

"SO LET'S TALK about your demon. Have you heard his voice this week?" He leaned back, folded his hands over his stomach, and looked expectantly at her. She peered back at him out of those unusual turquoise-colored eyes that had captivated him from the first. Like everything about her, as it happened. Without a doubt, Anabel Scott was the most attractive patient he had ever treated, but that wasn't what fascinated him so much. It was the fact that even after so many hours of therapy, he still couldn't figure her out. She always managed to surprise him, to get him to drop his guard, and he hated it. Every time she made him feel he was inferior to her, he was upset—after all, he was the qualified psychotherapist, and she was only eighteen years old, and severely disturbed.

But it was going well today. Today he was in control.

"He's not *my* demon," she replied, looking down. Her eyelashes were so long that they cast shadows on her cheeks. "And no, I haven't heard anything. Or sensed anything."

"Then that makes it—let's see—sixteen weeks since you

saw or heard the demon, or sensed his presence, am I right?" He intentionally let his voice sound a little superior, knowing that he was provoking her that way.

"Yes," she said.

He liked her meek tone of voice and allowed himself a small smile. "So why do you think your hallucinations have gone away?"

"I guess it could be . . ." She bit her lower lip.

"Yes? Speak up."

She sighed and put a strand of her gleaming golden hair back from her forehead. "I guess it could be the pills," she admitted.

"Very good." He leaned forward to scribble a note: *ak*, *d.s.*, *v.*, *hr*, *vk*. They were nonsense abbreviations; he was just making them up as he went along. Because he knew that she was reading them upside down and trying to work out what on earth they meant. With difficulty, he suppressed a triumphant grin. Yes, she had certainly aroused a sadistic streak in him, and yes, he had given up the proper professional approach to treating her long ago. But that didn't matter to him. Anabel was no ordinary patient. He wanted her to acknowledge his authority at long last. He was Dr. Otto Anderson, and one day he would be medical director of this psychiatric hospital. The institution where she was presumably going to spend the rest of her life. "Pills are essential in the treatment of a case of polymorphous psychotic disorder like yours," he went on as he leaned back again, relishing the expression on her face. "Therapeutically, however, we have done much more than that. We have identified your childhood traumas and analyzed the causes of your false memories." That was a great exaggeration. He knew from the girl's father

that she had spent her first three years of life with a dubious sect that performed rites of black magic, but Anabel herself couldn't remember anything. And his attempts to find out more by means of hypnotism—which he had used even though it wasn't really allowed—had not been successful either. In fact, they knew no more than they had at the beginning of her treatment. He wasn't even sure whether the causes of Anabel's psychotic disturbance really did lie in her childhood; he wasn't sure of anything about her. But never mind—what mattered was that she saw him as the experienced psychiatrist who could read her mind, the man to whom she owed all her insights. “So at last you are ready to accept that your demon existed only in your imagination.”

“Stop calling him my demon.” She pushed her chair back and stood up.

“Anabel!” he said sternly. And it had been going so well. “Our session isn't over yet.”

“Oh, yes it is, dear doctor,” she replied. “My alarm clock will go off any moment now. I have a date to see a course adviser about my studies, and I mustn't oversleep and miss it. You'll laugh, but I want to study medicine so that I can specialize in forensic psychiatry later.”

“Don't talk nonsense, Anabel!” A strange feeling came over him. Something was wrong. With her. With him. With this room. And why was the air full of the scent of his mother's lily-of-the-valley perfume all of a sudden? He nervously reached for his pen. A date to see a course adviser about her studies? Ridiculous. They were in the closed department of the hospital, and Anabel couldn't go anywhere without his permission, not even out onto the grounds. “Sit down again at once. You know the rules. Only I can end our sessions.”

Anabel smiled pityingly. “You poor thing. Don’t you realize yet that your rules mean no more here than—what did you call them?—false memories?”

He felt his heart miss a beat. There was something buried deep inside him, a thought or a recollection, information that he must bring to the surface. That was urgent because it was important. A matter of life or death. But somehow he couldn’t get at it.

“Don’t look so shocked.” Anabel was already at the door, laughing quietly. “I really must go, but I’ll come and see you again next week. That’s a promise. So until then, sweet dreams.”

Before he could say any more, she had closed the door behind her, and he heard her steps going away down the corridor. The little monster knew perfectly well that he wasn’t going to give himself away by running after her, thus showing everyone that he couldn’t control his patient. But this was the last time she’d act up with him that way. She wouldn’t end the session against his will again. Next time he’d enlist the support of some of the male nurses. Maybe he’d have her strapped down—there were a number of methods that he hadn’t exhausted yet.

When he closed Anabel’s file and put it back in the drawer, he still had that faint lily-of-the-valley perfume in his nostrils, the scent that reminded him of his mother. And for a split second, he thought he even heard his mother sobbing as she called his name.

But then the voice and the perfume both went away, and everything was the same as usual.



DESSERT WAS TAPIOCA pudding, which would have taken my appetite right away if the Rasmus problem hadn't done it already.

"Aren't you going to eat that, Liv?" Grayson pointed to my tapioca, pale, translucent, and wobbly in its glass dish in front of me. He'd already wolfed down his own helping of lumpy slime with pineapple jam.

I pushed the dish his way. "No, you're welcome to it. One more British tradition that hasn't swept me off my feet yet."

"Ignoramus," said Grayson with his mouth full, and Henry laughed.

It was a Tuesday at the beginning of March, and the sun shone in through the tall, poorly cleaned windows of the school cafeteria. It cast a delicate striped pattern on walls and faces, bathing everything in warm light. I even imagined I could catch the smell of spring in the air, but maybe that was just the large bunch of daffodils lying on the teachers' table, where my French teacher, Mrs. Lawrence, had just sat down. She looked as if she'd slept even worse than me.

So there was spring in the air; Grayson, Henry, and I had grabbed our favorite table in the sunny corner near the exit; and I'd heard a little while ago that there wouldn't be a history test tomorrow after all. In short, everything would have been just wonderful, if I hadn't had the aforesaid Rasmus problem on my mind.

"Sometimes tapioca pudding can be delicious." Henry, who had sensibly skipped dessert, smiled at me, and for a few seconds, I forgot our troubles and smiled back. Maybe things would turn out all right. What did Lottie always say? *There are no such things as problems, only challenges.*

Exactly. Think how boring life would be without any challenges. Not that it had been absolutely necessary to add an extra challenge to the pile of them already facing me, anyway. Unfortunately that was the very thing I'd done.

It had happened on the evening of the day before yesterday, and I still had no idea how I was going to wriggle out of it.

Henry and Grayson had been studying for a math test at our house, and when they'd finished, Henry had taken a little detour to my room to say good night to me on his way to the front door. It was late, and the house had been quiet for some time. Even Grayson thought Henry had already left for home.

I was genuinely surprised to see Henry, not just because it was the middle of the night, but also because we still hadn't gotten around to officially changing our relationship status from "unhappily separated" to "happily reconciled." Over the last few weeks, we had silently gone back to holding hands, and we'd also kissed a couple of times, so you could have thought everything was back to the same as before, or

at least well on the way there—but that wasn’t it. The experiences of recent months, and things that Grayson had told me about Henry’s love life before I came on the scene, had left their mark on me in the form of a persistent inferiority complex about my sexual inexperience (or “being so backward,” as my mother put it).

If I hadn’t been so happy that we were close to each other again, maybe I’d have taken the trouble to analyze the feelings smoldering under my happy infatuation more closely, and if I’d done that, maybe I wouldn’t have thought up Rasmus in the first place.

But as it was, I’d put my foot in it.

