Starlight & Strange Magic

by qqueenofhades

Summary

Lucy Preston, a young American woman, arrives in England in 1887 to teach history at Somerville College, Oxford. London is the capital of the steam and aether and automatonic world, and new innovations are appearing every day. When she meets a mysterious, dangerous mercenary and underworld kingpin, Garcia Flynn, her life takes a turn for the decidedly too interesting. But Lucy has plenty of secrets of her own – not least that she’s from nowhere or nowhen nearby – and she is more than up for the challenge.
In Which Lucy Preston Makes An Entrance

From the air, London resembles a vast, sprawling clockwork curiosity, a city of wheels and gears and steel and steam, the gothic towers of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament rising through the mist alongside the capacitor and telegraph aerials and the murky, coiling line of the River Thames spanned by new ironwork bridges. There is not much green, aside from the neat rectangle of Hyde Park and the smaller isosceles of St. James’. It is a world of bronze and brick and brass, stone and soot, burning coal to such a degree that faint yellow fog lies over the city even on clear days (and this being London in any century, there are not that many of those). But the yellow is mixed with the finer gold of the aetherium, which burns the brightest at sunrise and sunset and casts an eerie, lovely sheen over the crowded rooftops and old church steeples, the dome of St. Paul’s and the narrow crookback lanes that lead to forgotten medieval cemeteries and shops that murmur of magic. There is plenty about this London that is not at all beautiful, that is deprived and crammed and brutally poor in tenements and workhouses, opium dens and sleazy dancehalls, but when the aether falls on it, you tend to forget.

Lucy Preston sits by the isinglass window as the airship starts its final approach, firing its thrusters and easing down toward the Greenwich docks rapidly taking shape below. This is a comfortable passenger liner that nonetheless has made the transatlantic float from New York in only four days; its owners, the Great Western Airway founded by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, will be taking out advertisements in the papers to boast of speed records. Lucy has traveled second class, somewhat shockingly unaccompanied, and she glances at her faint reflection in the window. She is dressed for traveling in a striped-silk gown, belted overcoat, and broad-brimmed hat, parasol propped by one gloved hand and matching clutch held in the other. Women in 1887 require an obnoxious amount of accessories.

There are several bumps and jerks as the zeppelin’s crew throw down mooring lines and the well-dressed passengers get to their feet, preparing to disembark. Lucy subsides inconspicuously into the crowd and waits her turn in the queue like a proper Brit, feeling the cool, damp September air on her face as she starts to file down the ramp. Porters in caps and shirtsleeves are pulling the luggage off, trunks and portmanteaus and hatboxes, crates and birdcages and what looks like an entire household. Lucy waits until she is reunited with her own modest movables, pressing a penny into the porter’s sooty hand. She hasn’t gotten more than a few steps from the looming airship before a boy in a grubby neckerchief comes speeding up. “Carry your bags for a bob, mum? Fetch a hansom cab for you, mum?”

Lucy is aware that if she starts handing out too many tips, she will have half the urchins in London following her around (to say nothing of pickpockets) and she’d prefer to maintain close control of her possessions until she gets her bearings. She politely but firmly shoos him off, has to repeat the process five seconds later, and finally reaches the street. She could go by river, as there are plenty of small craft bobbing along the Thames, but decides she is not quite brave enough to step onto any of those. She hails a hackney carriage, climbs inside onto a hard velvet seat and a dim, musty interior, and gives the driver an address in Bloomsbury. He shuts the door, climbs up behind the horses, and with another jolt and a jerk, they roll off.

It turns out that it would definitely have been faster to sail. It’s a miserably slow, stop-and-start journey into central London, the cobbled streets crammed with horses, carts, broughams, hansom, costermongers and their barrows, a reeking tarlike slop six inches deep that should barely be dignified with the name “mud,” and here and there one of the new clockwork carriages, running on steam and driven by automatons that almost look human until you get close enough to see their blank metal faces and spinning-gear hands. Strictly speaking, they don’t need to look like that, but the wealthy Londoners who can afford the carriages have a certain expectation of it. Still need to
show that they have underlings doing their bidding, mortal or mechanical.

It’s getting dark, the gaslamps striking on in small islands along the street, by the time they reach the boarding house in Bloomsbury, not far from Russell Square, and the hackney rolls to a halt. Lucy accepts the driver’s hand down, pays him, and allows him to carry her bags up the front walk as she rings the bell. After a few moments, a maidservant in a starched black dress and pinned apron comes to answer it, and Lucy, with a final thanks to the driver, steps inside.

The boarding house is suitable, if plain, and the landlady, one Mrs. McBride, seems friendly enough, if clearly confused why Lucy is traveling alone. “Are ye meetin’ your husband then, mum?”

“No,” Lucy says. “I’m here to take a lecturer’s post at Somerville Hall, in Oxford. I’ll be traveling up there in a fortnight, when Michaelmas term starts.”

“Oxford, is it?” Mrs. McBride clearly is not sure how to react to that. She seems to decide that since Lucy is, after all, American, that may explain some of her more outrageous peculiarities. “They’re taking on ladies now, are they?”

“No all of them,” Lucy says wryly. “Or most of them. But Somerville was founded for women, I’ll be teaching history there.”

Mrs. McBride nods cautiously. “Your husband will join you up the country, then?”

Lucy starts to open her mouth to explain that no, in case it wasn’t clear, there is no husband anywhere in this equation. But given as she is thirty-four years old, and spinster status starts anywhere past twenty-five, that seems likely to provoke an outpouring of sympathy as if she has a terminal illness, or askance looks as if there must be something seriously wrong with her to stop an otherwise eligible young lady from getting married (is it the books? It must be the books) or more questions than she feels like answering. “Yes,” she says. “He’s coming to join me later.”

This momentarily settles the issue, though it leaves Lucy wondering if she’ll have to invent a husband, and Mrs. McBride summons her son, a strapping seventeen-year-old redhead named Seamus, to carry Lucy’s things up to her room. It has a narrow bedstead with a brass headboard, a wardrobe and side table, and a roll-top desk with a chair, as well as a filament lamp. The lavatory, Seamus informs her proudly, is just through the door there, and they’ve got a toilet done by the same chap who’s done the Prince of Wales’ at Sandringham House, holds a Royal Warrant. None other than the famous Thomas Crapper.

Lucy chokes a little at this, though she manages to avoid letting him see, and goes in to look. The hot water is not unlimited, so there will be no long showers, but there’s a claw-footed bathtub, a sink, and a pull-chain toilet, CRAPPER emblazoned over the back in raised porcelain letters. Lucy thanks Seamus, assures him that it’s suitable, and waits until he’s gone. Then she ensures that the door can lock, glances out the window to check the sight lines, and draws the curtains. Goes to her suitcase, undoes the catches, and looks to see if the knots she did up in a certain way have been undone or changed at all, or if there’s any sign of her things having been rummaged through. She doesn’t think anyone could have gotten to it on the airship, but she needs to check.

As far as she can tell, everything looks the way she packed it, and she’s kept the most sensitive bits in her valise, which never left her possession during the whole trip. Lucy digs through the skirts and petticoats and jackets, stockings and garters and blouses, takes them out and hangs them in the wardrobe, then opens the valise. She removes a six-shot Colt “Peacemaker” revolver and a box of bullets, loads it, and spins the chamber with her thumb. There is also a smaller one-shot, pearl-handled derringer, a gun barely powerful enough to do more than threaten cheats at cards in a smoky saloon, and a disassembled Winchester Model 1886 lever-action rifle, the heaviest thing
she’s got going. It should be enough to drop anything coming at her, as long as she doesn’t miss. And depending on who – or what – is coming at her, it is an essential precaution.

Lucy pauses, then hides the Colt in the side table drawer, assembles the Winchester, and stows it beneath a loose floorboard under the bed, finishing her unpacking and stifling a yawn. The bunk in the airship cabin was not particularly comfortable, she was close enough to the droning engines that it was always loud, and she had to maintain the same level of vigilance on the crossing, which means that she’s starting to run in a permanent state of sleep deprivation. That is not useful for the kind of work she is going to be doing, so perhaps she should try to catch up. Supper first, however. She doesn’t exactly have anyone to cable about her safe arrival.

Lucy changes out of her traveling clothes into a plainer shirtwaist and buttoned skirt, peering into the small mirror to tidy her messy bun. She briefly wonders if she should bring the derringer, then decides that if she really thinks she’s going to get murdered over dinner in the boarding house, she’s doomed from the start and all of this is a waste of time anyway. A bell rings to call the lodgers to mealtime, and she goes back downstairs.

Mrs. McBride dishes up portions of her hearty Irish cooking (Lucy has a feeling that potatoes in some shape or form will constitute a large part of her culinary experience over the next fortnight) for her current boarders: Lucy, a pale, wheezy young parson on his way to a new living in Hampshire, and a slightly self-important-looking fellow from Cambridge in the city to present a paper on aetheric science at the Royal Aeronautical Society. Lucy is the only woman, so after the parson has said grace (Mrs. McBride tactfully overlooking the fact that it is Protestant grace), the men both turn their feelers on her. The Cambridge fellow patronizingly congratulates her on a post at Oxford (the implication being that of course Oxford is a suitable place for someone of her second-tier intellectual caliber) and the parson wants to know about when her husband will be joining her. Lucy apologetically says that Mr. Preston is very busy in America and it may be several months. God, she hopes she doesn’t have to suffer through too many pleasant dinnertime conversations with these planks. Or perhaps she should search their rooms and –

No, no. She is getting too relentlessly paranoid (she has some reason, but still). Lucy makes a compromise with herself that she’ll look into them further if they do anything suspicious, but they’re both due to be gone by the end of the week. Neither of them have any particular reaction to her name or American accent, aside from the usual oh-dear expression of Brits confronted by expats from the colonies, and if she is going to suspect every condescending Victorian man of being a Rittenhouse agent, it will be a very long stay indeed. At least her polite fuck-you smile will get a lot of use, but that’s nothing new by now.

