice in her head – a familiar voice – a well-loved voice – desperately asking for help. Her mind swirled with fog and confusion but sudden flashes of brightness cut through the darkness – lightning moments that showed her pictures of a pretty cottage; a tall, dark-haired man; a laughing red-headed girl holding a tortoiseshell cat. Another flash of memory illuminated the darkness in her mind and she saw herself. She was there in the cottage, holding the man and girl close. She was shaken to her foundation as a wave of deep love engulfed her. The cat was purring and through the cottage window she could see a wonderful double rainbow. Ali touched the smooth turtle amulet at her throat, and struggled to remember.

Jo wanted to jump, but she was too high off the ground. She looked down, wondering if she dared risk it anyway, then saw with horror what everybody else could plainly see. Under the ultra violet light her gown was almost transparent, and the Blaschko lines on her body glowed, luminous and mysterious. *Silly, really,* she thought, *almost inconsequentially, to have imagined that Lethe had created something beautiful without an ulterior motive.*

Now the whisper changed subtly as Lethe continued to manipulate the crowd.

'All hail the Child of Glory!'

People sank to their knees as the chanting swelled to a crescendo. Jo could see a few people remaining standing, gesticulating angrily, resisting the rising tide of mass hysteria. Jeremiah Leroy Brown, his normally smiling face transformed into a mask of fury, was desperately fighting one of Lethe's minions, trying to operate the mechanism that would bring down the pillar. And Ali, her face stricken, was pushing her way to the front, staring up at Jo.

The air throbbed with the chanting. Sweet incense filled the night with a heady fragrance. People were enraptured, in a trance. It began to enchant Jo herself. She started to feel drowsy, swaying in time to the

chant, her eyes closing, but someone, somewhere emped her. **Jo! Open your eyes!**

She was intoxicated, surrendering to the magic. **Jo! Open your eyes! Now!** She blinked and forced herself to surface. She cried out with might and main.

'I am no more the Child of Glory than you are! Wake up! Think for yourselves!

Lethe looked directly across at her and laughed, subtly changing the chant to echo Jo's words.

'Wake up to the Child of Glory!'

The crowd took up the new refrain. Jo was in despair. *She'll twist whatever I say.* As she stood there she realised that her aunt did not, after all, particularly want to control her. What she planned was to use Jo to control the huge numbers of people who would believe they were witnessing a miracle.

And then a voice rang out, loud and hard and angry, cutting through the hypnotic chanting like a scalpel.

'This is an abomination! You have forgotten this: To God be the glory!'

In the sudden silence, six gunshots rang out. In rapid succession the six spotlights fell to the dark of night.

And in the darkness and confusion, a glimmer of gold and a rushing wind, pulling Jo down and away.

It was chaos in the amphitheatre. People were beginning to panic, jostling towards the exits. Some were crying, others were standing, stunned, trying to make sense of what was happening.

In the control booth Lethe was furious, snapping orders. 'Send out search parties! She must be found! Get the helicopter ready!'

People scurried to do her bidding. In the confusion Paul saw an opportunity and acting on instinct and adrenaline wrenched himself free of the burly men restraining him and charged headlong out of the room. He practically leapt down the stairs from the control booth and within moments was swept away by the pandemonium.

Titus spoke calmly and quietly to Lethe. 'If any of these people are hurt, or killed, our vision will be tarnished forever. You must calm them, reassure them.'

'Do I look like a damn nursemaid? There's no time to waste!'

'You will do as I say.' Titus spoke with a power and authority that brooked no denial. 'You must weave a web of forgetting around the child's disappearance. Leave them the wonder, right up to the moment she vanished. They must not forget what they have seen this night.'

'And how am I going to do that, exactly?'

'The way you always do. Make them want to forget. Then you can search until your heart's content. It's not as if you don't know where she will be going.'

Lethe stood perfectly still for a moment, her face rebellious while she thought furiously.

'I have it. Now get to the helicopter pad. I won't be long.'

Ali stood stock still, looking down at her clothes. *What the hell am I wearing? Is this fancy dress?*

She looked up and saw her husband running towards her. 'Paul! Thank God you're here! We have to help Jo!'

Tears stung his eyes and he pulled her roughly towards him. 'You're back,' was all he said.

Now someone was pulling his sleeve and an urgent voice was calling his name. 'Paul! Come on. I know where Jo is. I've got some horses waiting. Let's go!'

Hawk led them quickly through the milling crowd, just as the public address system crackled into life. Lethe had moved from the control booth to the centre of the stage and her voice rang out clearly above the noise.

'What's she saying?' asked Paul.

'Nothing I want to hear,' said Ali grimly and they left the amphitheatre.

Now Lethe was singing softly and slowly into the microphone and a hush fell over the crowd as they

strained to hear her song. As the emergency lights came on she was clearly visible, her head bowed as if in prayer. The lights became brighter and slowly she raised her head. Her face was a picture of piety and reverence.

*Mine eyes have seen the glory
of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage
where the grapes of wrath are stored...*

Other voices joined her and the stirring words and rhythm filled the air.

*He hath loosed the fateful lightning of
His terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.*

The singing was louder now, and the tempo quicker. Like the Pied Piper, Lethe led the crowd onwards, into the chorus.

*Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.*

As the last notes died away a profound silence fell. Lethe waited until all eyes were on her, then spoke quietly, her eyes shining with sincerity.

'Brothers and sisters, tonight we saw the Child of Glory! Hallelujah!'

'Hallelujah!' sang out the crowd.

'All hail the Child of Glory!'

'All hail the Child of Glory!'

'Mine eyes have seen the Child of Glory! Rejoice!'

'Mine eyes have seen the Child of Glory! Rejoice!'

'My heart jumps for joy!'

'My heart jumps for joy!'

There was a barely perceptible pause as Lethe changed her tone.

'Yet I am sad that the Child is gone.'

Instantly crestfallen, the audience mumbled this line. Most of them missed out the 'yet'.

'My tears fall like rain,' continued Lethe, and indeed, they did.

'My tears fall like rain.'

'My sadness is a burden.' Lethe's face was a mask of tragedy and grief.

'My sadness is a burden.'

She held the crowd in the palm of her hand.

'I wish I could forget my burden.'

'I wish I could forget my burden.'

She smiled a beatific smile. 'And so it will be. Thank you, brothers and sisters! Amen!'

A jubilant '*Amen!*' rang out and she was gone.

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Chapter Eighteen – Mysteries

'Nearly there. Are you warm enough?'

'Yes. Thank you.'

The Pastor chuckled drily. 'You sound very calm.'

'I feel calm.'

It was true. Jo's mind was clear and her heart was singing. The craziness back at the amphitheatre was paling into insignificance as she thought about being face to face with Smokey again. She was still shaking from adrenaline and was far too alert to feel afraid. But for now all she could see was darkness and mist; all she could hear was the rushing wind and the drumming of Gleam's hooves.

She snuggled inside Obadiah's warm, thick coat and smiled to herself. She could not remember the last time she had felt so peaceful and contented.

'We've got company,' whispered the Pastor, as Gleam slowed to a walk, then stopped altogether. 'I can hear horses... three of them.'

Jo strained to listen. 'I can't hear a thing.'

'Well, I can. And a helicopter.'

'How about Beth and Nick? Can you hear them?'

'Nope. Reckon we'll just wait here and see who's following us.'

The mist swirled around them as they stood, immobile and almost invisible, sheltering in a grove of huge and ancient elm trees next to a silvery stream. All around a gentle drizzle fell, soft but persistent. Apart from intermittent rumbles of thunder, the sounds of the night were muffled and indistinct. Directly above them great rolls of Morning Glory clouds barrelled across the night sky. Once again a half-forgotten phrase nudged at Jo's memory. *Rolling thunder and clouds of glory... Where did that come from?* Jo was trying to remember when an emp took her by surprise.