When Henry had looked around the door, I was just putting in the new mouth guard for my teeth. My dentist, a.k.a. Charles Spencer, had discovered that I obviously ground my teeth in my sleep (and I immediately believed him), so the mouth guard was to keep me from wearing the enamel of my teeth away at night. I couldn’t tell whether it was working; mainly it seemed to make my mouth water a lot, so I thought of it as my silly drooling thingy.

At the sight of Henry, I immediately tucked it between the mattress and the bedstead, without letting him notice. It was bad enough that my pajama top and bottoms didn’t match, and didn’t suit me all that well either, although Henry said he thought checked flannel was amazingly sexy. Which led to me kissing him, kind of as a reward for the nice compliment, and that kiss led to the next one, which lasted rather longer, and finally (by now I’d lost some of my sense of time and place) we were lying on my bed whispering things that sounded like lines from soppy song lyrics, although right at that moment they didn’t seem to me soppy at all.

So our relationship status was clearly heading for “happily in love,” and I was inclined to believe that Henry really did think I looked sexy in checked flannel.

But then he stopped in the middle of what he was doing, pushed a strand of my hair back from my forehead, and said I didn’t need to be afraid.

“Afraid of what?” I asked, still feeling a bit dazed from all the kissing. It took me a couple of seconds to realize that it had just happened in real life, and not, as usual, in a dream where no one could disturb us. Which was probably why it felt so much more intense than usual too.

Henry propped himself on his elbows. “You know what. Afraid it might all happen too quickly. Or I might expect too much from you. Or want you to do something before you’re ready for it. We truly do have as long as you like before your first time.”

And then it happened. Now, in the bright light of the school cafeteria on a fine spring day, I couldn’t explain it to myself . . . well, I could explain it, sure, but unfortunately that made things no better. Anyway, Henry’s choice of words was to blame. That infuriating *your first time*.

It was the cue that brought my inferiority complex into play, and it also dragged its friend, my injured pride, along with it. They were both firmly convinced that Henry was somehow sorry for me because of my inexperience, or at least the expression on his face sometimes very much resembled pity.

Like at that exact moment, for instance.

“Oh. So you think I’ve never . . . never slept with a boy?” I sat up and wrapped the bedspread more tightly around me. “I see what you mean now.” I laughed a little. “You took that



virginity stuff seriously when you and the others were playing your demon game, did you?"

"Er, yes." Henry sat up as well.

"But I only said I was a virgin so that I could play the game with you." My injured pride was making me say things that surprised me as much as they surprised Henry. Meanwhile, my inferiority complex was applauding enthusiastically.

I really liked the confusion on Henry's face, and the way he raised one eyebrow. Not a trace of pity now.

"We never really talked about it before," I babbled, almost forgetting that I was telling downright lies, my voice sounded so convincing. "Of course I didn't have as many boyfriends as you've had girlfriends, but well, there was . . . this boy that I went out with. In Pretoria."

Since Henry didn't respond but just looked at me expectantly, I went on. "It wasn't a great love or anything like that, and we only went out for three months, but sex with him was . . ." At this point, my injured pride suddenly switched off (damn it), and I was on my own again.

And hating myself horribly. Why had I done it? Instead of using the opportunity for a genuine conversation, I was simply making everything worse. I instantly went bright red in the face because I saw no way of ending the sentence I'd just begun. *Sex with him was . . . hello?* Only now did I notice how intently Henry was looking into my eyes all this time. "Was . . . okay," I muttered with the last of my strength.

"Okay," repeated Henry slowly. "And . . . what was this guy's name?"

Yes, you stupid injured pride, what was it? I ought to have thought of that before. The longer you hesitate before telling a lie, the less convincing it is. Any child knows that.

So I said, quickly, “Rasmus.” Because it was the first name to occur to me when I thought of South Africa. And because I actually was a pretty good liar.

Rasmus had been the name of our neighbor’s asthmatic chow. I used to dog-sit him, and for a hundred rands an hour, I took him and a pug called Sir Barksalot for walks with our own dog, Buttercup.

“Rasmus,” repeated Henry, and I nodded, relieved. It sounded good. There could be worse names for imaginary ex-boyfriends. Sir Barksalot, for instance.

To my surprise, Henry changed the subject at this point, although I’d already prepared myself for an interrogation. Or to be precise, he didn’t actually change the subject, he began kissing me again. As if he wanted to prove that he was better at it than Rasmus. It wouldn’t have made any difference if Rasmus had been real—no Rasmus in the world could kiss better than Henry.

All that was two days ago now, and since then we hadn’t mentioned my imaginary ex-boyfriend again. Okay, so my inferiority complex had enjoyed its one tiny moment of triumph, but in the long run, the Rasmus lie was not good therapy. And that was why I had to contend with a sinking feeling in my stomach, even without eating tapioca pudding, and even though Henry was smiling at me.

By now Grayson had vacuumed up my dessert and was looking hungrily around the canteen as if he expected to see a good fairy flying over to our table to hand out more dishes of tapioca.

Instead of the good fairy, however, Emily swept past us, casting Grayson a glance for which she certainly ought to have had a firearms license. She’d have run down poor

Mr. Vanhagen if he hadn't saved himself by swerving toward the teachers' table, while Emily went on her way to the counter where they served lunch, and where Grayson's twin sister, Florence, was waiting for her.

For several weeks now, Emily had been Grayson's ex-girlfriend, and she had problems with that little syllable *ex*. I admired Grayson for his calm stoicism when he crossed Emily's path. Even now he was just grinning. "I thought I'd had my day's quota of scornful looks in English class."

"I think she's upped the dosage." Henry leaned forward to get a better view of Emily and Florence. "I'm no professional lip-reader, of course, but I'm just about sure she's been telling your sister what you dreamed about last night. Wait a moment . . . the bunny-rabbit dream? Really?"

Because winding Grayson up was always fun, and it also took my mind off my own problems, I went along with Henry at once. "You mean the dream about the fluffy toy rabbit? Do you think Emily will give you away?"

Grayson put his spoon back in the dish and favored us with a mild smile. "How often do I have to tell you two that you're wrong? Emily doesn't know anything about the dream corridor. Apart from which she'd never go poking about in other people's dreams. She's far too sensible and realistic for that."

Unimaginative was more like it, but I couldn't say so because Grayson had more to say. "I don't know why the pair of you are always going on about it. I mean, nothing at all has happened for weeks now. That stuff is over and done with."

As always when he said that—and he said it fairly often, to convince himself that it was true—a part of me (the trusting part that liked a quiet life) hoped he was right. In fact, it

was true that peace and calm had reigned in the dream corridors for weeks.

“Arthur has learned his lesson. He’ll leave us alone now,” said Grayson firmly, and the trusting part of me that liked a quiet life immediately played the same tune: *Right, we don’t always have to assume the worst! And people change. There’s some good in everyone. Even Arthur.*

“Yes, sure, Grayson.” Henry frowned mockingly. “And of course he forgave you, ages ago, for breaking into his house while he was asleep and punching his nose. Very nice of him.”

Arthur was sitting not far away from us, right behind the teachers’ table, where Mr. Vanhagen was talking excitedly to Mrs. Cook, the headmistress, while Mrs. Lawrence, her eyes drooping, seemed about to lower her head into her soup bowl. Arthur was laughing at something that Gabriel had said, and showing his perfect teeth. There was no sign now of the injuries inflicted on him by Grayson; his face was as angelic as ever. He seemed relaxed and self-confident. I immediately regretted looking his way. The sight of him always made me furious all over again, and so did the fact that the others had no idea what kind of person was really sharing a table with them.

“Well, he may still be angry with me,” Grayson conceded. “But he’s bright enough to know when he has to give up.” He energetically collected his assorted empty plates and dishes. “No one would give it another thought if you two would stop going through dream doors that shouldn’t really exist.” The doubtful expression on our faces obviously annoyed him because he looked away, but he added, thrusting out his chin defiantly, “Everything’s just fine.”