With that sorted, Lucy makes it through the rest of dinner, then graciously excuses herself and heads upstairs. As she’s reaching the top landing and about to turn down the corridor to her room, she pauses at the window, pushing the lace curtain aside for one last glimpse. She’ll just look, settle her mind that there’s nothing, and –

There’s someone standing just out of sight of the streetlamp, cast in shadow. They’re wearing a trench coat and bowler hat, initially looking like any other Londoner out for an evening stroll, but as Lucy looks harder, she can see the flat bronze gleam off its face that means it’s not a person, it’s an automaton. This one is entirely in a different mold from the ones that were driving the carriages, and for just as obviously a different purpose. Clockwork servants have been advertised as the new fashionable modern innovation (almost makes you wonder if the British Empire, currently at its height and owning a literal quarter of the earth’s landmass and population, would stop exploiting it, but nah) but this automaton has not been designed to scrub laundry boards or sweep floors. It is huge, square, and solid, has pneumatic pistons for arms and some kind of broad-barreled blunderbuss strapped on its back. Its head turns to either side with eerie, mechanical slowness, as if scanning the street and passerby. Back and forth, back and forth, for as long as it
keeps ticking. It will need to return to its clockmaker to be re-wound at some point; most automatons can’t manage more than twelve hours independent, so they are still vastly inefficient for long-term operations. But who does Lucy know that got their – got his – start as a clockmaker? Who would be very interested in this new technology?

Rattled, she jerks the curtain shut, and speeds to her room, shutting the door and turning the key. Not that the door would be much deterrent if the automaton suddenly bashed its way in, and even her Winchester is not likely to drop a murderous metal giant that doesn’t feel pain and is operated according to esoteric scientific principles. God, she wishes Rufus was here, but even he is not likely to be much help. This is entirely different from anything he has ever studied.

Right, Lucy thinks. Risk or no risk, she needs to go out tomorrow and see about acquiring herself a weaponry upgrade. It could just be a coincidence that a skull-crusher of a mechanical soldier is stationed right outside her boarding house, but that is really pushing it, and it unfortunately seems to vindicate her fear that Rittenhouse is already on the lookout for her here. Is that thing going to be there every night? Don’t risk pushing curfew or coming back too late after sundown, or – squish? It can’t stand there all the time, the neighbors would notice, and as noted, it needs to get rewound. It has to leave eventually.

To say the least, however, this is not a recipe for peacefully catching up on lost sleep, and after she’s undressed and shrugged on her nightgown, she makes sure the Colt is in reach and warily closes her eyes. Opens them every time the floor creaks, of course, but it’s an old house and it does that often, and one advantage to the automaton being so godawfully huge is that it would definitely make a lot of noise breaking in. Not exactly a stealth operator.

Lucy manages to doze off, though it takes a while, and wakes in the morning without having been crushed into pulp by the rise of the machines. She washes in the small amount of hot water she can get, dresses and does her hair, and puts on her hat and gloves and boots. It’s grey and drizzly outside, so the parasol will function for more than just the aesthetic, and she looks out the window on the landing before venturing any further. The spot by the lamppost is empty; there’s no sign of the automaton anywhere. A solitary hansom cab clatters by, iron-shod wheels making a racket on the cobblestones. Otherwise, the street is quiet. Lucy decides she’ll buy breakfast while she’s out, checks that the Colt is snug in its inner pocket in her belted tweed overcoat, and takes a deep breath. All right. She can do this.

She pushes through the door and out into the mist, adopting a confident stride as she heads south, toward Covent Garden. London at least looks mostly like she remembers, with the streets and neighborhoods in the same place, though there are of course countless new side lanes and unfamiliar buildings and no other familiar points of reference. But she has a good sense of direction and she doesn’t get lost, or at least too much. Covent Garden Market is just opening for the day, butchers hanging fresh-slaughtered pig carcasses, bakers and greengrocers and cheesemongers and milkmen setting out their goods, and all of it smells very nice, but aside from paying a halfpenny for a hot roll, Lucy doesn’t stop. Makes her way to the back of the market, and the dusty door there, set down several steps and barely visible among the slimy bricks that surround it. Here goes nothing, probably.

Lucy finishes off the hot roll and then digs in her purse, pulling out a small bronze obelisk and fitting it into one of the carvings on the door. It briefly seems to glow of its own accord, casting the alcove in burnt-umber shadows, and she turns it, hearing a whirring of gears clunking and clicking behind the door. After another moment, it slides open to the side, as if running on a track, and reveals a steep, narrow staircase that descends out of sight under the earth. The steps are cracked and mossy, uneven underfoot, and Lucy keeps one hand on the wall as she starts down. The last thing she needs is a dramatic facer into the Croft.
The door rumbles shut above her, sounding like a tombstone, and for several moments, the way is entirely dark, so Lucy has to feel with each foot for the next step. The Croft is not the Night Market, which was raided, destroyed, and put out of commission thirty-six years ago, and it is much more prosaic in its goods and services on offer, but it’s the only place in London she’s going to find heavy automaton-killing weapons without immediately drawing unwelcome attention. Everything sold here is, strictly speaking, terribly illegal, but that is a triffing account in Lucy’s life now, and it’s not like any of its denizens are very fond of coppers (or peelers, she thinks that’s what they’re usually called right now, after Sir Robert Peel, founder of the Met). Especially if enough money is involved, nobody should be talking.

After a few more minutes, Lucy can see weak grey light ahead, reaches the bottom of the stairs, and steps out into a long, low hall of indeterminate placement whether above or below ground. There are windows, but it’s not clear if those correspond with any particular light from outside, and the water that drips on the walls looks as if they might be in one of the countless old tunnels under London, near the Thames. The Croft, like Covent Garden, is a market, with stalls set up and sleepy-eyed proprietors boiling coffee in tin pots and pulling colored scraps of cloth off their wares, but everything you can get here should not be tried at home.

Lucy glances around, spots something that looks likely to cater to her needs, and starts off in that direction. It takes all of two minutes, however, for the usual problem to return. “You want what now, mum? If it’s a lady’s pistol you’re looking for, I’ve some handsome ones here, fit into a handbag and not too heavy for a – ”

“I have a derringer,” Lucy says impatiently. “I want something that could take down an automaton. I assure you, I know what I’m about.”

“Something that could do for a tocker?” The proprietor does a double take that would almost be comical in other circumstances. “The bloody hell would – sorry, sorry for the language, mum, sorry – a lady like you need something like that for?”

Lucy senses that the fuck-you smile is going to get a lot of use indeed, but she still needs to convince him to sell to her. She’s just wondering if she should casually pull out the Colt and twirl it like a gunslinger, when the faded bit of calico in front of the stall is pushed aside, and a man comes strolling in. He’s slightly weaselly-looking, with a sandy mustache and a pocket watch chain looped across his dirty waistcoat. “Morning, guvnor. You got the guns ready?”

“Ah – ” The proprietor shoots a guilty look at Lucy, as if a lady should really not have to witness this grubby transaction. “Got as many as I could get me hands on. Given the trouble of collecting ‘em, I really think it should be another guinea on the price? Or – ”

“It’ll be two, like we agreed.” The man glances at Lucy. “Didn’t know you had your trouble visiting today, eh? Looks much too good for you.”

“No, not mine, she just – ” The proprietor is clearly hoping that Lucy will remember some pressing business and clear out on her own accord. “This bird turned up and wanted a piece as could do for a tocker, would you believe that?”

“Did she?” The man’s attention is now fully on Lucy. “Why’d that be, mum?”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t realize this was the Spanish Inquisition.” Normally she might just go off and come back later, though she’s not certain that attitudes will have become progressively more enlightened in six hours, but now Lucy’s mad, and she isn’t leaving here without that gun. “Why exactly are you here, Mr. – ?”

“You can call me Karl.” He shrugs. “Don’t think I’ve seen you in the Croft before, Mrs. – ”
“You can call me Lucy.” She stares at him narrowly. “I’m new in town.”

“Apparently.” Karl raises an eyebrow. “How about you run along, then?”

“I want to buy a gun, and if that’s too – ”

“Can’t,” Karl interrupts, looking smug. “I’m here to buy all of them. None left for you anyway. Nothing against you being a lady, I’m sure, but – ” He reaches into his trouser pocket and after a brief interlude of digging, removes two tarnished but still-good golden guineas. “Go on, Dooley, there’s a good man. I’ve got the lads just outside, waiting to carry them off.”

There is another uncomfortable pause as Dooley, as the merchant’s name apparently is, glances between Karl and Lucy. Then he gives her an apologetic shake of his head and disappears into the back of his stall, reappearing in a few minutes with the first of several crates. Karl whistles, and several strapping-sized men troop in, crowding Lucy back against the plywood wall with no more notice than if she’s a wax figurine at Madame Tussaud’s (currently a highly popular attraction on Marylebone Road). There are three crates of guns, and these are not just polite little pistols that shoot ordinary bullets. Lucy catches a glimpse of highly modified stocks with aetheromagnetic receptors, electrical filaments and broad-bore muzzles, until it looks as if Guy Fawkes has turned up almost three hundred years later and really does not intend to fuck around. Who the hell needs this many guns? You could take down a whole airship. Or blow up the Tower or London, or –

It is obviously a less than advisable idea to be standing here as a clearly identifiable witness to a large-scale illegal arms deal, and unless Lucy is going to drive a private bargain for them to skim one off the top, she should in fact get out. She ducks out of the stall as Dooley is bringing the last crate out, but she has only gotten about a dozen yards when someone grabs her arm. “Where’re you off to in such a hurry, ma’am?”

Lucy turns and glares icily at Karl. “Let go of me.”

“In a minute.” Karl does not appear in any hurry to do that, until Lucy reaches up and pries his fingers off. He looks momentarily startled at the strength of her grip, and adopts an obnoxiously ingratiating smile. “Just thought – no need to make any trouble for anyone, now, is there?”

Lucy continues to stare at him coldly. She knows that no good can come of asking him flat-out why he’s buying so many guns, and she searches his face, trying to decide if he looks Rittenhouse. Not that Rittenhouse is so obliging as to wear a sign around their neck, but she does have some practice at it by now. Finally she says, as neutrally as possible, “Big party?”

“Something like that.” Karl shrugs. “Look, I’ll sell you one of the guns, if you really want. As long as you keep your mouth shut and don’t get in our way.”

Lucy wonders exactly what that means. Nobody is buying this amount of high-powered weapons just to put them into a cellar somewhere, and it seems more than likely that things are about to get very interesting, whether in London or outside it. She does need the gun, but she’s left unsure if this is a bargain she should be making. Is Karl a noted underworld figure? That is currently a thriving element in London, mundane or otherwise, and the Croft is, as noted, the hub for the extra-legal activities that spread their feelers through this strange steam-powered Victioriana. He doesn’t look like a feared crime kingpin, but that means nothing. They never do.