Jo! We're on our way!

Mum? Oh, Mum!

Obadiah Moon chuckled. 'Seems like your mamma finally came to her senses.'

Relief washed over Jo in waves. Tears of joy filled her eyes. 'Will she remember any of it?' she whispered to the Pastor.

'I guess. Well, didn't your aunt work a number on you, as well? How much of that can you recall?'

'Just odds and ends. It's like trying to remember a dream. The memories slip and slide. But Mum's memory is amazing...'

Jo broke off speaking as she heard the sound of approaching horses. Then came the throb of a helicopter, directly above. A searchlight shone down from the indigo sky, and in the glare three riders appeared, surrounded by ragged streamers of mist.

'It's Mum and Dad! And Hawk!'

Jo started to dismount, wanting to run to her parents, but Obadiah held her close. 'Stay under the trees,' he said. It's you they're looking for.'

The Pastor guided Gleam further into the grove. The helicopter hovered for a moment, the searchlight sweeping the ground, then disappeared in the haze.

Darkness and silence descended once again as a girl in a sparkling, silver dress slid down from a shining golden horse and ran forward, her arms outstretched, her sleeves floating like gossamer wings.

Snowflake and Patch stood calmly as their riders dismounted. Jo almost flew into her mother's outstretched arms, and Paul held both of them close to him, his face fierce and proud.

'I was afraid you'd never come back,' whispered Jo. 'I thought I'd lost you.'

'I'm here now, thank God. Oh, my darlings...'

Tears fell then and laughter followed close behind. Hawk and Obadiah watched quietly, each thinking his own thoughts, each feeling his own loneliness.

'Time to get going,' said the Pastor gruffly. 'We've got some serious rescuing to be doing. That was the Glory Foundation helicopter. I can't hear it any more so I reckon it landed pretty close. We need to get moving.'



'This is the place, isn't it?' Ali sounded uncertain. 'Leads to the upper entrance?'

'Yup.'

'So where the hell is it?' asked Paul.

Hawk tried to be tactful. 'It was a long time ago you guys were here... and this mist is enough to confuse anybody.'

Three pairs of eyes glared at him. Ali spoke first, her voice growing more sure with every word. 'These elms are over two hundred years old. They've hardly changed since we were here.' She faltered suddenly, and Jo noticed her staring at some initials carved on one of the tree trunks. AL and Q. *Ali Lake and Quinn*, thought Jo. She realised her father had seen the initials as well. His mouth tightened. There was an awkward silence.

Ali coughed slightly, and continued. 'But there's a lot more trees now than there ever used to be, so it's a bit confusing. There was a long avenue leading to the way in. I think we need to go in that direction.' She pointed into the fog.

Hawk shrugged. 'Lead on. But I must have passed this grove a hundred times and all I've ever seen is trees and mist.'

'Well, you wouldn't see anything from here,' rejoined Ali. 'It was built in an abandoned quarry so it's below eye-level.'

'*The Lost Fair*,' mused Jo, as they rode deeper into the grove. If anything the fog was thicker now.

'Gleam sure don't like this place,' grunted the Pastor as his horse shied nervously. Jo held on tightly to Gleam's mane.

'None of the horses do,' said Hawk. 'Firedance is as edgy as a mustang...' and with that his colt reared and threw him off.

'Hot damn,' he grunted, temporarily winded.

'You hurt, boy?' called the Pastor, struggling to keep Gleam under control.

Hawk didn't reply. He just gave a long, low whistle, then, 'Well. I'll be... Come and look at this.'

'It's a tree,' said Jo flatly as they all dismounted and gathered round Hawk. He was holding a piece of ash-grey bark.

'It's not a real elm. Look here – where my boot knocked the bark off... that's metal.'

He pulled out a knife and quickly cut away more of the tree bark. Beneath the surface was a large steel column. Without a word Hawk leapt up into the tree and was gone. There was some movement from above and he suddenly dropped back to the ground without so much as a sound. In his hand he clutched a large silver ring, covered by a metal grille.

'This was over the top. You'll never believe it but it's a chimney. This mist that's all around us? It's coming from the tree!'

'It's a mist tree,' said Jo, and she suddenly understood Mirabel's private joke. 'A mystery! There's loads of them! Someone's gone to a lot of trouble to hide the place!'

'No prizes for guessing who.' Ali was exasperated.

Jo had been thinking. 'Dad, you're brilliant at locating lost things...'

Paul shook his head. 'I need something to connect me to whatever's lost. Like giving a bloodhound a sweater to sniff.'

Ali was very still. 'I have something,' she said at last, and she took a small purse from her pocket. Wordlessly she handed her husband a faded red cardboard rectangle.

Paul studied it carefully. 'The Tunnel of Love,' he read, without expression. Eventually he looked questioningly at his wife.

Ali held his gaze. 'Not now, Paul.'

Paul gave an almost imperceptible nod, then pointed into the fog. 'It's that way. But I want to make sure the coast is clear. Wait here. I'll be straight back.'

Ali and Jo both protested, but Paul ignored them and walked away. Immediately the thick grey fog swallowed him up.



They stood and waited. After a while they grew accustomed to the silence and looked at one another. There was an awkward pause when nobody knew what to say until Hawk eventually broke it by saying, 'Does anybody want any chocolate?'

'No thanks, Hawk.' Jo smiled, but her anxiety was obvious. 'I wish Dad would hurry up and get back. Maybe if I...'

'No. You're not going to look for him.' Ali spoke sharply.

Jo was truculent. 'I didn't say I would,' she muttered.

'You didn't need to.'

Obadiah and Hawk were talking quietly to each other. Both looked worried.

'What's up?' asked Jo.

'Something's strange. The Pastor and I have real sharp hearing, but not here. As soon as your Dad walked into the fog, neither of us could hear him. Ought to have been some footsteps and twigs breaking... but it's just silence.'

'Like the Grotto,' said Jo. 'None of my powers worked there.'

'It'll be something in the mist,' said Ali impatiently. With every passing minute she was visibly more agitated. 'Where the hell is he?'

'I wish he could emp,' said Jo despondently.

'He should be back by now. Let's go,' said the Pastor decisively.



They followed the direction Paul had taken. Some of the trees had tattered posters pinned to them, advertising the human Freak show and macabre exhibits such as two-headed lambs and a mermaid that looked like a cross between a fish and a baby monkey. Jo shivered.

Hawk had ridden on a little way ahead. He came back, looking dejected. 'There's a huge fence,' he said. 'I can't see a way in.'

'There's bound to be a way,' reasoned Ali. 'Otherwise Paul would have come back.'

Jo tried not to think about the flaws in that argument. 'Let's see,' she said, and they continued through the mist until they could go no further.

There was clearly no way over the fence. They had followed it until reaching one of the entrances to the *Lost Funfair*, but it had long been boarded over. The faded, peeling paint was covered with notices saying:

CONDEMNED!

**KEEP OUT – HAZARDOUS SITE
IF YOU ENTER, YOU WILL DIE**

Something caught Hawk's eye. He dismounted and studied the fence carefully. A couple of planks were rotten and splintered. There was a very small gap. 'He went through here,' he said at last. 'This is a thread from his sweater.'

The others dismounted and looked at the gap. 'That's a tight squeeze,' said Ali. She kicked the rotten planks viciously. 'Not so tight now,' she said. 'Come on.'

Jo peered through the hole. 'There's a sheer drop!' she gasped. 'I can see a really narrow ledge, just the other side of the fence, and then nothing.'

'I told you it's in a disused quarry,' said Ali tersely. 'There's a bridge.'

'I can't see one,' said Jo.