The trusting part of me that liked a quiet life had finally fallen silent.

“Sure, it’s fine and dandy.” My eyes flashed at Grayson. “Aside from a few minor details, like the fact that Arthur swore he’d get his revenge on us after he failed to murder my little sister. Or the fact that bloodthirsty Anabel has put her psychiatrist into some horrible kind of coma while she’s on the loose again. Or that your supersensible, morally impeccable ex-girlfriend slinks into your dreams by night. But like I said, those are only minor details. Everything is just fine.”

“That’s not true.” Although I had mentioned only a fraction of our problems in my list, Grayson picked on only the comparatively harmless bit about his ex-girlfriend. “Even if it was really Emily that you two saw in the dream corridor, which isn’t likely, it will have been a one-off incident.” He slammed a used spoon down on the pile of dishes on his tray. “Never mind the fact that she’s guaranteed to take no interest in my dreams—she could never get past my new security precautions. Nor could you,” he added in a grim undertone.

“Oh, is Frightful Freddy going to make people spell *tapioca pudding* backward?” I was about to ask, but I got no farther than *Freddy* because at that moment Mrs. Lawrence jumped up and climbed on the teachers’ table.

And we were soon to discover that we’d been like people having a comfortable picnic on the crater of a volcano. They know the volcano could erupt any moment, but they keep saying how terribly dangerous it is, and arguing, and only when the earth shakes underneath them and lava shoots up do they

realize that the situation is really serious. And that it's too late to do anything to save themselves.

Having knocked several glasses over, Mrs. Lawrence had attracted the attention of everyone present. Some of the teachers jumped up because their juice or water was dripping over their clothes. Mrs. Cook, with great presence of mind, picked up the vase of daffodils and got it to safety, and all the students sitting near us started whispering.

Mrs. Lawrence was around forty, and with her finely drawn features, dark hair, and long, graceful neck, she reminded me of that French movie star with the long bangs—Sophie Someone. She liked to wear pale blouses, Chanel suits, and high-heeled shoes in which she could move amazingly fast. Her hair was pinned up in a style that was elegant but still looked casual, and she could glare at you quite sternly if you hadn't done your French homework. In general, she looked the very image of the ideal French teacher, and we'd always felt as if Mrs. Cook hadn't appointed her in the normal way but had hired her straight from a movie set.

But that image had taken a bad knock now. Totally unfazed by the chaos around her, she stood on the teachers' table surrounded by the used dishes and overturned glasses and flung out her arms in a dramatic gesture.

At first I thought she might be going to make some kind of *Dead Poets Society* speech, quoting Walt Whitman, which would have been odd enough, anyway, since English poetry wasn't her subject, but unfortunately I was wrong.

"As you may know, because anyone could have read it in the blog of some little tart calling herself Secrecy, Giles Vanhagen here and I have been having an affair for the last two school years," she announced in the clear voice that usu-

ally made her students tremble, and not only the younger ones. Mr. Vanhagen, who had just been trying to mop up the contents of the spilled glasses with a napkin, froze rigid, and all the color drained out of his face.

You could have heard a pin drop in the cafeteria.

“An affair,” repeated Mrs. Lawrence, turning the corners of her mouth down scornfully. “I hate that word. It makes everything so shabby, so petty and despicable, when it seemed to me so pure, wonderful, and sweet. I was so in love, so happy, and so sure that we had been made for each other.”

Thinking about it later, it struck me as remarkable that in a room full of adolescents, who aren’t famous for the delicacy of their feelings, no one giggled, or laughed, or brought out a cell phone to record this astonishing moment. I saw nothing but shocked faces. And no one moved. You could bet that a teacher at that venerable institution, the Frogmal Academy for Boys and Girls, had never before climbed up on a table. If people ever did go out of their minds here, you could be sure they did it in a very correct and proper way, behind closed doors.

“I believed him when he swore he was going to leave his wife,” Mrs. Lawrence went on, pointing a shaky finger at Mr. Vanhagen, who was obviously wondering whether the better course of action would be to hide under the table or sprint for the exit.

“But I should have known better!” Mrs. Lawrence turned on her heel, knocking another glass over. “Girls, are you listening? You must never trust men. All they want is to steal your heart and then tread it underfoot!” She looked around the canteen. “Would you like me to prove it?” she

cried. "Would you like me to show you what he did to my heart?"

That was undoubtedly a rhetorical question not expecting any answer, although a fervent *no* or a projectile accurately aimed at her head might have prevented the catastrophe that now took place. But we were all too stunned to do anything.

Slowly, very slowly, Mrs. Lawrence unbuttoned her Chanel jacket and let it slide down over her shoulders to fall into Mr. Daniels's plate of salad. Then she undid the buttons of her blouse one by one.

"Look at this," she cried as she did so. "I'll show you where he tore the heart out of my breast."

I realized that I was holding my breath. We were all holding our breath. Two more buttons, and we'd see what color bra Mrs. Lawrence was wearing.

Mrs. Cook was the only one who summoned up the strength to move. She cautiously put the vase of daffodils down on the floor and reached out her hand. "Christabel, my dear! Do please come down from that table."

Mrs. Lawrence stared at the headmistress, irritated. "But my heart," she murmured. "I must show them my heart."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Cook, and her voice trembled a little. "Come along, let's go to my office."

"Where . . . ?" Mrs. Lawrence lowered her hand and looked down at herself. The heel of her left shoe was parked in Mr. Vanhagen's soup bowl, and when she took it out, pea soup dripped off it. "What happened? How did I . . . ? Why . . . ?" Her expression was one of pure horror now, and she began swaying slightly. Like someone awoken from deep sleep and not sure where they are.

"It's all right, Christabel," Mrs. Cook reassured her. "You



just have to get off this table. Andrew, could you give her a hand?" she asked Mr. Daniels.

"Who . . . where . . . ?" Mrs. Lawrence looked around the room in panic, her eyes disorientated as they wandered over our faces.

A thought shot through my head—she looked just like my sister, Mia, when she had been sleepwalking, and understanding rose in me, along with a bit of stomach acid. Mrs. Lawrence hadn't just lost her mind; there was method in her madness. And it had been staged especially for us. Someone had manipulated Mrs. Lawrence like a puppet, in order to show us something

To show us he was far superior to us—and more than a little way ahead in the game as well.

"This is a dream, isn't it?" Mrs. Lawrence managed to say. "This *must* be a dream."

"Unfortunately not," whispered a girl behind me, and I was sure that all of us in the place felt as sorry for the stammering, swaying woman as I did.

All of us but one.

While Mr. Daniels and Mr. Vanhagen, who was still white as a sheet, helped Mrs. Lawrence down from the table, and Mrs. Cook put her arm around her and led her out of the cafeteria, I slowly turned my head and looked at Arthur. He seemed to have been waiting for that because, for once, he held my gaze with his clear blue eyes. Held it until Henry and Grayson were staring at him too. Without a shadow of doubt, all three of us had come to the same conclusion.

Arthur smiled. Not even triumphantly, but with a horrible kind of deep self-satisfaction.

While all the students around recovered from their shocked

rigidity and began streaming out of the room, Arthur gave us a little bow.

“And that was only for a start, you guys,” he whispered as he passed us in the crush a split second later. “Try to improve on it if you can.”



HENRY WAS THE first to pull himself together. “Well, so much for the reformed version of Arthur.”

“Shit” was all that Grayson said, burying his face in his hands.

“How did he do that?” I asked, and the horror in my voice made me even more scared than I was already. “How could he manipulate Mrs. Lawrence in a dream, so that she’d climb on the table at lunchtime and set about wrecking her own life like that?” I was staring at the chaos around the teachers’ table.

Henry shrugged his shoulders. “A particularly nasty kind of hypnosis, I guess. He only needed some personal thing of hers, and then he just had to find her door.”