“Oy, Karl.” Right on cue, one of the henchmen pops up, gun crate in his beefy arms. “We got to get moving. Boss won’t be happy if we’re late.”

Karl turns to shoot an annoyed glance at his associate, even as Lucy notes that down with interest – Karl himself isn’t the boss, they’re working for someone else, though Karl seems to be some sort
of trusted, arms-procuring consigliere. With a long look at Lucy warning her that he is definitely going to remember her face, but now is in a hurry to blow this joint, Karl opens the crate, pulls out a midsize, short-barreled musket with a heavy stock and an aether coil, and hands it to her. “On the house,” he says. “This time. Like I said, you better not arse it up.”

With that, and no apology for his coarse language whatsoever (not that she needs it, but still a decided contrast to Dooley), Karl jerks his head at his trio of muscle-bound thugs, and they make a smartly paced exit. Lucy is left with a gun that she doesn’t really know how to operate, a hundred more questions than when she entered, and a lingering sense that she might have just made (another) powerful enemy. Who, she has no idea, and after a long pause, she stuffs the gun into her valise and ducks back into Dooley’s stall. “So who were they? Regular customers?”

“How – Jesus, Mary and Joseph, you scared me.” Dooley was clearly hoping very badly that he was done with unexpected visitors for the morning, and Lucy does feel for him, but she also needs some answers, and she’s willing to play a little dirty to get them. “Mum, you just saw – they bought my whole stock, I couldn’t sell to you even if I wanted.”

“I believe you,” Lucy says pleasantly. “You clearly had prepared their order, though. Admirable service. Who in London is buying that many guns, though? Any chance someone might know that they all came from you?”

Dooley’s eyes flicker back and forth. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, mum.”

“I’m fairly sure you do.” Lucy folds her arms. She is definitely going to take the opportunity to make misogynists squirm. Though it isn’t really something outstanding or personal in any case, not that that excuses it, but just what polite Victorian society has taught them from the ground up. The National Society for Women’s Suffrage was founded twenty years ago, and Emmeline Pankhurst lives and works in Russell Square right now, but still, change is going to be slow. “You’re frightened of whoever Karl works for, aren’t you?”

“Be a bloomin’ idiot if I wasn’t, wouldn’t I?” It’s hard to place Dooley’s origin – his surname is Irish, his accent is generally working-class London, though at that, it turns broad Cockney. “You want to get in trouble with that maniac? Be my bleedin’ guest.”

“Maniac?” Is this some notorious local bruiser and small-time mafioso that Rittenhouse has recruited to terrify the London underworld and coordinate some of their incidents? Lucy leans forward. “What maniac?”

Dooley looks as if he very deeply does not want to be having this conversation, but out of an apparent charitable desire to help prevent her from getting herself killed, he sighs and begrudgingly spills the beans. “Name’s Flynn. His lads come along, it’s just better you do what they say, easier for everyone. Only been in London a few years, but he’s taken down big fish already, bigger than ‘im. You want some advice, mum, stay away from all that. And please, for the love of Christ, don’t go telling anyone about. . . all this. I’ve got me the three nippers.”

“I’m not going to tell anyone.” That, at least, Lucy can promise him. But since it is readily apparent that he owes her a favor, and she still hasn’t quite forgiven him for making it so difficult and inadvertently getting her entangled in this when he could have just sold, she pulls the gun Karl gave her out of the bag. “I need cartridges for this. And anything else it takes. I expect you’ll give me a good rate on the price?”

Dooley cringes, but can clearly tell that he has made his own bed with this, and busies himself in fetching the required items. Its bullets are an inch long and half as wide, looking heavy enough to take down big game on safari, and there’s a hand pump that activates the electrical current if it is to be used on, as Dooley calls them, tockers. Since the only legally owned military automatons are
those belonging to the Army and the Met, it is plainly obvious that anyone buying this weapon is going to be getting into trouble with important people. And the mysterious Flynn sent his henchmen to buy three crates? Clearly, he is taking no chance that there is any important person in all of Great Britain that he might accidentally neglect to piss off. No wonder Dooley doesn’t want his name anywhere near it.

However, this fact is still gnawing at Lucy’s head as she leaves. Flynn could very easily be Rittenhouse, just because they like to have a monopoly on force and/or weapons of any kind, and certainly don’t give a Thomas Crapper whether or not it’s legal. But they have also always preferred to go the shadow-in-the-halls-of-power route. Recruit important people in high-ranking positions, get the system to work for them, turn the institutional wheels to their own advantage, rather than operate as rogues or outlaws. Rittenhouse is the law, that’s their strength. They make it, they are its organization and its enforcement. They’re much more likely to be using the automatons as their lethal weapon, in other words, rather than getting guns to destroy them. Flynn could be buying up the guns on Rittenhouse’s behalf in order to get rid of them, thus making it harder for the masses to oppose the tocker takeover, but it’s just strange enough that Lucy frowns. No matter what Dooley has said, she wants to know more.

By the time she climbs up the stairs from the Croft and emerges into Covent Garden, it’s midmorning, and London is awake and teeming with noisy, dirty, colorful life. Dodging past taverns, tenements, general stores, guildhalls, gentlemen’s clubs, booksellers, banks, hurdy-gurdies, townhouses, telegraph offices, tea shops, cemeteries, churches, more churches, insurance companies, statues, streetlamps, sideshows, park squares, museums, and houses of ill-repute, not to mention the countless boys flogging the Times or the Telegraph or other bastions of considerably yellower journalism, Lucy tries to think how to do some more digging without being totally obvious. She can’t get too far off track with her other little project either, but she can’t walk straight into Westminster and ask if anyone here is an agent for a dangerous American secret society. It’s always been hard hunting Rittenhouse, but here she feels like she’s doing it with a blindfold on and both hands tied behind her back.

Lucy stops to get a hot pasty for lunch, eats it while strolling down the Mall, and glances at the square grey oblong of Buckingham Palace at the end. Victoria has been queen for fifty years now; in fact, they celebrated her Golden Jubilee in much style and expense this past June. After a dip in popularity resulting from her decades of mourning and withdrawal from public life following Prince Albert’s death, she is once more a beloved, grandmotherly figure, prone to forming deep attachments to younger men – first John Brown, her Scottish equerry, and more recently to Abdul Karim, the Indian “Munshi.” If Rittenhouse was making some sort of play for her and her vast empire, wanted to make sure it was their sun that never set, would they send in a new favorite, a good-looking young fellow instructed on what to say and do to draw the aging queen’s attention? Disrupt Victoria’s attachment to Abdul before it becomes too deeply set (they only met a few months ago) and provide a more suitable (read: whiter) candidate for the tastes of the deeply starchy, conservative, and racist British court? It seems possible, at least.

Lucy tries to think if William Gladstone or Lord Salisbury is presently prime minister, as it changed back and forth several times during this decade, and that assumes that everything happened the same way here. It is obviously very close, with the addition of clockwork men and flying airships and other minor differences, but surely some things have changed, events nudged one way instead of another. How consequential is that? As well, it shakes up her usual rule of thumb for dealing with this. She doesn’t know what has happened, or what is going to happen, and that leaves her without any frame of reference for what she should or should not try to save.

After a pause, Lucy tosses the rest of her pasty to the ravenous pigeons, hails a hansom cab, and rides back to Bloomsbury, where she heads to University College, London. It started admitting women nine years ago, but that does not mean that the human fossil who peers down at her from
behind a high wooden desk is happy to see her. “Can I help you, Miss. . .?”

“Professor.” Lucy smiles pleasantly. “Professor Preston. I would like to go into the Royal Historical Society’s library, please. I hold a position at Oxford – Somerville Hall, I’m on my way to take it up. So if you’d just –”

She can sense herself about to be taking about her tenth Misogyny shot since landing, when there is a loud tut-tutting noise from behind her, and a small silver-haired woman, possibly in her seventies, appears from around the corner. “For goodness’ sake, Hubert,” she snaps. “I did promise I’d ensure you got the sack if I saw you being obnoxious to the lady students again, and I can entirely see to that happening. Surely you would prefer to avoid that? Otherwise do let me know, and we can make life altogether simpler for everyone.”

The porter – Hubert, apparently – opens and shuts his mouth, comes up with nothing, and is posthaste browbeaten into admitting both Lucy and the old lady, who is carrying a bronze-clasped case in one hand and her walking stick in the other, into the RHS archives. Lucy glances sidelong at her, feeling obliged to thank a fellow female academic, and someone who clearly has considerable standing around here to just sail in and shut people up. “I do appreciate it, ma’am. I’m Lucy Preston, by the way. I’m taking up a lectureship at Somerville in October.”

“I heard that.” The old lady regards her with a shrewd dark gaze, head slightly to one side. “Mary Somerville was my tutor and teacher, I knew her well. I am Ada, Countess of Lovelace. She taught me mathematics as a young girl, and we were quite close.”

“You’re –” Lucy’s jaw drops. “You’re – oh my God, Ada – Lady Lovelace, I’m – I’m honored, I’m very honored to meet you. I just thought – well, never mind, I – I didn’t know you had – had a post here?”

“I don’t,” Ada says aristocratically. “I do stop by on occasion to tweak the Analytical Engine, though. It does need a terrible lot of fiddling, and I’m still really the only one who knows how to do it. Will you have read any of my papers, then?”

“I – yes, I’ve – I’m familiar with your work. You and – and Mr. Babbage, you managed to actually build the Engine, then? I didn’t think you did.”

“It was quite a trial.” Ada glances around the library, then starts toward a door from behind which a faint whirring and clicking is emanating. Lucy trails worshipfully after her – after all, it is Ada Lovelace, only legitimate daughter of Lord Byron, mathematical genius, and essentially the first computer programmer, in partnership with the great inventor and eccentric Charles Babbage. She has clearly lived well past the age of thirty-six, enjoyed a successful career, and become a respected intellectual powerhouse in the age of steam. Ada pulls a key out of her case and unlocks the door, revealing a room containing a large, clattering machine. Treadles stamp, cards are punched, pistons spin, gears clank, and keys slam, and it smells like oil and hot metal. “Don’t stand too close, dear. It can tend to spit.”

Lucy takes a precipitate step back as Ada forages in, removes a pair of goggles from her case and puts them on, and takes a wrench out, regarding the machine like a doctor preparing for a complicated surgery. She expertly ducks as it throws a bolt, shakes her head at it, and levers it back into place, tightening it a few turns and checking the cards that come chittering out. Then she tips her head at Lucy. “Here, give it a try. Ask it to find something in the library for you.”