'Well, it's there somewhere.' Jo looked dubious. Ali continued, her voice tight and controlled. 'My husband is in there somewhere. On his own. If I had to walk a bloody tightrope across the Grand Canyon to get to him, I would. So I'm going through. Jo, follow me. The rest of you can please yourselves.' So saying, she disappeared through the gap.

Obadiah came to a decision. 'I can't take Gleam through there. Or your horses. They can find their own way back, and I'm gonna find another way in.' So saying he and Gleam moved off, following the fence further through the trees, leading the other horses.

Jo and Hawk exchanged glances, then scrambled after Ali.



The Pastor was deep in thought. *Bound to be more than one way in. Through, over, under. Well, can't get through, and Gleam ain't about to grow wings and fly over so I reckon it'll be under. Maybe there'll be some kind of tunnel...*

An old song came into his mind.

*So high you can't get over it
So low you can't get under it
So wide you can't get 'round it
You gotta' go in at the door.*

He laughed. 'You trying to tell me something, Lord? Well, I'll keep it in mind.'

He rode on, listening carefully. All he could hear was his own breathing and the sound of horses' hooves. He was unnerved by the unearthly silence and sang to keep his spirits up.

*Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham
Oh, rock-a my soul.
Oh, Lordy...*

He stopped singing abruptly. As the trees began to thin out the fence suddenly met a high wooden wall of vertical logs with sharpened tips, a stockade roughly painted black and red, stretching across his path as far as he could see. KEEP OUT notices were fastened at regular intervals. Beneath each one were metal signs displaying the VMN logo above random silhouetted icons of attack dogs, radiation trefoils, skulls and crossbones or exclamation marks.

The notices grew more threatening the further he rode.

**PRIVATE PROPERTY
NO TRESPASSING**

**CONTAMINATED AREA
RISK OF DEATH**

**STAY OUT
STAY ALIVE**

**INTRUDERS WILL BE SHOT
SURVIVORS WILL BE SHOT AGAIN**

He was clear of the grove now, so let the other horses go. *Let's hope they've got enough horse sense to find their way home*, he thought, and rode on.

The log wall seemed never ending. He almost missed the door. It was huge – one whole section of the fence. The hinges and fastenings were rusty, the same colour as the rest of the wall. He would have missed it completely if it hadn't been for the faint sounds he could hear from the other side. Almost drowned out by raucous, drunken singing, someone was sobbing helplessly. Someone else was laughing, a mirthless, cruel sound that chilled the blood. There was the ominous rasp of a shotgun being loaded.

Don't look down. Face the fence, hold on to anything you can and move left.

Jo was terrified. There was barely enough room for her feet on the ledge, and it seemed to crumble away as she inched round towards her mother. She could hear Hawk breathing raggedly next to her. She sensed his fear, and somehow that made her feel a fraction less afraid.

I hate heights.

Me too.

Just keep on keeping on, Hawk. Nearly there.

The ledge was beginning to widen, fanning out towards a platform of rock which led to a ramshackle covered wooden bridge. As far as Jo could make out the fence backed onto a sheer drop in either direction. The bridge was the only way across. Ali reached out her hand, and Jo took it gratefully. As she stepped onto

the rock she was horrified to feel the ledge give way behind her. She heard stones and clods of earth tumbling down and saw, to her horror, the ground beneath Hawk collapsing.

Hawk! Hold tight!

Hawk gritted his teeth and thrust his arms out, desperately searching for a handhold. He triumphantly grabbed a thin tree root poking beneath the fence, which instantly came away in his hand. He counterbalanced and threw himself forward, scrabbling to find finger-holds in the gaps between the logs as the ledge gave way completely. With his feet dangling above the abyss, his knuckles turned white as he clung to a protruding galvanised nail. Sweat broke out on his forehead and his face was a mask of terror. He seemed paralysed. ***I can't hold on!***

Yes, you can. Just move towards me. I promise I will not let you fall.

Hawk tried not to look down as the nail started to bend. ***My hands are slipping!***

Ali pushed Jo towards a spindly looking tree. ***Hold on to that with one hand, Jo, and grab my belt with the other. Hawk – just a few more inches to go.*** She leaned out as far as she could, stretching her hand towards Hawk. Jo tried not to notice quite how spindly the tree she was holding was.

For a moment time seemed to stand still then everything seemed to happen at once. There was a cry of terror as Hawk's fingertips slipped from the nail completely. His hand flailed at thin air. Immediately Ali lunged forward and grabbed it, yanking him towards her and the safety of the rock.

He lay there panting for a moment, his eyes swimming with gratitude. He had barely recovered when Ali was ready to move on. 'The bridge is a bit the worse for wear,' she observed.

Hawk and Jo looked in horror at the wrecked timbers ahead of them. At the far end of the bridge was a door. 'Race you across,' said Ali, and she was gone.

'Is she always like this?' gasped Hawk.

'Pretty much,' said Jo proudly. 'You OK to go?'

'Just about.'

They moved gingerly across the worm-eaten bridge, trying not to look through the holes in the floor.

Jo willed herself onwards. 'Halfway there,' she told herself. The bridge creaked ominously. She kept walking. 'Three quarters done. Don't look down.'

She looked straight ahead, focussing on the other side, and so she didn't see the splintered, rotten plank until it gave way beneath her foot.

Within seconds Hawk was there – but they felt like the longest seconds of Jo's life. He grabbed her and held her steady. 'Never heard you swear before,' he whispered with a grin, and Jo blushed.

At last Jo and Hawk reached the other side. As they were passing a small booth, still displaying a flyblown tattered list of admission charges, they were astonished to hear a great whoop of joy from the other side of the door. When they finally opened it, they were expecting to see Ali reunited with Paul, but to their surprise there was no sign of them. There was a brief second to register a highly polished metal floor and colourfully painted walls before their feet slipped from under them and they were tumbling down and down, round and round.

Chapter Nineteen – Helter Skelter

The helicopter had barely touched down inside the funfair when Lethe was off and running. Titus helped Mirabel out and they followed slowly.

'She's in a hurry,' observed Mirabel sardonically. She tucked her arm into Titus's.

'Yes,' he replied earnestly. 'She is afraid those foolish children will release Smokey before his rehabilitation is complete.'

'Rehabilitation, eh. Is that what she's calling it these days?'

'Oh yes. Apparently he is responding wonderfully well.'

'Blimey, Titus. Have you gone soft in the head?'

He laughed comfortably. 'Never underestimate Lethe's talent for re-invention, Mirabel. She is a reformed character since we let the Lord into our hearts.'

Mirabel rolled her eyes and said nothing.

'I hear there may be a breakthrough in her research – one that will please you, dear Mirabel. Oh, she told me about your little arrangement. I am touched that you both put so much effort into keeping this old sinner alive and well.'

'Wouldn't do it for just any old sinner,' sniffed Mirabel. 'Should have known she wouldn't keep schtum. But, Titus, even if her rejuvenation thingamajig turns out to be the cat's pyjamas, I'm still going to pop my clogs one day. She might buy me a bit of time, but she can't keep me alive for ever. Then what will happen to you?'

'We both hope and pray that you will share your secret formula with us before that sad day comes, so your invaluable work can continue.'

'Hmm. And if I do share my secret with Her Ladyship, I don't give much for my chances of seeing the next day in. So if it's all the same to you, Titus, I'll keep me own counsel for now.'

'What did you think of Lethe's idea to ask you to make up some bottles of your secret formula so they could be frozen and stored for future use?'

'I'll tell you what I thought, Titus. I thought she'd have one of her hot-shot scientists analysing it as quick as you like and putting me out of the picture faster than you can wink. So she can stick that little suggestion where the sun don't shine.'

Titus chuckled good-naturedly. He looked around. 'It is many, many years since I was last here. Sad to see it so run-down.'