“Easy as pie,” agreed Grayson ironically.

“But why poor Mrs. Lawrence? What . . .” I stopped for a moment because Emily’s brother, Sam, was just pushing past our table on his way out of the cafeteria. Since all the fuss about Mr. Snuggles, the topiary peacock, he would mutter quietly, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” whenever he

passed me, and recently he'd taken to saying the same thing to Grayson, but today he seemed too upset to think of that. I waited until he was out of earshot, and then I asked again, "Why Mrs. Lawrence? What has she ever done to Arthur?"

"Nothing, as far as I know." Grayson was as baffled as I was. "Arthur gave up French two years ago."

"I don't suppose it was anything personal," said Henry. Unlike Grayson, he didn't seem upset, but strangely animated. "He probably picked on Mrs. Lawrence just by chance, to show what he could do. To show *us* what he could do." He looked at his watch. "Come on, Grayson, we have to be in class discussing futurist cubism in Russian avant-garde art with Mrs. Zabinski."

Sighing heavily, Grayson reached for his jacket. "Hell, I still have goose bumps all over. I'd never have expected to feel so scared of Arthur. But right now it seems to me like all the other villains in the world are still in kindergarten by comparison."

"Look at it in a positive light." Henry gave Grayson an encouraging slap on the shoulder. "At least we know now why he's been keeping so quiet these last few weeks. He's worked out how to dominate the world."

Although that last bit was obviously meant as a joke, neither Grayson nor I could laugh at it.

"If Arthur can manipulate people in their sleep so that they'll do what he wants in real life, then world domination isn't such a far-fetched idea," I murmured. "And we can't even warn anyone—or we'd end up in a psychiatric hospital faster than you can say *dream doors*."

"Yes, well." Henry gave a wry grin. "It's just a shame we're the only ones who can stop him."

"Although we don't have any idea how," I added quietly.

"But . . . but we must do something." For a few seconds, Grayson looked utterly determined. "Let's all three of us meet at our place after practice tonight. We need to make a plan." As he put his jacket on, however, something seemed to occur to him, and the determination vanished from his expression again and gave way to sheer desperation. "That bastard! He really has picked one hell of a time. How are we supposed to save the world *and* pass our final exams at the same time?"

Henry laughed briefly. "At least he has the same problem himself. I don't think that Arthur is about to fail his exams for the sake of world domination."

I just hoped he was right about that. Although of course you don't necessarily need A levels if you plan to dominate the world.

In the two classes after lunch, no one was talking about anything but Mrs. Lawrence's nervous breakdown and her near striptease act. Apparently Mrs. Cook had driven her straight to a hospital, and she probably wouldn't be out again in a hurry. Mr. Vanhagen wasn't teaching that afternoon either. Maybe he'd also had a nervous breakdown, as my friend Persephone suspected. Or maybe he'd gone home to his wife and was looking for a new job. You didn't know whom to feel sorrier for.

By the time I set off for home with my little sister, Mia, the story had spread to the lower school students. Of course Mia wanted to know the details. "Is it true that she was wallowing in pea soup and left a slimy trail all over the school building?" she asked as soon as we'd left the schoolyard.

I was about to answer her, when someone put an arm around me from behind. Automatically, I put both hands up.

“Leave out the kung fu, please. It’s only me!” Henry strolled along beside us. He still seemed to be in an inappropriately good mood, but I could just have been misinterpreting it. “Hi, Mia!” he said. “Nice hairdo.”

“Lottie calls it the Empress’s Nest.” Mia put her hand to the braids pinned up on top of her head. “Liv and I call it the Empress’s Compost Heap.”

“Very useful if you don’t know where to hide your boiled egg from breakfast,” said Henry, taking his arm off my shoulder and reaching for my hand instead. “Okay if I come part of the way with you? Why aren’t you on the bus, come to think of it?”

“Because it’s such a lovely sunny day.” Mia was staring at our entwined hands and frowning. Before she could ask anything embarrassing (like “Are you two an item again or not? And if not, why are you holding hands?”), I added hastily, “And because there’s always a boy from Mia’s class on the bus who calls her Princess Silver Hair. His name is Gil Walker, and he writes her love letters. In his own rhyming poetry.”

“How ghastly.” Henry laughed, and I forced myself not to look at the crinkles at the corners of his mouth and think of what it felt like to kiss them.

“You’re dead right.” Luckily, Mia let that distract her. “At last, someone who doesn’t think it’s sweet and touching. Lottie, Mom, and Liv have been trying to persuade me to think up delicate things to say, so as not to hurt his feelings.”

“So she told him, with the utmost delicacy, that he’d damn well better find some other princess to worship,” I explained.

“Adding that otherwise I’d stick his poems where the sun never shines.” Snorting, Mia kicked a pebble along the side-

walk. “Unfortunately that didn’t put him off a bit. It just inspired him to write another poem.”

She was right. Even I had to admit that it’s no fun riding on a bus with someone behind you trying, at the top of his voice, to find rhymes for *eyes of heavenly blue* and *teeth with a glittering brace*.

“Mia and I have been thinking of fighting back with a poem of our own, called ‘Walker the Stalker,’” I said.

The crinkles at the corners of Henry’s mouth were still there. “Ah, yes, that’s love!” he said with a theatrical sigh. “Makes one do peculiar things. By the way, Mia, do you still remember South Africa and a certain Rasmus?”

All of a sudden the joke was over.

“Rasmus?” repeated Mia.

Oh my God. Please don’t. I had stopped dead in alarm. That was the trouble with lies—they always caught up with you sometime. Now Henry would not only realize that I’d made up my ex-boyfriend, he’d also find out that Rasmus was a dog. And then the pity in his eyes would be only too appropriate.

“Rasmus? You mean the Wakefields’ Rasmus?” asked Mia.

I was still standing there as if rooted to the spot on the sidewalk, trying to tell her telepathically to keep her mouth shut. Unfortunately the telepathy didn’t work.

Mia and Henry just looked at me, mildly intrigued.

“Er . . . hmm, yes, the Wakefields’ Rasmus. Rasmus Wakefield,” I said, pointing frantically at someone’s front garden. “Oh, look at those beautiful daffodils!”

My pathetic attempt to change the subject failed dismally.

Without waiting for me, Mia and Henry turned around and went on. I stared helplessly after them.

"What was this Rasmus like?" I heard Henry ask.

"Why do you want to know?" Mia asked suspiciously back.

"Oh, no special reason. Did you like him?"

At last I managed to get moving again.

"Rasmus? Yes, sure," said Mia. "He was really cute. Maybe rather pushy. Kind of possessive. The Wakefields had spoiled him rotten."

Oh no! Please no! She'd be talking about his blue tongue next.

"Pushy and possessive, was he?" Henry looked briefly back at me and raised one eyebrow.

"Wait for me!" I got between them.

"Liv always called him a *little slobberer*, didn't you, Livvy? Ouch."

Unfortunately my elbow hit her in the ribs just a second too late. I linked arms with Mia and Henry, uttering a small, artificial laugh. "No, I didn't. Does anyone have a spare mint?"

It was useless. Mia was enjoying her memories, and as for Henry . . . well, as so often, it was difficult to make out the expression on his face.

"Yes, you did, Livvy. You had all sorts of silly pet names for him, don't you remember? Buttercup was terribly jealous. She bit his leg when you'd been tickling his tummy. . . ."

Oh, for heaven's sake! "Can't we please talk about something else?" I said, maybe a tad too vigorously. "Mia, don't you want to know about Mrs. Lawrence? Henry and I saw the whole thing live."



This time it worked. I finally had Mia's attention, and for now her mind wasn't on the subject of my ex-boyfriend, a.k.a. ex-dog. Although I was afraid that Henry would go back to it at the first possible opportunity.