“Is that what it. . .?” Lucy supposes there must be several operable Analytical Engines, designed for different tasks, and that University College owns this one, at enormous pride and expense, so its students don’t have to dig through card catalogues like everyone else. Wary of any more bolts, she steps closer. “Do I just ask it out loud?”
“Yes. Just there.” Ada points at a bronze speaking trumpet. “Nice and clear.”

“Er.” Lucy glances reflexively over her shoulder. There’s no one there, but she feels nervous anyway. As quietly as she can, she says, “Rittenhouse?”

“What was that? Don’t mumble, dear, I can’t abide mumblers. The machine won’t understand you, anyway.”

Lucy raises her voice. “Rittenhouse.”

There is a corresponding clack and whir from the Engine, riffling through punch cards, but it does not last for very long, or spur a second phase of operations. Ada shakes her head. “Nothing on that topic, I’m afraid. What on earth is Rittenhouse?”

“It’s better if you don’t know.” Lucy considers, then clears her throat. “Flynn?”

This time, there is a louder and longer flurry from the machine, and a trapdoor bangs open, a tray comes rattling through, and then another, containing several stacks of newspapers and a few books. Lucy, after a glance at Ada to confirm that is what she is supposed to do, takes out the papers and carries them out to the reading room, spreading them on one of the tables. They are all the articles or other items containing the word Flynn, and Lucy quickly discovers she should have been a lot more specific, as it is a common Irish surname and there are apparently five hundred Patrick Flynns in the city, to say nothing of all the other names. Just as she’s about to give up, she comes across an article in the Times from last year, condemning the disruption and mayhem of one Garcia Flynn, and the lawlessness he has brought to London’s underworld (not, one has been given to understand, a particularly lawful place to start with – they probably don’t even take tea at four o’clock, the hooligans). It is the opinion of the Editorial Board that he is riffraff, and a gipsy to boot. They really cannot wait until some public-minded citizen gets him chucked into the Old Bailey where he belongs. Newgate gallows are not out of the question.

Lucy stares at it for a long moment. She can’t be sure, but this sounds like her man. She was figuring he was Irish, and a gipsy could mean that, as it’s used to refer to Irish Travelers, but it could also mean an Eastern European more generally. Garcia isn’t an Irish name, though, and the blurry, three-quarters photograph affixed shows a tall, dark, sharp-featured man, face turned away from the camera; he is obviously not about to sit still for the several minutes it takes for a full exposure. He is wanted for questioning in regard to several unexplained incidents of a violent nature. A substantial reward is offered for information.

Since this article is from August 1886, and it’s presently September 1887, Lucy can assume, given her run-in with Flynn’s boys this morning, that they have not in fact caught him. Dooley said he’s been in the city a few years – was this just the first time he brought himself to the attention of the authorities? Either way, he doesn’t fit the profile for a likely Rittenhouse mole, not if his name and (most of) his picture are in the paper urging the public to turn him in. Who the hell is this man? She’s heard of a lot of people, but she hasn’t heard of him.

Having sifted through the rest of the papers and not found much else, Lucy carries them back and puts them in the tray, pushing them back through the trapdoor. Ada is continuing her tinkering, and Lucy supposes it’s best to leave her to it; besides, she’s nervous about cutting it too close with getting back to the boarding house, in case the automaton returns at dark. It’s only midafternoon, but dusk comes increasingly early in London in autumn, and she can make a few stops beforehand. She tells Ada once more how amazing it was to meet her, and hurries out.

The rain has stopped, though it’s still murky and cool, and Lucy weighs up where she wants to try next. She’ll probably have to venture to the rougher parts of the city at some point, and even with
a good deal of heavy weaponry, that will be a gamble as a woman alone. Her feet are getting sore in their fashionable buttoned boots, and she wants to sit down, so she crosses the road to a coffee shop and goes inside. The faint reminder of home briefly makes tears sting at her eyes. It’s been a long time, after all. In more ways than one.

Lucy drinks her coffee from a porcelain cup and saucer with a white-gloved waiter solicitously at her service, spaces out for a while, and then, hearing the nearby church bells call four, decides that she should definitely get a move on back to the boarding house. It isn’t far, since she’s still in Bloomsbury, and should be a swift walk, but the air is pink and blue and grey when she steps out, and it makes her hurry her steps. The automaton didn’t turn up at sundown last night, but if it – or rather, its masters – know for a fact now that she’s there –

Lucy is waiting at a corner for a trolley car to pass when she hears a murmur from around her, which quickly deepens into a shocked hiss. Fingers point upward, necks crane, and people stare at the sky. It is generally well-trafficked with airships – passenger cruisers, pleasure barges and tourist flights, cargo freighters, Royal Navy aeronauts, and steam balloons – but at the moment, there’s only one that has caught everyone’s attention. It’s a zeppelin about the size of the one Lucy arrived on, in fact might have been making its way to the Greenwich docks for a scheduled touchdown, but that will remain a mystery. It’s on fire near the tail, coming in hard and low, and there’s an alarmed outcry over the instinctive fear that it will crash directly onto their heads. As soon as that fire reaches the hydrogen supply – but while accidents are not uncommon, a world that relies so much on airships should have found a better way to –

At that, a dark, unformed suspicion crosses Lucy’s mind. She really does hope she’s wrong, and she will happily eat any amount of crow if she is, but she personally saw all those guns being bought this morning, and even had the thought that that was enough firepower to take down an airship. She should definitely get out of here, but she stares up at the burning zeppelin, hesitates a moment longer, then starts to run.

The airship swerves and veers overhead, almost close enough for Lucy to hear the flames crackle, as she tries to fight her way through the crowds running, sensibly enough, in the opposite direction. It’s not going to make it much further; it looks like it’s going to crash in Regent’s Park, which at least has a lot of open space for it, though it’s surrounded by expensive villas and has the possibility to put a lot of rich people unhappily out of their houses. The zeppelin is burning in good earnest now as it plunges, and there’s the sound of breaking glass as passengers decide to smash windows and jump out rather than wait for the crash. Lucy dodges as someone falls out of the sky in front of her and hits the paving stones with a gruesome sound, but doesn’t stop running. She doesn’t even know what she’s going to do or what she’s looking for, just that if this is what she thinks –

The zeppelin blocks out the sky above the street, its pilot house scraping on the gate with a massive fountain of sparks, as it does a half-somersault and plows nose-first into the green expanse of Regent’s Park. Lucy can feel the heat lashing her face, and skids to a halt, staring, at the oiled-silk skin charring away to reveal the bones of the frame. People are still stumbling from the wreckage, coughing and gagging on the smoke, and the distant sound of alarm bells means that the London Fire Brigade is on its way – there is nothing that Lucy can do to help anyone, and she needs to go, she needs to go, she needs to go. But for some inexplicable reason, her gaze is drawn up as if by a lodestone, across the way to where a tall dark figure is just turning as if to run for it. For a horrible moment, she thinks that it’s the automaton from last night, that it has somehow followed her here, or even that it downed the airship itself – but why?

And then, a gout of violent firelight falls on half of the figure’s face, and Lucy sees that it’s a man, not a tocker. A man that, even from distance and from a bad newspaper photograph, she somehow recognizes at once.
Garcia Flynn.
For a long moment, even as the zeppelin continues to burn and thunder down in pieces, which hit the grass like meteors just a few feet away from Lucy, the world seems eerily silent. So this is him, the man buying enough guns to start a dozen turf wars, who has just shot down a passenger airship and is a wanted criminal across the city – what the hell is he doing here? Aside from the literally flamingly obvious, and he clearly doesn’t intend to be here much longer, as he’s halfway across the lawn and almost out of sight. There is every good reason in the world for Lucy not to go anywhere near this man, especially given what he has just done. If they can prove it was him, at any rate. He could just be a garden-variety psychopath who enjoys watching the world burn (is he Jack the Ripper?) All of it is very likely. But nonetheless, Lucy starts after him.

She has to weave an obstacle course through the hail of fiery debris, sees someone trapped under a plank, and stops to haul it off them, helping them to their feet and telling them to run while still staring ahead into the darkness for Flynn. He is hurrying across the park, has almost reached the London Zoo on the far side, and Lucy has to outright run, never the easiest feat in long skirts, to keep him in sight. He pushes through the gates of the zoo, as if he’s just going to go chill out in the monkey house and wait for things to calm down, and Lucy fights a demented urge to laugh. Or is he going to make a clean sweep, and blow this up too?

Either way, no time to dawdle. She ducks behind the gatehouse as Flynn, as if sensing he’s being followed, looks around sharply. She draws the Colt out of her pocket, checks that a round is chambered, and debates whether to leave her bag behind, as it’s heavy and will slow her down. As well, it contains the rifle that Karl gave her earlier, which might be an unpleasant tip-off that she has now popped up twice to uninvitedly involve herself in his scurrilous business. But if she drops it here, is she going to be able to get back to it?

Very cautiously, she peers out an inch, careful not to break from cover. Flynn has apparently decided that he’s in the clear, because he starts to jog again, and Lucy decides it’s too risky to leave her bag. So she edges out and stays low, darting through the decorative shrubbery and brick-cupolaed, shingle-roofed buildings. London Zoo in this age is no enlightened model of animal welfare; they’re kept indoors in cramped cages, and Lucy can hear distant howls and gibbers and shrieks as they smell the smoke and panic. With flames still scorching the sky an eerie orange behind her, it gives the place an unsettlingly infernal air, as if she has stumbled down into hell in pursuit of the devil, and these are the torments of the damned. She raises her gun, eyes stinging as she squints. She can possibly wing Flynn from here, but it’s risky. If she hurts him but doesn’t finish him, he will be very motivated to run back and express his displeasure. She is a small woman, and he is a tall and formidable-looking man with clearly extensive experience in this sort of thing. She is under no illusions that she can take him hand to hand.

Up ahead, Flynn alters course sharply, cutting toward a small shed behind the African mammals enclosure that might, for all Lucy knows, actually contain a live lion. She hesitates. She has no obligation to go after him alone; she’s a civilian, he’s crazy, and there will be plenty of awkward questions and red flags raised if she is caught with him. Any chance of decent intel on Rittenhouse while she’s in London, not to mention the rest of it, could go up in (more) smoke. But he’s just vanishing inside, and after a final instant, she flings herself after him.