It was just possible, in the darkness, to make out the shadowy shapes of the fairground attractions. A huge helter-skelter loomed high in the distance, and the distinctive outline of the Ferris wheel was dramatic against the night sky. Termites had all but destroyed the supports on one side and the whole thing slumped as it dangled precariously from the strained and decrepit spindle. Ahead of them was a carousel.

'They gallopers gives me the creeps,' declared Mirabel. 'Not exactly my idea of a merry-go-round. Fancy having skeleton horses and that scary music playing while you goes round and round. Merry my eye.'

As if right on cue the lights began to come on all over the fairground. There was a harsh, wheezing sound like an ancient bellows and grinding and clanking as the machinery creaked into life. The unmistakable opening notes of Saint Saen's *Danse Macabre* were heard, tinny and distorted, as the skeletal horses, jerkily rising and falling, began their sinister circuit.

Mirabel shivered. 'Even the lights is morbid. No cheerful red or blue or yellow. Just purple and green. Like deadly nightshade. Enough to give you the willies.'

'There is a certain disturbing frisson. But the customers loved it. This was one of our most popular rides.'

'Until they poor little Injun kiddies was electrocuted.'

Titus sighed. 'So long ago. Billy Joe Thunder and Magnolia said it was sabotage. They didn't believe their

children died as a result of an accident. Dwayne Slaughter was in charge that day. He never liked the Indians; even more so after his daughter-in-law left the family. He made his dislike very obvious and a lot of people thought he'd tampered with the wiring on purpose. A mob gathered here. They were going to lynch him and his family if he hadn't escaped.'

'So was it?'

'Was it what?'

'Sabotage.'

'I fear so.'

'You shouldn't have helped him escape, then.'

For a second there was a flash of the old Titus. 'Saving someone from a lynch mob tends to ensure their everlasting gratitude, Mirabel. VergissMeinNicht had many occasions to employ the services of Colonel Dwayne Slaughter. Ironically, we were also able to offer employment to Billy Joe Thunder. His rage, once channelled, was invaluable. Even now, he and his men help protect this place from intruders. They have many ways of making a trespasser feel unwelcome.'

Mirabel shuddered, then pulled herself together. 'Let's go somewhere more cheerful, for Gawd's sake.'

'Like Mirabel's Dream?' he teased. She nodded. 'My thoughts exactly. It is still the most beautiful ride in the world – my maintenance crew have strict instructions to ensure it is as luxurious and smooth-running as the day I dedicated it to you. And on the way I'll tell you the latest news about Lucy. The clinic called me earlier today.'



From far below Jo and Hawk could hear Ali laughing and singing a snatch of an old Beatles song. 'Helter Skelter,' she sang out, and, exhilarated by the ride, they laughed in spite of themselves, before coming down to earth with a mighty thump.

Jo and Hawk looked around them. Ali was there, staring up at the huge tower of the Helter Skelter looming above them, the ladder on the side long since broken and useless. 'No wonder Dad couldn't get back to us,' said Jo.

They had landed in the middle of a tangle of tinder-dry vegetation, surrounded by high walls of dense undergrowth. Between the plants an overgrown path was barely discernable as it led them away from the Helter Skelter. Tall, thick stems, with long, thin pointed leaves, brown and clearly dying, competed for space and light with brambles that caught at their clothes and scratched their hands and legs.

'What's this plant?' asked Jo as they pushed their way through the narrow, dark corridor.

'Maize,' said Hawk gloomily. 'This is an old maize maze. We could be lost in here for hours.'

'No way. We'll just have to call Dad, then.' Jo drew in her breath to shout, but Hawk clapped his hand over her mouth.

We can't let them know we've got through.

Jo wriggled out of his grasp. 'We have to find him,' she whispered fiercely.

'I agree. But we have to be really quiet. If we're going to rescue Smokey, we'll need the element of surprise. Let's face it, they will be expecting us...'

'Paul's a tracker, so he'll have left signs for us,' said Ali quietly. 'Not that I have a clue what to look for...'

'Well, I do,' whispered Hawk, smiling with relief. 'Not only that, we can emp and I can hear properly again. There's some really spooky music playing way up ahead.'

They battled on with Hawk leading the way. They fought their way through dry, crackling foliage. The path was long and curving, with no apparent end in sight.

'I think we're going in a spiral,' whispered Jo.

At last they came to a junction.

'How will we ever get out of here?' hissed Jo irritably. 'Both the paths look exactly the same.'

'This way.' Hawk sounded very confident.

'Why?' whispered Jo. 'Show me.'

Hawk pointed at a clump of leaves. 'These have been flagged – turned over to show their underside. See if you can spot the next one. Your old man's good. Very good. He's not making a sound.'

The path through the maze seemed never ending. However far they walked the Helter Skelter loomed just as large, seeming never to recede into the distance. Jo became adept at spotting the flagged leaves, but the effort of hacking through identical tunnels of tangled stalks and leaves was tiring and frustrating.

'Are you sure we're not just going round in circles?' asked Jo.

Hawk shook his head. 'I'm leaving markers so we don't.' He stopped suddenly and concentrated hard. 'Not long now,' he grinned. 'I can hear him breathing.'

Three more turns and at last they saw Paul, almost camouflaged by the foliage. 'You took your time,' he grinned, his relief obvious as Ali and Jo smothered him with hugs. 'I couldn't get back up so I had to go on. We've reached the start of the maze. All the side shows and rides are through that gate. We need a plan. Hawk. How many people can you hear?'

Hawk deliberated. 'That creepy music from the carousel is making it hard to tell. Four or five, I reckon. I can make out Lethe, Titus and Mirabel. The other guy must be the helicopter pilot. He's doing some maintenance work on the chopper, by the sound of it. That's about it.' He frowned. 'Wait – there's something else, but it's a long way off. I'd say it's on the other side of the funfair. I can just about hear some singing. Someone's crying. And someone's laughing, but it's a really evil laugh.' He scowled.

'No sign of Smokey?' queried Jo.

Hawk shook his head. 'Sorry, I can't hear him – maybe all the mirrors affect the acoustics somehow...'

Jo looked crestfallen.

'How about Obadiah?' asked Ali. 'Can you hear him?'

Hawk was just about to shake his head when he heard a distant rumble. He clapped his hands to his ears as the noise became deafening. The others, hearing nothing untoward, stared at him as he flinched with pain.

'I've no idea what he's up to,' he gasped, his ears ringing, 'but I swear I just heard him say, 'Come and see.'

Ali spoke quietly. 'It's from the Book of Revelation. ... and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.'

Paul's face was grim and strained. 'I remember the next verse. *I looked and there before me was a pale horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hell was following close behind him.*'

For a moment, nobody said a word. Then Hawk spoke briskly and calmly. 'I've emped Grey Wolf. He's already sent out a war party. Meanwhile we should do what we came for and find Smokey.'

While Jo and the others had been battling the maize, the Pastor had been following his own path. After following the stockade for a while he came across a cluster of tumbledown wooden shacks. The Pastor and Gleam moved stealthily round the derelict buildings, peering through the jagged, broken windowpanes. In one room he saw ramshackle shelves piled from floor to ceiling with rusting cans, filthy old bottles and broken pieces of machinery. The Pastor nodded with satisfaction, and hitched his lariat to a roof beam, accessible because the shingles had long ago slipped to the ground.

Noiselessly he wheeled Gleam around and moved straight ahead, to the left of a bedraggled clump of trees, training his rope round first one tree, then making a right angled turn towards a second tree. One more turn, and one more tree trunk and the lariat was taut. He headed back towards the huge door, urging Gleam on, feeling the lariat strain and the tension increase. He gambled on the beam giving way before the rope did and when he felt the lasso slacken, he yanked it free and rode quietly over to the door and waited in the shadows.