Mia listened, fascinated, to the tale of Mrs. Lawrence climbing up on the table and delivering her speech. And nearly showing us the very place where Mr. Vanhagen had torn out her heart. Henry and I told the story by turns, and Mia sighed sympathetically.

"How terrible to think that unrequited love can send you out of your mind," she said after we'd described Mrs. Cook leading the totally shattered Mrs. Lawrence out of the canteen. "A nervous breakdown in front of so many people—I should think you'd never get over it."

"It wasn't a nervous breakdown," said Henry. "Unrequited love didn't send her crazy, and she wasn't under the influence of drugs either. She was in the same kind of state as you when you were sleepwalking and tried to jump out the window."

I looked at him in alarm. I hoped to goodness that he wasn't about to reveal the truth about Arthur and the dreams. We'd been disagreeing about that for weeks. "Don't you have to turn off here?" I asked rather brusquely.

Henry thought that we ought to let Mia in on the secret, if only so that she could protect herself. Grayson and I were against it. She was only thirteen, and she'd stopped sleepwalking. By now Mia's subconscious mind had taken plenty of precautions (her dream door was as safe as Fort Knox), and Arthur had new aims in view. Knowing that he had invaded her dreams and made her do things while she was sleepwalking, things that almost cost her her life, would worry and confuse Mia unnecessarily.

"What do you mean?" Mia was staring at Henry.

As for Henry himself, he looked at me and sighed when he registered my stony expression. "You'll have to ask your sister. Yes, I do have to turn off here. Nice to talk to you both, though." He dropped a kiss on my cheek. "See you tonight."

"Does he really think Mrs. Lawrence was walking in her sleep?" asked Mia as I watched Henry walk away. As usual, his hair was standing out in all directions. I used to think he styled it every morning in front of a mirror, using all his fingers and both thumbs, until it looked as wild and casual as that, but now I knew that he had no less than fourteen cowlicks on his head doing all the work for him. I'd found every one of them myself, and stroked them, and . . .

"It's terrible to see what love does to people," said Mia.

"Yes, poor Mrs. Lawrence," I hastily agreed.

"I'm not talking about Mrs. Lawrence." Mia jumped up on top of a low wall and made her way along the flat top. "What's up with you and Henry? Are you together again, or aren't you?"

"Kind of. One way or another," I muttered, relieved that we had indeed changed the subject. "I mean, we haven't explicitly discussed it. There are still a few things I have to clear up. And then I stupidly went and . . . er . . ."

Mia sighed and jumped down on the sidewalk again. "Then you went and what?"

"Went and invented an ex-boyfriend that I'd slept with."

Mia was staring at me, horrified. "Why?"

"So that Henry won't think he's the first." Put like that, it sounded even worse than I'd thought.

"Why?" asked Mia again.

"Because . . . because . . ." I groaned. "I don't really know myself. It just sort of happened. As if it wasn't me saying it, but a nasty-minded ventriloquist's dummy yakking away. And now Henry thinks I had a boyfriend in South Africa. And had sex with him."

"I really don't want to keep asking *why*, but I can't help it."

"It . . . well, he always seemed so sympathetic . . . and then there was that . . . oh, you don't understand."

"You bet I don't. Please, dear God, don't let me ever fall in love and do silly things without knowing why I do them myself." Mia linked arms with me. "Oh well, at least it's not boring being around you and Henry. I can't wait to see how you're going to get out of that fix."

Me neither. "One more thing. If Henry asks about Rasmus again, don't say he kept panting in a funny way, or . . ."

Mia stopped and began grinning all over her face. "Oh, I get it now. That's why Henry took such a burning interest in the Wakefields' pudgy dog." She was giggling unstoppably. "You said your ex-boyfriend was called Rasmus."

"It was the first name I thought of." I was beginning to see the funny side of it myself.

"Oh God, Livvy, only you could do a thing like that!" gasped Mia. "Rasmus Wakefield. Good thing I didn't say he stopped to lift a leg at every streetlamp."

"Or stank in rainy weather."

"Or howled when you played the guitar."

"Or once got stuck in the cat flap."

When our front gate came in sight, we were still falling over laughing, and we almost collided with an unshaven young guy who was carrying two moving boxes, a floor lamp, and a saxophone along the sidewalk.

"Are you moving in here?" asked Mia, pointing to the house next door.

The guy nodded, which wasn't so easy, because two books were jammed between the top box and his chin, and they now started sliding out of place. "Oh, good." Mia smiled at him, pleased. "The people who've been living there are dead boring. The woman's been sweeping the front path every day and swearing at the blackbirds."

"My mother has a blackbird phobia." The guy sighed, and the books slipped out from under his chin.

"Oops," said Mia.

I caught the books before they could hit the ground. One was a heavy tome entitled *Criminal Law*, the other was a much-worn paperback copy of John Irving's *The Hotel New Hampshire*. Obviously a law student with good taste in literature.

"Hello, the return of the prodigal son." Florence got off her bike beside us. As usual, she looked simply stunning, not in the least worse for wear after a long day at school. Her brown ringlets were tied back in a ponytail, with one gleaming strand of hair loose and falling decoratively over her face. If you considered her enchanting smile, bright eyes, and cute little dimples, you'd never have believed she would ever do or say anything unkind. But impressions were misleading. Florence had been in a particularly bad mood recently. "I heard about your girlfriend throwing you out of her apartment," she told the unshaven guy. "Your mum thinks she's the most horrible person that ever lived. You too?"

"The second-most horrible, right after Poison Ivy." The guy smiled too, showing nice teeth. He didn't even notice me holding his books out to him. "Hi, Flo. You've grown."

Florence put the loose ringlet back behind her ear. "Time doesn't stand still, Matt. I'll be starting at university this fall. You'd better watch out that I don't finish studying law ahead of you. I heard you failed a couple of exams. Your mum thinks it was unrequited love of the girlfriend."

"Ex-girlfriend." Anyone else would probably have been writhing with embarrassment, but Matt didn't seem to feel the least bit awkward. He looked like someone who was at ease with himself even with a floor lamp under his arm, and even though he was moving back in with his mother.

"You're better off without her, Matt." Florence patted his arm, overdoing the sympathy a bit and making the standard lamp wobble. "She's telling terrible lies about you. Saying you split up because you had something going with her best friend. And her best friend's sister. And that you'd rather hang out in clubs than study for your degree. And didn't pay your share of the rent for four months because of what you owed on some ridiculously expensive vintage car with a hood about four times as long as its trunk, something like—no, *exactly* like that one." She pointed to the red car parked beside the sidewalk. It really did have rather a long hood. "What a shocking liar she is."

"It's not a vintage car; it's a Morgan Plus 8, made in 2012," Matt explained with satisfaction. "The father of a friend of mine was selling it at such a ridiculously low price that only an idiot wouldn't have wanted to buy. The downside is that I'll have to live with my parents for a few months and cook my own food every day. But I'll survive. With such nice neighbors." He winked at Florence. "I bet Mum has kept the love letters you wrote me. Maybe we should reread them together."

Now Florence was having trouble keeping the pitying smile on her face. "I was twelve at the time," she said, pushing her bike on. Her ponytail was bobbing up and down angrily.

Matt grinned at her retreating view. "Seems like only yesterday to me," he said while Florence and her bicycle disappeared down the path to our house. Then he turned to Mia and me. "And who are you two?"

A couple of girls who had been listening, openmouthed.

"Florence's future stepsisters," said Mia helpfully. "I'm Mia, and this is Liv. She used to have braces on her teeth too."

"Nice to meet you, Mia and Liv. I'm Matt. The character who'll be sweeping the path here and chasing blackbirds away for the next few months."

"That's good to know." I put *Criminal Law* back on the top box, and Matt wedged it down with his chin and set off up the path to the house next door.