The shed is low and dim and smells strongly of animal fodder, and Flynn has his back to her, checking what looks like a makeshift electric chair. It definitely is something he is going to tie someone to and commence on further unpleasantness, at any rate, and one of the three crates of guns acquired from Dooley this morning is set to the side. Where the other two are, who knows. Probably distributed to his henchmen, who are – what? Dragging survivors off the airship and
shaking them down for all their valuables? Is this the most over-the-top and spectacularly overkill jewelry heist in history? If he wanted that, why not just hit up a bank, or –

No time for that. Lucy has the drop on him for an instant longer, and she had damn well better take it. She raises the Colt, training it on the back of his head, and cocks it with a click. “Put your hands up and turn around slowly.”

There is one brief instant where Lucy has the vaguely satisfying impression that he has been completely taken off guard, is shocked and horrified for it, and is scrambling to think how to respond. Then Flynn does as ordered, raising his hands and turning around slowly, so she looks at him full-on for the first time. A flip of dark hair falls over his forehead, and his eyes glitter in the sharp, angular lines of his face. His nose is long, his eyebrows dark and expressive and somehow managing to communicate a singular amount of sass before he’s even said a word. He surveys her up and down, clearly not expecting to be held at gunpoint by a petite woman in tweed and velvet. “Let me guess,” he says, not sounding terribly concerned. “You’re the one that Karl was complaining about this morning.”

This, to say the least, is a rather blasé reaction to someone pointing a gun at your head, no matter who they are, and the smiling-sociopath theory ticks up a few notches as a possibility. His accent isn’t English, or for that matter Irish; it sounds European of some sort. Slavic, if Lucy had to guess. The Times did say “gipsy,” which could mean anything from Czech to Romanian to Hungarian, though most of that is presently part of the Austrian Empire. Mysteries of origin aside, Lucy can already tell that everyone is right. He’s a terrible pain in the ass.

“You shot down that zeppelin,” she says. “Didn’t you?”

Garcia Flynn shrugs. “So?”

“So?” Lucy takes a few steps closer, can see his eyes following the barrel of her gun, and knows as before that if she does fire, she better not miss. Or for that matter, let her attention slip for a single instant. Despite the faint, stinging residue of smoke, his gaze is almost tocker-level unblinking, until she wonders if this man is somehow also powered by wheels and gears instead of flesh and bone. It’s cat and mouse, but even though she has the gun, she has a strong feeling that she’s the mouse. “Is that just what you do, murder people for fun?”

“I – ” Flynn looks first confused, then exasperated, then angry, as if he can’t believe that this tiny historian can appear from nowhere and think she is entitled to an explanation for his recent spectacular spree of homicidal recreation. “Who the hell are you? You’re no peeler, not that they’d risk popping their monocles and taking on women. Just get out of the way, you have no idea what you’re interfering with. We’ll call it square once, but if you try again – ”

“Why did you shoot it down?” Lucy tightens her grip on the gun and aims it between his eyes. As far as her marksmanship skills go, she is not Annie Oakley, but she can hardly miss a broad target less than three yards away, especially when he’s standing there and staring a hole through her. “What’s this, planning to take someone hostage and torture them – for what? Fun? Information? Feed them to the tigers once you were finished, cover your tracks?”

Flynn raises one of those insolent eyebrows at her, as if to remark that she said all that, not him, and he admires her vivid and gruesome imagination. He takes several steps closer, outright daring her to pull the trigger, until they’re only a few feet apart in the dim, earthy-smelling shadows. “You’re brave,” he says. “Coming out here alone. I can respect that. One last offer. Get out, or I kill you. I don’t want to do that, but I will.”

Lucy raises the gun, as if to remind him that one of them is empty-handed here, and it isn’t her (not that she thinks he’d actually need a gun to do it, and she has let him get within grabbing range
without firing, she needs to back up). But just then, the door of the shed bangs open, and Lucy whirls around just in time to see Karl and one of the thugs from this morning, dragging an unconscious man. Her gaze locks with Karl’s, there is a mutual and very unfortunate moment of recognition, and she remembers an instant too late that she should not have taken her eyes off Flynn. But he isn’t quite lunging at her — he’s taken too long to react, he’s still just standing there — and as Karl drops the man’s arm, draws his own gun, and points it at Lucy, Lucy spins and fires at Flynn. It’s a wide shot, fast and reckless, just trying to create enough disruption for her to escape, but he stumbles backward, hand to his neck, and a spurt of blood slaps the dark air. She hikes her skirts, hurdles over the unconscious man in her way, and bursts out into the night. There’s a lot of shouting from inside. Karl and the ancillary thuglet might be after her to pay her back for wounding the boss, and whatever temporary truce she established with them in the Croft is very definitely off. She puts her head down and runs like actual hell.

Lucy is winded, gasping, and stabbed agonizingly with a stitch by the time she navigates around the still-burning wreckage of the zeppelin, out a side gate, and into the dark streets of London. This is not a safe time to be wandering around any city, especially this one, and she remembers that the automaton could be waiting for her back at the boarding house. She puts the Colt back in her jacket and removes the tocker dropper instead, checking that she knows how to load and prime it, then pulls the pump to send a crackle of blue energy coruscating in the barrel. If she isn’t careful running with it, she’ll electrocute herself instead, so she dials back the charge, but keeps it tightly in hand. Her heart is hammering, her mouth is dry, and she feels in a state of mild shock. She doesn’t know why. It’s definitely not the first time she’s shot someone.

Once she’s put some distance between herself and Regent’s Park, and because Lucy physically can’t run anymore, she slows to a crawl. Her feet are absolutely killing her, and she might just shuck the boots and walk the rest of the way barefoot, but that is definitely a horrible idea. She limps and labors, wonders if she’s really up to facing that thing if it’s there, and diverts course into one of the narrower, shabbier lanes of Covent Garden. She staggers up to a certain establishment with a red-glass lamp before the door, heads inside, and buys a room with the last of the money she has with her. It comes with a whore named Bella, who is probably about sixteen and looks younger, and Lucy tells her to go to sleep. She pulls off her overskirts and her boots, winces at the mess of her feet, then crawls into the bed and very determinedly does not think too much about what she’s lying on. She wondered if she might stay awake, but instead she passes out to a level barely compatible with continued brain function.

It takes a long time for Lucy to be stirred the next morning, remember why exactly she feels like total death, and why she’s in the none-too-clean sheets of a bed in a Victorian brothel. Filmy, indeterminate sunlight slants in the grimy window, and while she will definitely want to wash thoroughly when she gets back to the boarding house, it’s better than being murdered by one of any number of potential culprits. Lucy sits upright slowly, grimacing, and catches sight of Bella digging through her bag, as most whores will when a client (even if, in this case, only in the loosest sense) falls asleep. “Hey. Hey, leave that alone.”

Bella jumps and drops the bag with a clunk. She looks at Lucy guiltily, and with a hint of fear and respect alike. “I’ve never seen a lady as has so many guns, mum.”

“Yes, well.” Lucy rubs her face. “Never mind that. Did you steal anything?”

“No, mum.”

“Are you sure? It’s important.”

“No, mum.” Bella holds out her hands, as if in proof. “Only nick from the ones who deserve it.”

Lucy grimaces. After a pause she says, “Have you heard of the Church Penitentiary Association?
It’s for women of your – of your profession. It’s not a workhouse, and it would be better for you than here, could teach you a different kind of trade, if you want. I could take you over there.”

Bella goggles at her as if Lucy’s asked if she wants to walk on the moon. “The what?”

“The Church Penitentiary Association for the Reclamation of Fallen Women.” It’s a mouthful, and Lucy hopes it still exists here, since as far as she knows, William Gladstone established it in 1848. For everything you can justly say about this era, at least the institutional church is concerned with actually helping widows, orphans, the poor, the homeless, prostitutes, thieves, and other members of the invisible underclass, in a way that other incarnations of it could take a lesson from. Protestant evangelism and social reform is very much afoot, in other words, and Lucy just doesn’t want to leave this child here to get brutalized by however many more men. She can’t save all the whores in London, but still (and besides, you won’t want to be a lady of the evening in Whitechapel in 1888). “Look, I know where it is, I’ll take you. Do you want to go?”

Bella looks justifiably frightened, as if this is a trick or test to catch her out or take her somewhere even worse. “Mr. Carr, he who owns the house. I don’t think he’d be ‘appy.”

“Well,” Lucy says, nodding at her bag. “Guns.”

“Why’d you do that, mum?”

“Because I’d like to.” Lucy stands up, and immediately regrets it as her raw-hamburger feet hit the floor. She can’t face the prospect of stuffing them back into her boots, which is a problem, but maybe she can just suffer it for a little longer. “If you want to go.”

Bella considers that. Finally she offers, “I can please you if you want, mum? I know how to do it with ladies.”

“No, no thank you,” Lucy says hastily. “I don’t want that in exchange, or anything else. If you really want to stay here, I suppose I can’t stop you, but… I just thought I’d offer.”

The young whore blinks, still confused and waiting for a catch, but then she looks up and firms her chin. “I wouldn’t mind seein’ you shoot Mr. Carr, mum, and that’s God’s truth. S’pose if them church types are too bad, I can run away again.”

With that, she gets up, puts on her slippers, and grabs a small calico bag out from under the floorboards, which probably contains all her worldly possessions. Lucy wonders what her parents died from – typhoid, dysentery, cholera? Any of the epidemics that still can take out entire tenements, though less so since Joseph Bazalgette finally finished his pioneering outfall sewer system about ten years ago and reduced the virulent pollution and stink of the Thames. Bazalgette is one of the unsung heroes of the Victorian or any era, a civil engineer who saved countless lives and introduced the concept of modern sanitation systems and waste treatment, but as Lucy has noted, even the new technology and science and magic (if that’s what you want to call it) available here has not made the lives of the grindingly poor any more enjoyable. It almost personally offends her. All this possibility, and you still don’t do anything with it?

She sneaks Bella down the back stairs as the rest of the brothel is waking up and doing its morning laundry and shooing out hungover johns who want to stay later without paying. They emerge into the alley without being caught, and walk as quickly as Lucy can, but she gets Bella to the headquarters of the Association on Harley Street and into the care of a pair of ward sisters. Bella squeezes her hand with her small, grimy ones, and solemnly promises Lucy that if she can ever help her sometime in the future, she has only to say. She won’t forget this, mum, she won’t.