At first there was just a creaking sound, but as the rotten timbers splintered and the roof caved in, the clatter increased. The shelves buckled, spewing their contents everywhere, pulling down the walls as they collapsed. There was a domino effect as the adjacent

hovels and lean-tos fell like ninepins. The noise was thunderous.

Behind the stockade the singing stopped. The Pastor heard someone say, 'Hoka hey!' followed by the sound of running footsteps.

'Come and see,' he said quietly, and watched as the door swung open. A group of Lakota dressed in old VMN uniforms came running out. Some of them wore face paint and war bonnets. Looking wildly all around them, they headed for the shacks. When the last one was through, Obadiah and Gleam slipped silently into the covered courtyard. He pulled the door to, and drew the bolts.

A scene of terrible carnage met his eyes. A wild-eyed white man, dressed like one of the Pilgrim Fathers, was kneeling in the dirt, clearly begging for his life. He was surrounded by a circle of Indian braves. All were terribly wounded, covered in mud and gore, closing in for the kill. One held the man by his hair, his axe raised high. At his feet a white woman and her children lay lifeless on the ground, having been horribly mutilated and degraded. There was a deathly silence and stillness.

With a great roar the Pastor charged into the circle. The Indians fell like ninepins, and to his horror, limbs and heads rolled from bodies that fragmented before his disbelieving eyes. It was a moment before he realised the truth. *They're waxworks*, he realised. *Someone's been re-writing history.*

Tattered old posters covered the walls of the stockade. One proudly proclaimed

NATHAN SLAUGHTER'S GLORIOUS KILLING SPREE

On the poster the wild-eyed man was the triumphant victor, with dead and injured Indians strewn in his path like flotsam and jetsam. The poster had been defaced and clearly used for target practice.

A muffled sob came from the shadows. The girl was cowering in a corner, sprawled on some filthy straw.

She shrank back as Obadiah approached her, then her eyes widened in recognition. She started to sob uncontrollably.

'Hush, now, Beth,' said the Pastor softly, cutting the ropes that bound her. He gently placed her on Gleam's back. 'Where's Nick?'

Beth pointed wordlessly, her face a mask of terror.

The Pastor followed her gaze, then paled.

'Forgive them, Lord,' he said slowly. 'Because I don't think I can.'

'Please, cut him down,' she begged. 'I cannot bear it...'

He walked across to the makeshift gallows, his mouth moving in a silent prayer. His hands moved swiftly and he tenderly laid the boy's body down, then covered him with his coat. As he straightened up, he heard the sound of banging on the door.

'They're coming back,' said Obadiah. 'We have to go. Now. But I promise you, I will come back for him. And they will pay for what they have done.' He swung up behind her.

'There was a mad old Indian called Billy Joe Thunder,' she whispered. 'He said he knew Nick's face from years ago. He called him a murderer. Kept saying these three names over and over. Lily. Rosie. Daisy. And after... after, one of the others, called Crow, said I was next. But he said he was going to have some fun first.'

Obadiah was silent, not trusting himself to speak, spurring Gleam out of the courtyard and onto a rough, dirt road, riding towards the sinister music he could hear in the distance. Behind them there was shouting and cursing as the gang broke their way in and discovered their prey had gone.

As Gleam galloped along the road, Obadiah heard the sound of horses behind them. Something whizzed past his ear, and all around him arrows suddenly sang in the air and clattered to the ground.



Hawk spoke with a natural authority that surprised both him and his listeners. 'Jo, you and I will go to the

Mirror Maze and get Smokey. Ali, it's down to you to contain Lethe until we're in the clear. I'll emp you when Jo and I are done, and we'll head for the helicopter.'

'None of us can fly the helicopter!'

'No, Paul, you're right. But the pilot can. And he is one of my ...' – he paused and looked directly at Jo and Paul – '*our* people. If he has a choice between helping Lady Lacuna, or us, I know what he will decide. So you go straight there, Paul, explain it to him, and prepare for take-off.'

'What if he doesn't trust me?'

'He will. Because you will use his true name. I was there last year at his naming ceremony. He whispered the name to Paul, who nodded, then set off at a run.'

'You've forgotten Titus and Mirabel,' said Ali.

'Not so,' said Hawk. 'I can hear them clearly. They're over by the Tunnel of Love, yakking fit to bust. Something about some poor old soul in a hospital who's near the end, I reckon. I heard Titus say, *The doctors say she is comfortable, but her time is very near* –'

Jo cut him off impatiently. 'Yeah, yeah. They're obviously distracted already. Let's go.'

Lethe was striding towards the Mirror Maze, her jaw set in grim determination. She was oblivious to Ali's presence right up until the moment Ali jumped her from behind and they fell tumbling to the ground. Hawk and Jo slipped past, ducking under the barrier at the sideshow entrance. Jo caught a glimpse of a luridly painted sign.

**WILL YOU LOSE YOUR SOUL
IN THE LABYRINTH?
REFLECT ON THIS – WHAT IS REAL?**

Hawk and Jo were in a corridor lined with posters for the other attractions.

ROLL RIGHT UP AND SEE THE FREAKS!

Jo shuddered at the cruel, screaming headlines and the crude, lurid illustrations.

**WOLF BOY
HE ATE HIS OWN SISTER!**

**NATHAN SLAUGHTER – INDIAN KILLER!
REAL SCALPS ON DISPLAY**

**THE MIDGET AND THE GIANT
A MARRIAGE MADE IN HELL**

Straight ahead was a jet-black door, studded with chrome metal spikes.

'Here we go,' she said to Hawk, and they went into the Mirror Maze.

'This is so undignified,' grunted Lethe as she and Ali slugged it out in the dust. 'And what in the name of Heaven do you think you look like?'

'Something you see in a mirror in your worst nightmares,' said Ali. With a superhuman effort she flipped Lethe onto her back and straddled her chest, pinning her to the ground.

'Just like when we were kids,' Ali gasped. 'We actually had fun then, as I recall. But I expect you'd rather forget that once we loved each other like sisters should.'

'Oh, spare me the sanctimonious nostalgia,' spat Lethe, still managing to look beautiful despite her torn clothes and tangled hair. A trickle of blood from her nose, mingled with dust, looked like the latest fashion accessory.

'But it's true,' persisted Ali. 'Remember the little black kitten we had? Obsidian? I was ill in bed with chicken pox and you smuggled him in to visit me, disguised in your dolly's nurse's uniform.'

Lethe smiled, despite herself. 'I remember,' she said. 'Mum was so mad at me! But it was worth it. There. You've got what you wanted. A nice, cosy family memory. Now let me up.'

'We were so happy then – I remember everything. Why do you prefer to forget? Forgetting is lying to yourself.'

'Oh, Alithea. Like all holier-than-thou people you persist in maintaining that the truth, however terrible, is preferable to a lie, however comforting or expedient. But if it makes you feel any better, I do remember. When I choose to.'

'So what went wrong, Lethe?' Ali sounded sad.

'Surely the Mistress of Memory hasn't forgotten?' Lethe's voice was mocking. 'Some other time, Ali. Right now, I really do need to stop your headstrong, undisciplined daughter from thwarting my carefully laid plans.' And with that she gave an almighty twist catching Ali off guard and throwing her clear. With surprising speed Lethe on her with a rock in her fist. One swift blow to the top of Ali's head was all it took for her to go limp and lifeless.

Lethe reached the black studded door in next to no time and yanked on the handle. The door was jammed from the inside. With a howl of fury she seized it with both hands and, using all her strength, wrenched the door free. The rusted hinges protested briefly before twisting free of the splintering doorframe. With a contemptuous snarl she pushed the heavy door away and let it fall to the ground with an ominous, echoing boom.

After taking a moment to smooth her hair and straighten her torn evening dress, Lethe calmly entered the Mirror Maze, the click of her stiletto heels heralding her approach.