"Thanks. Be seeing you again soon, I'm sure," he said over his shoulder.

It was amazing to see how long he could juggle the boxes and the floor lamp, not to mention the saxophone, which was already at a dangerous angle.

Something else seemed to occur to Mia. "Did your mother really keep Florence's love letters?" she called after him. "And if so, would you sell them to me?"

Matt laughed. "Why not? I could use every penny I can get."

"Don't look so reproachful," said Mia as we finally started up the path to the Spencers' house. "I only want them in case of emergencies."

"For your career as a blackmailer?"

“Better a blackmailer than a thief. I was watching when you stole his book. What for?”

“Oops.” I took Matt’s paperback out of my blazer pocket, pretending that I was surprised to find it there. “Oh yes. *The Hotel New Hampshire*. I just wanted to read it again.” That was a lie—we had a copy of our own on the bookshelves, even signed by the author with a personal dedication to Mom. In fact, it had come to me spontaneously that it might be useful to have a personal item belonging to Matt around the place. You never knew when such things might come in handy. And what could be more personal than what was obviously a favorite book, since it had been read several times already?

# TITTLE-TATTLE BLOG

The Frogal Academy Tittle-Tattle Blog,  
with all the latest gossip, the best rumors, and  
the hottest scandals from our school.

## ABOUT ME:

My name is Secrecy—I'm right here among  
you, and I know *all* your secrets.



### 3 March

*J'ai tremblé*

*tu as tremblé*

*il/elle a tremblé*

*nous avons tremblé*

*vous avez tremblé*

*ils/elles ont tremblé*

And didn't we all just tremble in Mrs. Lawrence's lessons when she had us conjugating French verbs! Woe to anyone who turned up late. In the first year, I thought her stern *L'exactitude est la politesse des rois* meant "Exactly like a politician," or something like that, and I connected it with being late and wearing the school uniform. (It really means



“Punctuality is the politeness of kings”; I add that just for those who opted to learn Spanish rather than French and who complain that my blog is too difficult for them.)

Anyway, that’s all over now. Maybe no student will ever be trembling in Mrs. Lawrence’s French lessons again. The last thing she taught us was never to get involved with a married man. Very useful. Could be even more useful than conjugating irregular verbs. Although I’m sure none of us can imagine ever getting involved with someone like Mr. Vanhagen—even if he wasn’t married. Well, would we?

One way or another, what happened in the canteen today is terrible, so terrible that I wouldn’t run a picture of it even if I had one. I owe Mrs. Lawrence that, although she did call me an anonymous slut. Well, the anonymous slut will tell you something now, Mrs. Lawrence: You were much too good for Mr. Vanhagen, anyway. And you’ll be okay. It’s said that psychopharmaceutical drugs work wonders these days. Who knows? One day you may be back teaching at Frognal Academy. Or you might meet the love of your life in the hospital and be happy somewhere else. I think you deserve it. *Chaque chose en son temps*. (Go and look that up, those of you who don’t do French. I’m not your interpreter, I’m only the anonymous school slut.)

Speaking of school sluts: In view of today’s drama in the school cafeteria, all other news pales, of course. So here are only the main headlines: At this very moment Jasper Grant is on the ferry from Calais to Dover. He was really supposed to be staying in that French dump until the end of the school

year, but his father had to go pick him up today. Because he's been expelled from the school there for breaking the rules, and his host family wanted to be rid of him as soon as possible. For now we can only guess what he did that was so bad, but the great thing is that tomorrow we can ask him ourselves.

I for one am glad—I've really missed Jasper.

See you soon!

Love from Secrecy



"JUNE? YOU DON'T mean June this year, do you?" Mrs. Spencer Senior, a.k.a. Grayson and Florence's grandmother, a.k.a. the Beast in Ocher, a.k.a. the woman who on principle left her Bentley occupying two parking spots, a.k.a. just the Boker for short, stared at Mom, horrified. "But that simply can't be done."

"Oh, there's another three and a half months before the wedding." Mom was sitting at the kitchen table beside a mountain of essays that she had to mark, but before the Boker arrived, she had put her feet up and was basking in the afternoon sun. She laughed happily. "We can take it easy."

"We?" Florence wrinkled her nose. "You can leave me out of that *we*." Although she officially thought Lottie's presence in the household unnecessary, she had taken to hanging around the kitchen every afternoon, wolfing down the cookies that Lottie baked. Today there were tiny apple and cinnamon muffins that tasted as delicious as they smelled. When Florence bit into one, an expression of bliss involuntarily came over her face for a moment. But when she noticed that Lottie

and I were watching, she said quickly, and as crossly as possible, “Anyway, Grayson and I can’t help you with the planning. We have more than enough to do with our A levels. And then there’s the end-of-exams ball in June. Maybe you really should think of putting it off until the fall. Or next spring.”

“Yes, or 2046, so that your grandmother could celebrate her eightieth birthday at the same time.” Mia picked up three muffins and looked thoughtfully at them for a moment, as if wondering whether they would all fit into her mouth at once. They did.

“Don’t worry, there’s nothing to plan.” Mom gave us all a relaxed smile. “We’ll just spontaneously improvise. Those are always the best parties.”

“But . . .” The Boker looked as if she had to gasp for air. “But this is a wedding, not a child’s birthday party. It takes more than a few balloons. The guest list alone . . . I mean, normal people have already made their summer plans by this time of year.”

“Yes, let’s hope that includes Great-Aunt Gertrude,” muttered Mia.

“Oh, that doesn’t matter. Anyone who has time to come can come, and never mind the people who can’t,” said Mom. “It’s not going to be a big occasion, just a nice, uncomplicated little party. . . .”

“But I hope Lottie can wear her party dirndl.” Mia grinned.

“And I’ll bake a wedding cake, anyway.” Lottie was beaming. “A three-tier wedding cake.”

“That would be terrific,” said Mom enthusiastically.

The Boker groaned. “All possible venues will have been booked for June already, of course—in the end, you’ll be

having the party in the garden here.” She gave a little laugh showing she meant that sarcastically, but Mom didn’t notice.

“Yes, that’s a good idea,” she said appreciatively.

“It would be a disaster,” said the Boker.

“Not if we make sure that Grandma, Great-Aunt Gertrude, and Great-Aunt Virginia don’t appear as the Supremes,” I said, and the Boker went pale. It didn’t seem to have occurred to her that we had a family of our own.

“Oh, how I look forward to meeting even more of you.” Florence rolled her eyes. She might be Grayson’s twin sister, but when it came to being good company, she took entirely after her grandmother.

Who had a vein beginning to throb on her forehead. “A little garden party! That’s probably all very well if you’re marrying a nobody without family or obligations.” She began pacing busily up and down the kitchen. “Unlike you, however, my son can’t simply ignore the traditions and principles that he owes to his social standing. You obviously haven’t the faintest idea of all that.”

“And there’s smoke coming out of your ears,” Mom said cheerfully.

“Nonsense,” said the Boker, but Mom was right: little white puffs were unmistakably coming out of the Boker’s ears, accompanied by sounds like a steam locomotive. That was when I realized that I was only dreaming all this, although the actual conversation had taken place, in just the same words, in the kitchen this afternoon. Except that the Boker’s ears hadn’t been smoking, and there hadn’t been a green door in the wall beside the fridge. I noticed the door only now.

The Dream-Boker had followed my eyes. “I never did think much of arts and crafts, far too fussy,” she said. “And

that kitschy lizard doorknob really is utterly tasteless . . . oh, my word!”

The doorknob had moved. Her fine black and red scales shone in the light, while the lizard stretched, uncoiled her tail, and opened her eyes.