Lucy tells her it’s all right, makes her promise not to run off, and then finally departs, feeling like
she’s been beaten with a nightstick and desperate for a proper bath and sleep. She can’t help but wondering if she has now added Mr. Carr, who sounds like the kind of well-adjusted, respectful-of-women, and not-at-all-violent man who owns a brothel in Victorian London, to her sizeable list of enemies, once he finds out that some of his property is missing and a funny American woman was the last person spotted with her. Between him, Flynn and his gang, the automaton, and Rittenhouse, it will absolutely be a miracle if Lucy gets out of this city alive. Maybe she should just leave for Oxford today. It seems safer than staying here any longer.

At last, Lucy staggers up to the boarding house, where Mrs. McBride is volubly relieved to see her. “Thought ye might have gotten mixed up in the airship disaster, Mrs. Preston. Hear about that? All over the papers this morning. A zeppelin crashed in Regent’s Park, and Mr. Stanley missing. A terrible shock for everyone, sure. But they’ll sort the villain that did it, you’ll see.”

“What?” Lucy has already decided that she does not need to tell this nice middle-aged Irish Catholic landlady the least thing about how wildly eventful her last twenty-four hours were, nor that she almost sorted the villain herself, but at that, she frowns. “Mr. Stanley?” That name sounds familiar. “Which Mr. Stanley, and why is he missing?”

Mrs. McBride pushes the morning edition of the Times at her. A black-and-white photograph of the burning zeppelin is splashed all over the front page, and the banner headline blares, AIRSHIP TRAGEDY SHOCKS LONDON; FAMED AFRICAN EXPLORER MISSING; CULPRITS STILL AT LARGE. Underneath, the article goes on to explain how the passenger service arriving from Brussels last evening was downed by an unknown incendiary device, crashing in Regent’s Park with considerable property damage and public terror. Loss of life has been thankfully minor, as most people managed to escape in time, but there are still six confirmed dead, as well as ten or twelve unaccounted for. Several dozen have suffered injuries of some degree, and both Houses of Parliament are in an uproar as they demand a full investigation into the outrage and prompt punishment for those responsible. Everyone from Irish republicans to anarchists to Marxists are being blamed, sometimes all at once. To compound the insult, Henry Morton Stanley, famed for his voyages to the Dark Continent of Africa, may be a victim. He was traveling aboard the airship, and has not been seen hide nor hair of.

At that, a bolt of lightning goes down Lucy’s back. Henry Morton Stanley – yes, he’s one of the major explorers of the Victorian era, he of “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” fame, upon locating the lost Scottish missionary deep in the African bush. He goes to find the source of the Nile and the Congo basin and other expeditions to Africa that earn him the pomp and approval of imperial Britain, including eventually a knighthood. He’s also a terrible, terrible person even by nineteenth-century imperial British standards: virulently racist, fond of force, instrumental in opening central Africa to plundering, colonizing, and exploitation, and the right-hand man of Leopold II of Belgium in running his genocidal empire in the Congo. He’s supposed to be in Africa right now, in fact, but if he was returning from Brussels to London, he was probably meeting Leopold on the down-low. As she stares at the photograph of the esteemed explorer, Lucy realizes that she knows exactly where Henry Morton Stanley is. Or rather, where he was last night. In a shed out behind the African mammals exhibit at the London Zoo, unconscious, as she jumped over him and ran.

“Mrs. Preston?” Mrs. McBride frowns at her. “You look a bit peaky, if you won’t mind my saying. Perhaps I should put the kettle on?”

“That – that would be nice.” Lucy sits down heavily, still staring at the newspaper, as the landlady bustles into the kitchen. Her head is whirling. Did Flynn shoot down an entire airship just to get his hands on Stanley? He must have been tipped off somehow, learned that he was planning to travel on that crossing, and pulled together this whole operation at extremely short notice. While Lucy can’t say that she disapproves of the irony of feeding Stanley to lions and tigers, as she suggested last night, she doesn’t see Karl and the others going to the bother of saving him from the
crash just to kill him outright. Flynn was going to pump him for information, or at least he was. Then Lucy shot him in the neck, which probably threw a wrench into his plans for the evening. What the hell?

Mrs. McBride returns with her tea, which Lucy sips in a state of extreme distraction. Flynn did say that she didn’t know what she was interfering with, and this suggests a considerably more sophisticated degree of strategy and intention than just blowing something up to see it go boom. Knowing Stanley was going to be on the airship. Getting enough weaponry to take it down, and then successfully doing that. Having his men in position to drag the explorer out of the wreckage and convey him to a prepared location for interrogation. Ask him – what? It can’t just be how he sleeps at night, though Lucy wonders that too. Unless –

Oh God. Is Stanley Rittenhouse? He fits the profile a little too well, but not every terrible person in history has been part of a cultish secret society. Sometimes people are just awful dicks because that’s humanity for you; you don’t get the luxury of putting them all in one bad-apple box. But given that Lucy is here because there is reason to suspect that Rittenhouse is trying to expand their operations, and because she was just thinking yesterday that they might target Queen Victoria, they have plenty to offer Stanley. Maybe that is why he cut his expedition short and returned to Europe. Is Leopold part of the package too? You’d hardly think he could get any worse, but if Rittenhouse has promised to make sure that his regime endures –

This is at least plausible, much as Lucy wishes it wasn’t. But the problem is that it would require Flynn to know, or at least suspect, that Rittenhouse had made overtures to Stanley. Which in turn would mean that he knows… about Rittenhouse.

That isn’t possible. That isn’t possible for any number of reasons. He could have been targeting Stanley because he’s actually an ass-backwards vigilante Dark Knight who is giving racist imperial mass murderers what they deserve. And since Lucy doesn’t know if Stanley is in fact Rittenhouse, or even approached by them, this is a lot of conjecture with very little solid basis. For all she knows, Stanley is involved in shady business deals and owes a lot of money to Flynn’s racketeering schemes. Lucy is not about to put her back out of joint rescuing this jackass, but she would be unwise to let this go entirely, and she needs to be careful. People must have seen her around the Croft yesterday, with Dooley and then with Karl, and it must be already whispered in the underworld that Flynn is responsible for the airship downing. They’re not going to take the risk of grassing on him to this strange American woman. (Definitely for the best that they have no idea how strange.)

Lucy is still dangling from the horns of her dilemma when the door opens, Mrs. McBride looks up, and utters a sharp sound of consternation. “Seamus! What happened to you, love?”

“I’m fine, Mam.” Her son in fact looks quite a bit less than fine, as he has a handsome black eye, a cut on his cheek, and blood running from his nose. “Gang of gobshites in the street, they threw a paving stone at me and said it was probably the filthy Catholics had blown the airship up. Scarpered like cowards. I promise, it’s not that bad.”

Mrs. McBride does not appear inclined to take his word for it, and as she is fussing over him with hot water and a cloth, Lucy doesn’t feel that the time is right to butt in and ask if either of them spotted a large and dangerous automaton outside last night. Instead, as she does know exactly who blew the airship up, she can’t help but feel obliquely responsible, even though she isn’t. She gets up, goes upstairs, and has a quick wash. Then she changes out of her bedraggled clothes, forces her abused feet into a pair of much sturdier and plainer shoes, and reloads the Colt. Puts the derringer in her jacket, the tocker dropper in her bag, and thus liable to clank slightly when she walks, heads out.

London is abuzz with nothing else but whispers of the drama. Everyone seems to have their own
theory on what has happened, though most of these lack even a vague acquaintance with the truth (possibly for the best). Lucy makes her way back to University College, where – apparently properly chastened by Ada yesterday – Hubert the porter meekly lets her into the Royal Historical Society archives without complaint. The Analytical Engine seems to be running, though there is a weedy undergraduate in a three-piece suit who is instructing it to fetch him apparently everything ever written on Ancient Rome, and who gives Lucy a miffed look that she won’t just stand there and let him hog it for the next five hours. Finally, when she’s cleared her throat for the third time, and he has enough to be getting on with anyway, he scoops his books out of the tray and scurries off, and she waits for the gears to cool down a little. Then, since this time she has a better idea what to look for, she says, “Garcia Flynn AND crime AND London.”

It’s known as a Boolean search (George Boole was another contemporary of Ada and her intellectual circle, a mathematician and logician who helped establish the technological information age) and Lucy figures it will work here. That way, she won’t get results about every godforsaken Flynn that has ever been written about, but just whatever contains Garcia Flynn, crime, and London together. That should make it a lot easier to sift through.

Indeed, the stacks of newspapers and a few booklets that roll through the trapdoor are much less intimidating in size, and Lucy scoops them up. She will only be able to access information in the public domain, and which University College owns a copy of – in other words, she won’t get any secret state papers or private dossiers that the Government (she has found out that Gladstone is still prime minister, doubtless Not Amusing Victoria, who famously complains that he speaks to her as if she was a state meeting and not a person) might have compiled on a known threat. But maybe it will get her started.

It does, at that. The first reference she can find to Flynn’s presence in London is in February 1885, just after the end of the Berlin Conference – a three-month-long event where the European powers formalized the “Scramble for Africa” and all staked their claims as to who got what piece of it. Lucy recalls that Stanley was there as an American delegate, even though he’s English (or strictly speaking, Welsh) by birth. Otto von Bismarck chaired the whole thing, and among other things, it’s where the gathered European powers confirmed Leopold of Belgium’s right to his “Congo Free State” (viz., murdering up to ten million Africans for rubber and ivory). Has Flynn been hunting Stanley, or other attendees of the Berlin Conference, all this time? Yes, that is the kind of sordid and evil world-domination event that Rittenhouse would want to get in on, and there could have been all kinds of potential recruits that they might have tried to tap as a result, but that still assumes that Flynn knows about Rittenhouse. He can’t.

Lucy rubs her eyes, trying to focus on the lines of smeared old type. The papers, when they mention Flynn’s activities at all, do so in the disparaging tone of the establishment who can’t understand why this upstart doesn’t see that society is perfect the way it is, and it’s not very informative. There are dark rumors. In January 1886, one of the more sensationalist newspapers, the Daily Trumpet, informs its readers that the mysterious crime lord Garcia Flynn killed his own wife and child, which Lucy takes with a considerable grain of salt. However, the claim is then repeated in the Telegraph, with somewhat more information: the murders took place in 1884, in the Kingdom of Dalmatia, the coastal sliver of Croatia that is presently part of the Austrian Empire. Flynn ran for it after that, and has otherwise not behaved like an innocent man.