However many times she went there, Lethe never got used to how blindingly dazzling the Mirror Maze was. Shining white marbled pillars supported Gothic arches over aisles lined, sometimes with mirror, sometimes with window glass. Silver mirror balls turned slowly, reflected in ceilings that were also mirrored. Festoons of silvery fairy lights glittered, illuminating every surface. Everywhere she looked, she saw her own reflection, sometimes distorted horribly, sometimes achingly beautiful, multiplied an infinite

number of times. Somewhere ahead – or was it behind her? – she saw Jo and Hawk, stooped over a crumpled figure. Hawk picked him up effortlessly and as he straightened up he saw Lethe. He whispered to Jo, whose blazing eyes met Lethe's, reflected over and over again.

'You will pay for what you've done to him,' yelled Jo fiercely. With fire and fury she launched herself into a Lakota war chant.

Now the chase was on. Lethe pursued Jo, Hawk and Smokey as they searched for the exit. Each junction offered a myriad of choices. Once she thought they were standing next to her, only to realise that a sheet of window glass stood between them. Sometimes she went towards them, only to find they were off to the side. And all the time that ungrateful girl was singing.

Ahead of her Jo stood stock still, staring with horror into a mirror edged in obsidian and jet. For a moment, the singing stopped abruptly. Jo sobbed once, then Hawk pulled her away roughly. The singing resumed.

Within moments Lethe had caught up. As she passed by the black-edged mirror she noticed the words etched in the glass. *Sorrows past and future pain*. Her eyes were involuntarily drawn to the image before her. Gazing upon her visage, she felt her knees buckle. And still Jo sang her strange otherworldly song.

The singing rattled Lethe. On several occasions she misjudged the reflections, and banged into a mirror when she thought the way ahead was clear. The dazzling light and multiple reflections made her head spin. And all the time the singing was louder. Why on earth was her wretched niece making that infernal noise?

This is the exit, Jo. Are you ready?

Jo nodded, drew a deep breath, and unleashed a torrent of sound. Reaching down deep within herself, Jo grasped her very soul and forced it to be heard, her voice climbing ever higher until she was singing notes she had never sung before.

Louder, Jo. As loud as you possibly can. Hawk longed to cover his ears – their sensitivity meant

agonising pain as Jo sang such high and wild notes – but instead he held onto Smokey – poor, broken Smokey – as Jo’s voice continued to soar.

Hurry! She’s gaining ground! From every direction Hawk saw Lethe’s reflections, her face contorted with fury, her arms reaching out to stop the unbearable noise. Jo sang on and hit a note so high the vibrations made the mirror balls start to shake. There was a moment when time stood still until with a great cracking sound, the Mirror Maze began to shatter. As Jo followed Hawk and Smokey through the exit, she glanced back as Lethe screamed, shrouded by cascades of shattering glass.

‘That’s a lot of bad luck,’ observed Hawk sardonically.

Chapter Twenty – Mirabel’s Dream

As Hawk and Jo, half carrying Smokey, emerged into the main arena, ready to run for the helicopter, they could hardly take in what they were seeing.

Two groups of Native Americans on horseback were galloping round the fairground, shouting blood-curdling battle cries, fighting each other with bows and arrows, pistols and rifles, spears and hatchets. One group, a gang of complete strangers, all wearing VMN insignia, was led by an old man with crazy eyes and two black lines across his right cheek.

‘What the hell is happening?’ gasped Jo.

‘The ones in uniform are outlaws who work for your aunt. My uncle cast them out. The others are warriors from my tribe.’

They tried to dodge the fighting and head for the helicopter but made little headway as all around them horses galloped wildly, half mad with fear from the screams of the wounded and dying.

‘We have to get Smokey to safety.’ Jo looked around for somewhere to take refuge. She registered pink and red fairy lights and an abundance of crimson hearts with gilded edges. They were close by the entrance to Mirabel’s Dream. A romantic waltz was playing softly. A gilded gondola floated slowly past.

‘In here,’ she said, but Hawk wasn’t listening to her. His eyes were fixed on the tall man on the golden horse cantering towards them, shaking off all attackers. Gleam drew to a shuddering halt and they watched dumbfounded as the Pastor gently handed Beth down.

‘Take care of her,’ he said. ‘I have business to deal with.’ Gleam wheeled round and Obadiah was gone.

Beth swayed, her face pale as death, her eyes shadowed and red rimmed. Jo caught her before she fell, and as she held her, in terrible flashes of insight she read Beth’s horrific story.

In the distance Lethe emerged, blood-streaked and limping, from the shattered Mirror Maze. Her beautiful face was slashed to ribbons; a mask of blood and rage. Her fury increased as her gaze fell upon Jo and her

companions. Smokey's eyes painfully opened and, seeing Lethe, he began to shake uncontrollably.

One of the outlaws, a man with a cruel smile and a laugh to match, was scouring the fairground for the quarry that had escaped him. Crow turned and looked directly across at the Tunnel of Love. He saw Beth, and laughed. Simultaneously and from opposite directions, Crow and Lethe began stalking towards their prey.

Another gondola was slowly passing Jo, Hawk, Smokey and Beth. 'Don't let Crow find me,' Beth sobbed, and darted forward. Hawk and Jo followed, bundling Smokey on board, then clambered in, four people squashed onto a seat meant for two.

The gondola moved through a curtain of artificial red roses, into the peace and safety of the tunnel.

The slow, languorous ride began. Sweet, soft music played, and the air was warm and fragrant with the scent of roses. Gentle golden lights softly glowed and time seemed to stand still. Somewhere outside, far away, a battle was raging, but as the exhausted children sank into the soft velvet cushions their terrors receded a little, to be replaced with a gentle, restful calm.

Jo was profoundly aware of Smokey next to her. She felt him stirring as his nightmare of living in constant brightness slowly receded. In the soft, kindly shadows he was coming back to life.

Jo knew the moment Smokey opened his eyes because she saw what he saw. He looked directly at Beth's tear-stained face, and saw her loving devotion shining through the terror.

'Beth,' he whispered, and there in the Tunnel of Love Jo felt her heart break.

Hawk coughed awkwardly. 'They'll be waiting for us at the end,' he said. 'What are we going to do? We have to get Smokey to the helicopter. He needs help urgently.'

Beth spoke for the first time. 'Lethe still trusts me. I'll try to buy you some time.'



When the gondola emerged from the tunnel, Lethe, Billy Joe Thunder, Crow and some of the gang were waiting. The rest of them were caught up in the fight with Grey Wolf's warriors. Beth stood up and climbed onto the landing stage. The gondola sailed on and as it disappeared back behind the curtain of silk roses she called, 'I managed to push them overboard – they're still in the tunnel.'

'Well done,' said Lethe, her voice barely recognisable as she fought the pain that threatened to overwhelm her every word, her every move. She turned to the outlaws. 'Billy Joe, Crow, go in there and rip the place apart until you find them.' She gestured to the other men. 'You – go with them. You two – wait here with us.'

Beth paled as she realised her flimsy plan was in ruins. 'Shouldn't we go as well?' she asked. Lethe shook her head.

'No need.' She leaned heavily on Beth, struggling to stand upright.

Beth watched helplessly as the men headed towards the curtain. She shivered as Crow looked back at her. He slowly made a lewd gesture. 'Later,' he mouthed.

Another gondola glided slowly out of the tunnel, and the outlaws prepared to scramble aboard, but they fell back at the sight of the occupants. 'Mr. Titus,' gasped Billy Joe, and Titus inclined his head graciously as he and Mirabel sailed serenely past.

Lethe seethed with irritation and impatience. 'Don't just stand there gawping,' she rasped. 'Get in after them.' Crow jumped off the landing stage and waded through the curtain, following Billy Joe and his men.