“You’re not at all kitschy,” I said, charmed by her beauty as I always was. When I first saw my dream door, the lizard had been made of brass and was much smaller than she was today. Apart from a friendly wink now and then, she had never moved, but these days she scuttled up and down the door and condescended to act as a door handle only when I really wanted to go out. Her eyes were bright turquoise and—unlike the eyes of her twin on the other side of the door—always looked friendly. I was still looking for a name that would do her justice: mystical, musical, and kind of pleasantly familiar. After all, she was a creation of my subconscious mind and thus a part of myself. Just like her sharp-toothed, hissing sister on the other side of the door.

“Far too brightly colored,” said the Boker. “And totally unrealistic. The proportions in front and behind are all wrong.”

I waved a hand to dismiss the Boker from my dream. It was bad enough having her drop in on us so often at home in real life, noticeably picking days when Ernest was away on business and Mom had an afternoon when she wasn’t giving a lecture. Mia and I thought it was sheer bloody-mindedness, but Mom and Lottie, who persisted in believing in the good in people, thought the poor old lady just wanted to take part in family life and make herself useful.

Sure. And the Earth was flat.

I cautiously ran my fingertip over the lizard’s smooth

scales. To my delight, she began purring like our cat, Spot. Unrealistic but kind of nice.

“Call her Liz,” suggested Mia. She, Lottie, and Mom had turned up beside me to admire the lizard. Florence had obviously disappeared with the Boker. “I think she looks like a Lizzie.”

“No, too . . . too prosaic,” said Lottie. “Maybe Salamandria. Or Nyx, like the goddess of night.”

“Barcelona would suit her.” When Mom looked at our inquiring expressions, she added, “You know, like Gaudí’s famous lizard that . . . Oh, forget it, you two philistines.”

As so often in a dream, I found it a bit creepy when my subconscious mind dug up information from the depths of my brain that I thought I’d never heard. I’d type “Gaudí” and “Barcelona” into a search engine tomorrow. And hopefully I would find more than just lizards.

Someone was knocking at the door.

The lizard obligingly rolled up like a good little doorknob, while her twin on the other side of the door put her head through the mailbox slit and hissed, “It’s Henry.”

“That’s what I call an innovative spyhole,” said Mom.

“You could call her Mata Hari,” said Lottie.

I bent down. “What did Grayson’s room smell of this evening?” I asked through the mailbox slit.

“The bottle of cologne that Grayson dropped on the rug, which is probably going to smell like his grandfather forever now,” replied Henry on the other side of the door. “I bet he dreams of him tonight.”

I opened the door. Henry had propped one hand against the frame and was grinning at me.

“Hi, cheese girl. May I come in?”

"I don't know," I said, acting flirtatious. "It's the middle of the night. My mother would never allow it."

"Nonsense," said Mom behind me.

Henry put his head around the door. "Ah, a nice, comfy family dream. And it smells delicious too . . . freshly baked cookies, and cinnamon . . . incredible, all those good smells in your dreams these days."

It was even more incredible that he could smell what I was dreaming about. That was so crazy that I avoided thinking about it for long. Because whenever I did that, I felt afraid—afraid that in the long run there might not be any logical, scientifically verifiable explanation of this whole dream thing. Which in turn would mean that . . .

"Hello, who's this?" said Henry, interrupting my train of thought.

A rather fat chow had suddenly appeared under the kitchen table and was looking at us with his head to one side. Rasmus, as large as life.

"He always looks like that when he's begging for a treat," said Mia, giggling. "What's little Ras—"

"Ouch!" Henry was rubbing his arm. I had pushed him into the corridor, slipped out after him myself, and slammed the door behind us both—all before Mia could finish what she was saying. I could move faster in a dream than Superman if I had to.

"That little scamp. Let's check up on the dream corridors around here," I said, linking arms with Henry. "For instance, we could go and see whether Grayson is right, and it's really impossible to get past his dream door anymore."

"But it was so comfortable in there." Henry looked regret-



fully at my door. “While out here there could presumably be invisible spies and psychopaths up to all sorts of things.”

Right, or demons. You could never be absolutely sure. The corridor with its different colored doors and soft lighting could have looked cheerful and peaceful, but it didn’t. There was something sinister about its silence, and I couldn’t make out where the light came from anyway—there were no windows and no ceiling lights, in fact not even a ceiling that the lights could have hung from. A little way above the walls there was a vague kind of void that could be compared only with the pale-gray sky that hung over London on many days. There seemed to be no end to all the branching corridors; they just lost themselves somewhere in the shadows. All the same, I liked this place, and the idea that there was another human mind dreaming behind each door, so that everyone in the world was linked by this labyrinth. It was a magical place, mysterious and dangerous—a mixture that, to me, was simply irresistible.

I moved a little closer to Henry and took a deep breath. “We can have as many comfortable dreams as we like for the rest of our lives. Once we’ve saved the world from Arthur.”

Henry moved away from me, only to put both arms around me this time. “That’s why I love you so much, Liv Silver,” he murmured into my ear. “Because you’re always ready for an adventure.”

It was just the same with him. Without another word, we both turned into jaguars and padded forward side by side. I always felt a little safer here in nonhuman shape, and by now I could control being a jaguar so well that it didn’t take much concentration to keep the transformation going. Unlike

difficult shapes such as flying insects, immovable objects, and, that most difficult transformation of all, a breath of air, I could maintain a jaguar for hours on end. Sometimes when I woke in the morning after an intensive night dreaming in jaguar shape, I had taken on the role so well that I had to suppress an urge to lick my paws, and once I had even growled like a jaguar at Florence because she was standing between me and the coffee machine in the kitchen.

And speaking of Florence, the elegant reed-green door that was next to Grayson's tonight was certainly hers. Unless the initials F.C.E.S., in silver lettering on the wood, meant something other than Florence Cecilia Elizabeth Spencer, but that was rather unlikely.

We hadn't yet found out what the rules for the arrangement of the doors were, and why they changed places now and then. But it was certain that the doors of people close to you in some way, whether positive or negative, were never too far from your own. You could tell who owned many of the doors just from the look of them—for instance, Grayson's door was a perfect copy of the front door of our house, and Mom's door even had her name on it: MATTHEWS'S MOONSHINE ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS—OPEN FROM MIDNIGHT TO DAWN. Other doors weren't so easy to identify, but by now I was sure that the plain door painted an elegant gray next to Mom's Moonshine Antiquarian bookshop belonged to Ernest. Wherever Mom's door went, the gray door was always beside it. And the door painted bright red, with a showy golden door knocker, was a perfect match for Persephone's character, particularly as it kept getting closer to mine when we'd been spending time together during the day.

Not that I'd ever felt I needed to look behind one of those

doors, but it kind of reassured me to know which door was whose. If you spent as much time as Henry and I did in this corridor, you got to know all the doors in the corridors near it pretty well—even if they changed places or altered their appearance. I'd spent half the day wondering how the hell Arthur had managed to find Mrs. Lawrence's dream door. There were a great many doors here that might have suited her, but no real clue on any of them, like—oh, how would I know? Maybe like a picture of the Eiffel Tower carved on it, or a doormat saying BIENVENUE. Or at least a doorknob shaped like the stopper of a bottle of Chanel perfume. But Arthur had probably set about it pragmatically. Having laid hands on some personal possession of Mrs. Lawrence's, he'd only have had to try all the likely doors until he found one that would open. It would have taken him some time, but that just showed how doggedly he kept pursuing his unpleasant plans. And if Mrs. Lawrence hadn't built any insuperable obstacles into her door, it would have been easy for Arthur to get into the room behind it. And do whatever he had done there.

I felt the fur on the back of my neck stand up at the thought of it. And for another reason too: by this time, Henry and I had turned off our own corridor and were now in the one where we were likely to find both Arthur's and Anabel's doors.