Considering that he threatened to kill her when they were face to face at the zoo, Lucy has to admit that it doesn’t seem out of character. She puts the papers down with a frown, thinking that the last thing she needs is a repeat engagement with this man, especially after she shot him and disrupted his carefully planned capture and interrogation of Stanley. But she also has questions that she can’t see an easy way of getting an answer to, and she doesn’t want to leave London, wise as it may be to do so, without them. Assuming that she’ll still be alive in a fortnight to go up to Oxford seems like a gamble, but as Bella said, she does have guns.
Lucy gets up, puts the newspapers back in the tray, and leaves University College, stepping out and trying to decide on her next move. She could go back to the Croft, as Flynn is clearly well-known and infamous there, but good luck trying to get someone to talk, and Dooley, if he just sold three crates of weapons used in the scandal of the decade, has probably packed his bags and gotten the hell out of Dodge. Finally, Lucy remembers that there’s a pub on Tower Hill that caters to the same general clientele as the Croft, and indeed is informally known as Traitor’s Gate, after the portcullis in the Tower of London where condemned prisoners entered by boat from the Thames. Someone there has to know something. She can try.

Traitor’s Gate is not the kind of place that should be visited by night or even, for that matter, by day, but Lucy is armed, and she is used to people underestimating a small and outwardly not-frightening woman. She takes a hackney to Fenchurch Street, then gets out and walks. It’s a cold, sour-looking day, wind whipping hard off the murky Thames, and she claps a hand to her hat to stop it from blowing off. A few passing gentlemen give her odd looks, as if an unescorted lady is a terrible affront to their patriarchal sensibilities, but at least they don’t push it.

Lucy reaches All Hallows-by-the-Tower, an ancient Saxon church where William Penn was baptized in 1644 and John Quincy Adams got married in 1797, crosses the garth and looks for the door at the bottom of the steps, and uses the same key she did for the Croft to open it. There’s a long, low tunnel that briefly forces even her to stoop, and then she emerges into a taproom built into the ground. She can hear the thump and treadle of steam pumps rattling through the pipes in the brick walls, keeping the Thames from flooding in. It’s warm and dim and smells like tobacco and cheap alcohol. There aren’t many patrons here in early afternoon, but all the heads that turn toward her wear expressions that are far from friendly.

Lucy takes a deep breath, reminds herself that she has as much right to be here as anyone, and touches the Colt in her skirt pocket, reminding herself that it’s there. She strolls up to the counter and leans on it. “One whisky, please. Neat.”

“We don’t serve ladies.” The barman, sporting an impressive set of mutton-chop whiskers and a stained serge waistcoat, doesn’t even turn around. “Especially not strangers. Suggest you leave, mum, before it’s difficult.”

Lucy grits her teeth. Slightly louder, as if he might not have heard her the first time, she repeats, “Whisky. Neat. And I’m not a stranger, by the way. What exactly would Flynn think, if you didn’t serve me?”

This, obviously, is an utter bluff – Flynn is the last person in the world who would care whether or not she got served in a bar, given that she, you know, shot him – but she intended to make the barman panic, and it works. He whirls around, stares at her up and down as his brain clearly cannot quite process how she might know Flynn, but can’t take the risk that she doesn’t. He grudgingly pulls one of the whisky bottles off the rack and decants it into a glass, and Lucy pushes a few coins over the bar. She takes a very small sip, as whisky isn’t her usual tipple, but it’s rare enough to see a lone woman drinking in public at all, let alone such an uncultured working-stiff libation as this, that she’s definitely drawn notice. Good. She can’t really find Flynn herself, so the best option seems to be to let him find her.

Lucy nurses the whisky in brief, burning bits, supposing that they probably don’t have a kitchen here to order late lunch, and wonders how long it’ll take. Depends on how angry Flynn is, most likely. She has seen a few men whispering in the corner and glancing at her, and one of them gets up and casually drifts out. A faro game has been abandoned, and the glowing green dregs in a glass, along with the distinctive whiff of anise, means that someone has been drinking absinthe. Lucy almost wants to try it, just for the experience, but she needs to keep a clear head right now. She hopes this doesn’t turn into a shootout, but she has to be prepared for anything.
At length, the man who left reappears, as Lucy has mostly finished the whisky and feels just buzzed enough to be fearless. He goes back to whisper to his comrades, and then they all stand up, crack their knuckles, and start toward Lucy. She lets them think she hasn’t noticed for a moment longer, then gets to her feet, draws the Colt, and turns around. “Afternoon, gentlemen.”

There are startled looks at the presence of a firearm, which strikes her as stupid – she had one yesterday, she nailed their boss with it, did they think she suddenly forgot? There seems to be a brief discomfort with the idea of getting rough with a woman, but the one nearest to her appears to feel that he can shoulder the noble burden. He makes a grab for her, Lucy whirls aside, and the barman squawks in distress. “Mulroney, don’t, she’s one of – ”

Mulroney is clearly about to inform this idiot that no, she definitely is not one of theirs, but at that moment, a door swings open with a bang, a hush falls over the entire taproom, and Lucy doesn’t even need to look around to know who just entered. A chill goes down her back – yes, she wanted this to happen, but she’s now officially on extremely thin ice – and she knows that this coterie of experienced criminals are not scared of Flynn just because the Daily Trumpet prints hand-wringing articles. That is a certain and definite power, to silence an entire bar when you saunter in, and she turns her head, though she doesn’t need to confirm, to see.

Garcia Flynn looks much too tall for the low-ceilinged room, and has inclined his head slightly so as not to hit it on the mossy bricks. The side of his neck is clumsily stitched up – it looks like he might have done it himself – and he’s wearing a white shirt, suspenders, and crisp pinstriped trousers that look too nice for these breeds of ruffians. His suit jacket is slung over his arm, and he throws it over the back of the nearest chair; the other man who was sitting at the table grabs his drink, jumps up, and vacates it at high speed. There’s a holster strapped over Flynn’s left shoulder, containing a heavy Prussian revolver, and that’s only the gun Lucy can see. He probably has half a dozen more God knows where.

“Afternoon,” Flynn says, once he has deigned to break the silence. Even without the smoke, his voice is gravelly, rough and intense. “Anybody going to buy me a drink?”

There’s a collective scramble as the patrons hurry toward the bar, the barman is already pouring something, and Flynn reaches over for it with the same cool, unhurried demeanor. He takes a sip, staring straight at Lucy. With a graceful, sarcastic gesture, he says, “I don’t believe we have been formally introduced, madam. You are – ?”

Lucy hesitates just long enough to make it obvious that she’s fishing for a lie, and Flynn gives her a warning look. “I wouldn’t.”

“Lucy.” It feels kicked out of her, but she draws herself up and stares at him as defiantly as she can. “Lucy Preston.”

“Lucy Preston.” He repeats it, his accent giving it a particular lilt, then jerks his head at the table. “Well, Lucy. We have to stop meeting like this, don’t we?”

It’s on the tip of Lucy’s tongue to ask him where exactly he gets off saying that to her at their second meeting, but since the choice is clearly either to sit down by herself or have the goons drag her, she makes her way over and takes the chair with cool, icy dignity, smoothing her skirts. Flynn sits across from her, which doesn’t really reduce his size. He solidly blocks out the air around him, broad-shouldered, barrel-chested, and arms heavily muscled, and he could clearly snap her like a twig if he took a mind to it, even if she might be able to get a few shots off first. She instinctively shifts back, trying to establish more space, but it doesn’t work. She just has to stare at him, as everyone makes a valiant effort to look as if they’re going back to their business and have just made a tactical decision to become abruptly blind, deaf, and dumb. Then, plucking up her nerve, she says, “Where’s Stanley?”
One of Flynn’s eyebrows raises. Then he shrugs. “Read the newspaper this morning, then?”

“That and a few others.” Lucy clenches her hands in her lap. “Apparently you have a reputation.”

Flynn grins, as if he doesn’t see why he should bother denying it. His teeth are very white and straight; he probably has a nice smile when he isn’t, you know, being psychotic. “What do you want, Lucy? Turning up here after what happened last night? That is very foolish, don’t you think? Especially now that I know your name. I already told you once to get out of my way. You should not count on there being a twice.”

Lucy has no reason to believe he doesn’t mean it, and is well aware that she is already playing with fire (literally, given his apparent propensity for explosions). She needs to choose her next words carefully, and he lifts his glass for another drink, never taking his eyes off her. She did shoot him last night, he’s not about to underestimate or laugh off her danger, and though she senses he might be genuinely impressed, it’s not enough on its own to protect her. Finally she says, “I’m not interested in rescuing Stanley. I was just wondering why you wanted him.”

“He is a dick.” Flynn still appears to be enjoying this somehow. “Isn’t that enough?”

“Yes, he is, but no, it’s not.” Lucy holds his stare. “How long have you been trying to get your hands on him? Since Berlin?”

That, finally, catches Flynn off guard. He glances away, and his eyes have lost their amusement when they flick back to her. “So you have been reading up, haven’t you? What else did you find out about me?”

Lucy hesitates, but only briefly. He has to know, or at least guess, that she’s come across it. “You killed your own family.”

Flynn’s mouth twists. He doesn’t answer at once to confirm or deny it, though he polishes off his drink in a long slug, throat muscles working, then shoves the glass aside and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. “Who are you?” he says instead, low and sleek. “Some plucky American lady detective who has read too much Arthur Conan Doyle? You walk in here – in here – and think I’m going to tell you what I’m doing. . . why?”

“Because.” Lucy really isn’t sure if she should do this, but she’s backed herself into a corner now, and sometimes the only way out is through. “I’m wondering if it has anything to do with Rittenhouse.”

There’s a moment of total, stunned silence, and then Flynn’s eyes flare like West End floodlights. His hand flashes out, fast as a viper, and snatches her wrist, half-dragging her over the table toward him; she knocks his glass off and it falls to the floor with a crash. “What,” he breathes in her face, half a whisper and half a snarl, “do you know about Rittenhouse?”

Lucy would normally be too busy being floored that he knows about Rittenhouse, but he still has hold of her wrist, and his grip is bruisingly strong. She pulls at it to no avail, trying to loosen his fingers, until he finally looks at her face, seems to decide that she won’t run, and lets go very slowly. “Is that why you were there last night? To kill me and rescue Stanley? You’re one of them, aren’t you? Of course. That explains it. Well, Lucy Preston, I’m very sorry, but as that’s the case, I am unfortunately going to have to – ”

“I’m not one of them anymore. I used to be.” Lucy can feel her pulse hammering in the indents of his fingers. “They took everything away from me. I’m – I am not loyal to them.”