Ahead of them, Jo and Hawk scrambled back up from where they had been hiding in the floor of the boat. They pulled Smokey onto the seat, and his eyes opened briefly. 'Jo,' he whispered. 'I knew you'd come.' His eyes closed again.

The sharp edges of Jo's broken heart softened slightly.

Jo heard a noise behind her and looked back. Just for a moment her heart stopped as she thought she

saw a slight movement in the silk and velvet draperies that lined the tunnel. She held her breath, but nothing happened.

The ride continued, sedate and serene, a cocoon of tranquillity and beauty despite the mayhem outside. Behind them they could hear shouting and splashing as their pursuers searched the tunnel.

'Be ready to run,' said Hawk as they rounded a corner and approached the last stretch of the ride. Despite the beguiling music and sweet scent of roses, he was all too aware of the proximity of their enemies. They were getting closer, and could be heard swearing, clearly frustrated.

Jo nodded and smiled. 'You've been great,' she said. 'You're not so bad yourself,' he replied.

Suddenly an arrow whizzed past Jo's head, then another and another, followed by the sound of gunshots as the outlaws fired at random, hoping to find their targets any way they could.

Then three things all happened at once. She heard Smokey gasp and felt him slump as an arrow found him. As she frantically turned to help him, something struck Hawk. With a cry he fell from the gondola into the jet black waters. Before Jo could even react, a desperate emp from Beth turned her blood to ice.

My plan went wrong. Sorry. Lethe is waiting for you.

As the curtain of roses parted and the gondola inched slowly forward Lethe advanced towards them. Jo could hardly bear to see her once beautiful face, lacerated beyond recognition.

'Drag her out,' commanded Lethe, 'then get the other one.' The outlaws reached for Jo, grabbed her roughly and pulled her out of the gondola. Lethe gripped Jo's hand viciously. The scar on Jo's palm began to throb.

Time slowed to a crawl.

Jo saw Beth, weeping, frantically pulling Smokey from the gondola. She gasped when she saw the arrow in his shoulder.

As the empty gondola continued its circuit, Billy Joe Thunder and three furious men emerged from the tunnel.

Lethe gripped Jo and squeezed her hand. Jo felt herself growing weak.

She remembered her aunt, helpless in a wheelchair, grabbing her scarred hand – the scar where their blood had mingled. Then, as now, electricity had sparked between them. Then, as now, she began to feel dizzy and faint.



Hawk surfaced from the water like a bullet, lungs burning and gasping for air. Blood flowed from his forehead where the bullet had grazed his face. He quickly tore a strip from his sleeve, bound it round his head and took in his whereabouts. The gondola containing Smokey and Jo had gone. He could hear Billy Joe Thunder and his men all around him.

'I know I winged him,' rasped a cruel voice not far away. Crow.

Hawk slowed himself and slid into the shadows, slowly drawing his spirit knife. At that moment, all of Reverend Obadiah Moon's lessons in discipline proved themselves invaluable and Hawk was finally grateful. Stealthily he crept along the tunnel, relying heavily on his advanced hearing, heading back the way they had come.

He froze at the sound of another gunshot, then relaxed when a frustrated cry of 'Where is he?' echoed along the tunnel. Rounding a corner he was surprised to find a slim jetty. Silently he pulled himself out of the waist-deep water and onto the narrow walkway. It was positioned in such a way that it was barely noticeable from the opposite direction. As the voices grew quieter and more distant, his eyes became accustomed to the gloom.

There was a door hidden amongst the drapes.

Moving like a cat he inched his way through and, following the shadows, made his way down the metal steps beyond. He could hear the hum of a great

machine and somewhere ahead, the familiar voice of Titus Stigmurus.

'This is the heart of Mirabel's Dream, my dear. May I present...' Titus paused for dramatic effect then continued with a flourish. '...The Soliton Generator.'

'Ah, I had one of them but the wheels fell off,' cooed Mirabel cheerfully, taking a nip from her silver hip flask.

Unperturbed, Titus continued. 'Do you know the Wave of Translation?'

'If you hum it, mate, I'll play it.'

Titus soldiered on bravely. 'Allow me to enlighten you. In 1834 a Scottish naval engineer named John Scott Russell witnessed an unusual phenomenon. He was conducting research into the most effective design for canal boats, when he saw it. The barge itself stopped moving, but the wave it generated did not. He raced along the canal bank on horseback after it.'

'What did he do that for, the daft bugger?'

Titus winced. 'The pursuit of knowledge, of course.'

'Ah. Fancy that.'

'He *then* built a device to replicate the phenomenon,' continued Titus doggedly. 'A wave tank to be precise, which is the basis for the Soliton Generator. A soliton is a self-reinforcing wave that maintains its shape while travelling at a constant speed.'

There was a pause while Mirabel digested this new information.

After a while she said, 'Well I never. That's nice, innit?'

Titus pressed on, thin-lipped. 'This device generates a pulse every few hours. Steam from these turbines is released through the surrounding forests as a mist. With every pulse, ribbon clouds are formed and released.'

This time the silence was pregnant with anticipation.

Eventually, Mirabel cottoned on, 'You mean... them freaky Morning Glory clouds is your doing?'

Titus did not reply, but beamed proudly.

'I knew about them mist trees, I figured they was just to keep this place hidden. But making your own clouds? What do you want to go and do that for?

'There are untold benefits for those who can control the weather. For example, these clouds can be set to seed rapture where they pass.'

'Rapture? Like all that hoo-hah up at the sing-song earlier? What's the point of that, then?'

'As I say, there are many benefits. A docile populace is both content and compliant.'

'You mean, they'll do whatever you wants them to do. Just like lambs to the slaughter.'

Titus sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. He was getting a headache. 'Sigmund von Birken put it far more succinctly; *Shepherds love their sheep so dearly, and the sheep return his love.*'

Hawk strained to hear more but at that point he heard something else; the sound of footsteps gently creeping up behind him. He ducked just as a tomahawk whirled through the air and struck the wall where his head had been moments before. With a tremendous cry of *Huhn!* Crow leapt from the shadows and flew at the startled Hawk.

They tumbled down the stairway in a flurry of punches, bites and kicks. There was a squawk from Mirabel as Titus hastily pushed her aside. The brawling pair rolled to the floor and continued fighting. Hawk leapt to his feet first and cast around anxiously looking for his knife.

'This what you're after?' sneered Crow, kicking the fallen blade and sending it clattering into the shadows. Hawk moved to dive after it but froze at the sound of a pistol being cocked.

'Got you now, *iyeska.*'

Without thinking Hawk barrelled headlong towards Crow. In his surprise Crow let off a shot, and another, and another, and another. Before he could pull the trigger again, Hawk was upon him. He grasped Crow's head in both hands, wrenching it downward in a vicious fluid movement, while jabbing his knee directly

up. There was a crunch of bone and Crow sprawled to the floor.

Panting and dazed, Hawk retrieved the gun. Somehow every shot had missed him. He quickly checked the chamber; two bullets left. *One each for Titus and Mirabel*, he thought.

The enormous turbine behind him suddenly let out a high pitched whine, rapidly growing in strength and sound. Hawk realised that was where the four bullets had gone.

The pressure was making the whole room vibrate. He looked up just in time to see the roof girders buckling. With a cry Hawk lunged forwards and threw himself up the stairs. As pipes burst and rivets flew across the room like bullets, the roof collapsed in on the Soliton Generator.

Outside, the weather took a sudden turn for the worse. An intense wave of pressure threw everybody off their feet. Jo felt her nose start to bleed. From out of nowhere a great funnel of wind thrust itself vertically, sending everyone reeling and staggering once more.

Buildings ruptured and ripped apart as debris flew upwards before being tossed in all directions. With a tortured scream the contorted Ferris wheel was rent free of its only bearing. Slowly at first and then rapidly gaining momentum it toppled, relentlessly crashing down upon Mirabel's Dream and all those stood before it.