Just in case Arthur was watching us somehow or other, we always used to stroll along this corridor in a particularly calm and confident way. We didn't want him to think we were afraid of him. So I cast only a brief glance—a glance as scornful as my jaguar face could manage—at the words *Carpe Noctem* hammered into the smooth metal surface of his door, and

then I turned my head away and went on scanning the surroundings. There—that plain silver doorbell on the door opposite was new. And even as I stared inquiringly at it, it melted and flowed like a silvery shining stream down the wall to the floor, where it formed again, grew taller, and finally turned into a girl with long, wavy hair and a striking similarity to Botticelli's Venus. Except for being much, much more beautiful, and wearing jeans and a T-shirt instead of standing naked in a scallop shell. Anabel Scott, probably the best-looking psychopath in history.

"Why, if it isn't the kitty-cat patrol." Anabel had an attractive smile, which had failed to impress me ever since she tried cutting my throat.

I wasn't so sure about Henry. He had changed back to his own shape and was smiling just as attractively back at her. "Nice to see you, Anabel. Is that your door, right next to your ex-boyfriend's? Interesting. Or are you hanging around as a doorbell to spy on him?"

"You'd like to know where my door is, wouldn't you? So that *you* can spy on *me*." Anabel gave a little laugh and then added, with a sigh, "Although spying isn't so easy since everyone has found out how to be invisible. . . . I never ought to have taught Arthur so much."

She had a good point. *One* brilliant psychopath around the place would have been quite enough. And there was no denying it: Anabel was brilliant. Somehow or other, she had managed to lure her psychiatrist into these corridors, and while he had been living out his megalomaniac fantasies here, like a child given the run of a toy shop, believing he had everything under control, Anabel had found a way of locking him inside his own dream—after he had signed her discharge papers,

by the way. Now Dr. Anderson, or Senator Tod, as he had called himself in the dream corridors, was lying in a care home somewhere in Surrey being fed through a tube—and was fast asleep. The doctors could find no conclusive diagnosis for his condition. Anabel had assured us that he was feeling fine because he was dreaming a life for himself and couldn't tell it apart from real life. All the same, and although Senator Tod hadn't been exactly a nice character, I felt sorry for him when I thought about all that. I had no idea how Anabel had managed to lock the man into his dream, but maybe he could be woken if his door was opened from the outside. But we'd have to find the door first, and unfortunately only Anabel knew where it was. She was right: invisibility made spying very difficult.

I growled softly.

"I'm afraid that now Arthur can do things even you haven't mastered," said Henry. He didn't mention the fact that we did actually know where Anabel's door was. Once, it had indeed been right opposite Arthur's, but since Anabel's breakdown last fall, her showy double door with gold fittings in the Gothic style had disappeared without a trace. Which meant that it had changed its appearance entirely, because Anabel herself was haunting the corridors as busily as ever. We'd been looking for it for ages, sometimes in corridors quite a long way from ours, but Henry had tracked it down only a week ago, thanks to his detective instincts and some underhanded shadowing tactics, as he claimed. But later he admitted that it had been pure chance—and luck—because he had been exploring the corridors invisibly when a bright-pink door with a Hello Kitty picture on it opened and Anabel cautiously stepped out into the corridor. When you were disguised as

a breath of air or something as insubstantial as that, it was difficult to the point of impossibility to move objects or do something as simple as pressing down a door handle, and it reassured me to know that Anabel obviously had the same difficulties. A second later, she had made herself invisible again, but that brief moment had been enough for Henry. He had waited for her to come back, so as to make quite sure that it wasn't the door of someone else whom Anabel had been visiting in a dream. Of course we'd seen the Hello Kitty door hundreds of times before; it was far and away the most tasteless in the corridors, and we'd never have expected to find Anabel behind it. You had to admit that her camouflage was perfect, in line with the principle that people who draw attention to themselves aren't likely suspects. How she had done it was a mystery to me; I was pretty sure that you didn't have any influence on the appearance of your own door. It seemed to suit its owner's frame of mind just like that. However, maybe Anabel had developed a special trick—it wouldn't be the first time she'd proved capable of doing something when we hadn't the faintest idea of it. Now, for example, she even seemed to be capable of reading Henry's thoughts.

"You mean that scene with Mrs. Lawrence. I read about her nervous breakdown in Secrecy's blog." Anabel glanced up and down the corridor again. "Arthur's been visiting her in her dreams these last few nights, so I knew at once he must have something to do with it. I did wonder what he wanted with her, of all people, after he gave up French."

"We think he picked her by chance, as a kind of guinea pig. He wanted to try out a new method of hypnotizing people in their dreams so that they'll do what he wants in the day-time."

Anabel nibbled her lower lip. “But why would he want Mrs. Lawrence to climb on a table in the school cafeteria and tell all about herself and Mr. Vanhagen?”

It was a good question. I looked at Henry with my jaguar head to one side.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Well, just like that. To show that he can ruin people’s lives.” There was a short pause in which he looked around. “Because he can.”

“Yes. Yes, maybe,” murmured Anabel, and her eyes were slightly glazed. “That would be just like Arthur. Or, anyway, the person that Arthur has turned into.”

I found it hard to imagine that Arthur had ever had moral scruples and something like a conscience, but Henry and Grayson also kept assuring me that their former best friend had once been a really nice guy. Before he fell hopelessly in love with Anabel and then realized that he had been exploited, manipulated, and misused for her purposes. However, I kept my sympathy well within bounds. Where would we be if everyone who suffered a bitter disappointment automatically mutated into a criminal? I felt sorrier for Anabel. After all, she hadn’t been born a crazy psychopath. Her early childhood with her mother in a sect that worshipped demons and went in for weird rituals had made her the monster who tried cutting my throat. And now that monster had created another monster—a nastier and more dangerous one than Anabel herself.

We knew it was risky, and neither of us was happy with the idea, but if we were to be a match for Arthur, we needed Anabel as an ally. Even worse than facing him without her help was the idea that she might get back together with him in the end. We had to prevent that, at all costs.

Henry cleared his throat. "No one knows what Arthur has in mind, but with the abilities he's developed, I guess every opportunity is open to him. He must be doing something like what you did to Senator Tod to get him to sign your discharge from the hospital. You must tell us how you did it, Anabel."

"So that you two can interfere as well?" Anabel gave Henry a thoughtful smile. "I can well imagine that you'd try everything, Henry Harper. No, thanks! It's quite enough to think that Arthur could spoil my plans."

"And what plans would those be?" asked Henry with a deep sigh.

"You've known that long enough." The light suddenly changed. It was as if a shadow were falling over the invisible sources of light in the corridors. Anabel made a sweeping gesture with her hand. "You both know who we have to thank for all this, and what we still owe him."

The air around us was noticeably chillier. I was very glad I was still a jaguar. That way, I could stare hard at Anabel without her noticing how uncomfortable I felt.

"Isn't all that about the demon over and done with?" asked Henry gently. "I thought you'd realized in the hospital that it was only part of . . . part of your sickness."

"Yes," said Anabel. "Or so they tried to convince me. And I may be crazy, but I'm certainly not stupid. I do take it into consideration that . . . that the Lord of Shadows and Darkness may have existed only in my sick imagination. But suppose that isn't so? Wouldn't you, too, rather be safe than sorry?"

No, we wouldn't. Heaven knows we had plenty of other problems as things were.

"Are you still taking your medication?" asked Henry, frowning.



“Always so splendidly direct.” Anabel was smiling again. “As it happens, I’ve stopped taking it. Just to see what happens. Or if anything happens. So we can wait and see.” Suddenly she seemed to be in a hurry. She threw her hair back over her shoulders. “Well, nice to see you, as always.” She walked away without waiting for us to say anything, and after she had taken three steps, her outlines blurred and became more and more translucent, until a few meters farther on she had disappeared entirely. She had taken the cold temperature with her.