Hardly daring to breathe, Hawk risked a glimpse back. The massive wave tank had cracked and water was gushing out, flooding the chamber. A sparking, ruptured cable fell without warning across the deluge. With an almighty crack the room plunged into darkness. The whine of the turbines stopped abruptly. Electrical flames sprang up from a wall-mounted fuse box, curling and licking their way towards the generators.

For a moment Hawk caught sight of Mirabel and Titus on the far side of the room. As he took aim, the flames found the gas mains and, with a sudden *whumph*, the room became an inferno. Hawk was thrown clean up the stairway, headlong through the doorway and headfirst into the waters of the Tunnel of Love.

Battered, bedraggled and bruised, Hawk spluttered to the surface, the gun lost in the murk. He floundered toward the exit, closely followed by the rapidly escalating firestorm.

Through the exit was a scene of bedlam. Mirabel's Dream lay in ruins; huge pieces of debris were whipping through the air in every direction and the deep pressure wave blotted out all sound. Hawk felt his eardrums ready to burst and hastily grabbed his nose, pinching his nostrils shut and forcing the air to his ears. He swallowed hard and with an almost imperceptible hiss his hearing levelled out. From all around him came the moans of the dying and the injured.

'Jo!' he cried. 'Jo! Where are you?'

'Here!' came the muffled reply. Hawk rushed towards it and found nothing but wreckage.

'We're trapped! Get us out!'

Using his bare hands, Hawk began to dig, throwing aside lumps of masonry and timber. To his horror he came across the crushed remains of Billy Joe Thunder's men. Behind him the remnants of the tunnel exit were suddenly engulfed by fire. With renewed urgency he scabbled through the rubble. Using a strength he did not know he possessed, he lifted a huge warped sheet of corrugated iron and there, cowering beneath, were Jo and Beth, cradling the emaciated Smokey.

'What the hell happened?' cried Jo.

'No time!' yelled Hawk. 'This whole place is about to burn!'

'Have you seen my mum?' asked Jo, desperately.

'I'm here!' came the reply.

All heads turned as Ali came into view, leaning on Paul. Dried blood matted her hair and encrusted one

side of her face. She looked deathly pale yet still had her wits about her.

'Paul, get Smokey. Hawk, get the girls. We are leaving.' Without a word Hawk pulled Jo to her feet. Paul moved in and swept up the limp Smokey. Jo reached down for Beth and together she and Hawk freed her from the wreckage. Hawk scooped Beth up in his arms and staggered after Paul.

'This way!' called Ali. 'To the helicopter!'

The blaze had crept around behind them now and everything was alight. Flames roared into the sky, fuelled by the unnatural squall. Sparks danced in all directions, many landing among the maize, instantly setting new fires wherever they fell. The *Lost Funfair of Forgotten Dreams* was going up like a tinderbox.

As they battled their way through the conflagration, Jo was surprised to be emped.

Help me.

It was Lethe. Ravaged, ragged, ruined Lethe. Crumpled in the dust.

Her once beautiful face was sliced to ribbons. Whenever she moved her head, splinters of glass glittered from deep within the weeping lacerations. Blood poured from her wounds. Her emerald eyes were bloodshot and her hands, hair and clothes were all charred and blackened. Behind her lay a bloodied trail where she had dragged herself from the furnace. With a whimper she clawed her way closer to Jo.

Help me!

Lethe reached imploringly for Jo's hand. 'Help me,' she mouthed, and Jo felt her heart lurch. She had the power to heal the horrific wounds disfiguring the broken woman in front of her. She struggled with her knowledge of Lethe's terrible deeds and her deep-seated feelings, rooted in the love of a child for a favourite aunt.

Please!

Jo tentatively reached out to gather Lethe in her arms when a flash of white-hot pain shot through her scarred hand. She hesitated, and stopped. Her hand

throbbed, urging her to reach out. Her blood sang out to Lethe's.

Please help me!

Jo looked down at the woman before her. The woman who had brought her so much pain and fear. The woman who had deliberately driven her father and mother insane. The woman who had stolen her life and her dreams and her mind. The woman who had taken Smokey. Slowly, she straightened herself up.

Help me! I beg you!

As flaming timbers crashed to the ground beside her, Jo hardened her heart and turned and walked away.

Jocasta! I order you to help me!

Jo made herself keep moving. *Don't look back.*

She emitted a simple reply before raising her shields completely.

My name is Johanna.

Then, from the east, came the clear, ringing clarion call of a trumpet, piercing the air. A soft, muffled drumbeat played slowly, mournfully. Jo turned and saw Obadiah and Gleam, flanked by Grey Wolf and Silver Lightning at the head of a huge band of Lakota riders. They escorted two braves, walking slowly, bearing Nick's body on a stretcher covered with animal pelts. Behind them the dawn was breaking; pink and gold streaks across a silver sky.

Billy Joe Thunder led his remaining men forward until they came face to face with Grey Wolf. Billy Joe bowed his head in submission. Respect for the stern, unsmiling old chieftain was clearly visible as he surrendered.

There was a whistling sound as Obadiah's lariat snaked through the air. The loop settled over Lethe's neck and the rope tightened. She struggled feebly, but to no avail.

The Pastor called across to Jo. 'Go. Get Smokey and Beth to Summer Moon.' The Pastor surveyed Lethe as she lay in the dust. There was a moment when his composure deserted him. He yanked the rope

savagely. 'Get up, Lady Midnight. You're going to a funeral.'



In the helicopter, Paul was cradling Ali, Hawk was holding Beth. Smokey was curled up on the seat next to Jo with his head resting in her lap. As she looked down on the *Lost Funfair of Forgotten Dreams*, the rising sun revealed it for what it truly was; a tangle of tawdry, catchpenny, shabby facades. *Smoke and mirrors*, she thought contemptuously.

She watched as the roof finally caved in on Mirabel's Dream. She remembered how safe and warm she had been inside the tunnel and tried not to think about how good it had felt being close to Smokey. She remembered her mother talking about it. *I have never experienced anything so romantic. It was no ordinary fairground ride.* She reached down and smoothed his hair from his tightly screwed up eyes.

Before the *Lost Funfair* was consumed by fire completely, Jo saw that the funeral procession had come to a halt on a carefully tended patch of green. Three small crosses stood in the shade of a stone angel under a magnolia tree. She saw Reverend Obadiah Moon hand a shovel to Billy Joe Thunder and watched as he began to dig a grave.

Nick hated them, thought Jo as their helicopter banked over the morning clouds. *And some of them killed him, and some of them are caring for him now. He will rest forever with his mother's people.*

EPILOGUE

The bunker was deathly quiet and still. The air was fetid and stale. Nothing had moved there in over fifty years. Until now. With a muffled bang, dust fell from the ceiling above; with a louder bang loose stones visibly shook. A third and final bang and the ancient metal door flew back against the wall with a deafening clang.

Wheezing, dishevelled and clutching his shoulder, Titus Stigmurus picked his way through the dust-strewn landscape. Mirabel gingerly followed.

Striking a match, Titus's grim and grimy features were illuminated briefly. He struck another. Smiling in triumph, he beckoned Mirabel over.

In the flickering light Mirabel looked up at the massive hulk patiently waiting before her. Covered in dust and fifty years after her time, she had lost none of her presence or menace, and neither had the Junkers Ju 88 bomber before her.

Titus ran a loving hand along the nose of the vintage aircraft. Still visible was a cartoon of a scantily-clad, voluptuous woman straddling a giant bomb, beneath which were daubed the words *Das Traum von Mirabel*.

Jo's mother protects her memories;
her aunt can destroy them.
Jo doesn't know it yet, but she
has more power than either of them.

Suitable for age 12 and upwards.

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