If Flynn doesn’t believe this, she’s toast, but something about the rawness and anger in her tone
catches at him. He sits back and stares at her as if the Rosetta Stone has just dropped into his lap, as if this might be a new and exciting opportunity he has never considered. Lucy’s head is still spinning, because – how? To put it in the simplest possible terms, Rittenhouse is not from his reality. There is no way, at least that she has ever encountered (and that is a lot) for him to know.

There is a very, very tenuous pause as both of them size each other up. Flynn licks his lips, looking as if he’s on the verge of marching her off to continue this conversation somewhere more private, and Lucy is pretty sure she’ll have to put up a struggle if that happens. Then the door bangs again, making everyone’s heads swivel once more, and a large, red-faced man storms in, waving a heavy stagecoach pistol. “Where is she?” he bellows. “Where’s the American bitch? Heard she was here, bring her out!”

Lucy has just enough time to consider that her plan to reveal herself to the underworld has really gone far too well, but she has no idea who this man is, much less why he would be looking for her. But as she jumps up, Flynn grabs her adroitly from behind and spins her around in front of him – evidently he feels that if there’s any chance of shooting, it’s her turn to catch a few bullets, especially since she was the cause of him doing so last time. He also seems interested in discovering the source of the commotion, and calls over, “You mean her?”

The angry bloke wheels around, spots them, and comes charging over. Lucy is starting to have a bad feeling she knows who he is, and in another moment, that hunch is unfortunately confirmed. “You! Are you the bitch who stole my working girl? You’ve robbed me, thieved me! Either we go right now and fetch her, or I’ll make you go back in her place!”

“Mr. – Carr?” With him in front of her, spraying spittle, and Flynn behind her, arm still around her neck, Lucy is honestly terrified, and her knees feel like water, but she struggles to lock them and speak as calmly as she can. “I presume?”

“Yes, you bloody well presume, bitch. What did you do with my Bella? The girls said she vanished from the house this morning, with some meddling American cunt. You fetch her bloody back, I said, or I’ll make you go back in her place!”

“Mr. Carr, you have absolutely no right to Bella, or for that matter, any of the other women.” Lucy wonders if she can get to her gun, but her arm is awkwardly pinned to her side by Flynn’s grip and she can’t solve all of her problems by shooting them. There are too many witnesses, and to say the least, she’s already in enough trouble. “I’m not going to tell you where she is, and I’m certainly not going to take up her former employment, so why don’t you just – ”

At that, several things happen at once. The first is that Mr. Carr spits full in her face, thick and phlegmy and whiffing vilely of tobacco, the second is that she lets out an involuntary squeal of disgust and struggles to get it off, and the third is that Flynn, never letting go of Lucy, shifts his grip on her to the other arm, draws his revolver, and shoots Mr. Carr point-blank in the head. The report, directly next to Lucy’s ear, is deafening, and she can only hear a muffled, tinny ringing on that side, in a way that means it’s going to take a while for it to come back. There is an explosion of blood and brain and broken skull, and Mr. Carr goes down cold.

In the split second while everyone is staring at the dead brothel owner, Lucy moves. She jabs an elbow ferociously into Flynn’s gut, stamps on his foot, and twists herself out of his arm lock, punching him hard in the face as he lunges at her. He drops the gun, she grabs a drink from a nearby table and throws it in his eyes, then vaults over it, tearing her petticoat on a loose nail. The crowd is already pushing and jostling to every side, some toward Flynn and some toward the dead man and some for the goddamn exit like sensible people, and he can’t catch up to Lucy, especially as she reaches the passage on the far side and runs flat-out. Oh God. She doesn’t know why Flynn shot Carr, aside from the fact that he was clearly a mad dog and was going to make trouble, but she certainly isn’t staying to ask. Oh God. Flynn knows about Rittenhouse. How, how does he
know about Rittenhouse? More than that, he was ready to kill her if she was working for them, and does that mean –

Lucy doesn’t know. Right now, she just wants as much space between her and this place as possible, and she doesn’t dare look back. Finally reaches the end of the tunnel and scrambles up the stairs on all fours, scraping her palms, and staggers out into the cold dusk. Shit, it’s past sunset, she’s too late. She can’t go back to the boarding house now (and it might not be smart to go back for a while, what with the draco dormiens she has sharply and repeatedly titillanded in the oculus). It might have to be Harley Street after all. Maybe she and Bella can be roommates.

There’s a crash from the tunnel below, and distant shouting. Lucy doesn’t wait around for further inspection. Once more, like escaping London Zoo last night, she runs.
In Which An Evening Out Goes Sideways

Lucy manages to get through the next several days without any more near-death experiences, which she does by adopting a strict program of lying low and stepping along. She spends the morning and part of the afternoon in the RHS archives, finds whichever other colleges around the city she can get into on the back of her Oxford credentials (she does have an offer letter, it’s not entirely fictitious), and researches as inconspicuously as she can, without looking for Rittenhouse directly. It’s not going to appear openly, and she’s just going to send up more smoke signals if she tries. Then she goes straight back to the boarding house well before dark, with the distinct feeling that it’s time to find some new lodging. Are halls open in Oxford yet? Students and lecturers have to be settling in before term starts. She can go.

Lucy’s eagerness to explode this soda booth is increased by the fact that she’s been keeping careful watch on the street outside, and every night at seven o’clock, give or take a few minutes, the automaton lumbers into sight and takes up its spot by the lamppost, standing there and turning its head back and forth, back and forth, for hours. But she’s starting to question her first, panicky assumption that it’s there to spy on her, or to prepare the ground for an attack. It could just be the regular night watchman assigned to this beat, since automatons can’t be distracted or bribed or wounded like human peelers, and most people are wary of interfering too directly with them. There are others used as security guards and lookouts across the city; Lucy went to the British Museum yesterday, and there were tockers in blue uniforms posted in the corners of the exhibition halls. One unfortunate young lad leaned too close to a priceless Tang dynasty porcelain vase, and the tocker rolled forward, setting off its alert sirens, to close its gears into the lad’s shirt and drag him backward. It’s hard to tell how sentient they are. This is nineteenth-century robotics, after all, and while some of them have been programmed to communicate with a few canned phrases, they can’t comprehend or process anything beyond their set functions. The tocker outside the boarding house is clearly able to respond to a threat – it wouldn’t be carrying that blunderbuss if it couldn’t – but it’s less obvious if it takes notice of anything short of that.

Either way, given that Lucy has pissed off the city’s most notorious underworld crime boss and there is still a heated investigation for the perpetrators of the airship incident, she thinks it wise to maintain a low profile. Once or twice, she has considered stopping by Scotland Yard and just telling them that it was Flynn (though they probably know that, their problem is catching him), but something stops her. Flynn is the only other person she has ever met, on any of her trips, who knows about Rittenhouse – especially here, where strictly speaking, they don’t exist in history at all. Is he from – ? No. Given the effort it took to get her here, they would have stumbled across it if anything like it had been done before. If she hadn’t shot him, elbowed him, stamped on his foot, punched him, thrown a drink in his eyes, and ruined his entire operation of however many months in the offing, Lucy might want to go for a third stab at finding out what exactly the hell he knows, and how. But she isn’t nearly that insane.

In any event, it feels like if she got rid of Flynn, she might be doing Rittenhouse a favor (along with the rest of the city, but still) and as long as she gets out of here and doesn’t ever come back, she might get away with it. Not that Oxford is that far in the scheme of things, especially if Flynn is inclined to be vengeful. Besides, now he knows that she knows about Rittenhouse, and given his vehement reaction, it’s a subject of paramount importance to him. He doesn’t seem like the kind of guy who gives up. Is she going to be looking over her shoulder twice over?

Lucy finishes the week, then announces to Mrs. McBride that the stay has been lovely, but she’s decided to go up to Oxford on Monday. Mrs. McBride anxiously asks if everything is all right, and Lucy, lying through her teeth, assures her that it’s fine. Just eager to start her new post.
She sleeps late on Saturday morning, since it and tomorrow are going to be the only chance she has before she gets to Somerville and starts trying to figure out how on earth to teach alternate history in the nineteenth century, and is awoken by the maidservant knocking on her door. “Mrs. Preston, mum? A visitor just came by with an invitation and a calling card for you. Should I leave it, then?”

Lucy groans and rolls over, scrubbing her gritty eyes. The bed is not the most comfortable, but she’s made do, and she does not feel up to dealing with the byzantine protocols of Victorian social interaction right now. First of all, you don’t “visit” someone, you “call,” and at a certain time of day while wearing a certain type of clothes. You then leave a card with your name on it if the person was out, or even if they were in, because everything is about decency and decorum and order (as well as title and brand recognition). You can’t go to the house of someone higher in rank than you without being invited; it is their duty as a patron to generously grace the plebeians with their presence first. But you also can’t really go to the house of someone lower in rank than you without a good reason, because you might be stooping below your level. It’s all about who is seen at which dinner parties and garden teas and horse races, and whether you make the right kind of conversation and defer (or suck up to) the right people. Behind closed doors, the Victorians are absolutely into all kinds of freaky shit, sexually and otherwise, but to all public appearances, these are a deeply, deeply weird, starkly divided, and very repressed bunch of people who, after the libertine, hedonistic nature of English society during the late Georgian and Regency era, have swung back way too hard in the other direction. Lucy just wants to sleep. Besides, who would be calling on her? This feels like a trap, like a –

“It’s from the Countess of Lovelace, mum,” the maidservant says, sounding rather awed. “She’s wondering if you’re free to take supper this evening, at her residence in St. James’ Square.”

“Ada? Ada Lovelace invited me to dinner?” Lucy sits bolt upright, feeling like a dog offered a huge and juicy bone, and then being momentarily unsure if it might kill her if she bites into it. Obviously, there is very little in the world that could ordinarily stop her from going come hell or high water, but it will also involve staying out well past seven o’clock. She may be more or less confident in her new theory that the automaton is just a watchman and isn’t there to attack her personally, but this will put it to a fairly stringent test. Unless she wants to crash on Ada’s couch, which probably is not an option. Besides, what if one of Ada’s other dinner guests is a spy, knowingly or otherwise? They could report to someone and then –

At that, Lucy decides that justified concerns and objections being what they are, there are only so many times in your life that one of your all-time heroines is going to invite you to dinner. She asks what time the invitation is for, and the maidservant says it is for five o’clock PM, though that will involve however long of drinks and conversation before the main meal is served. But consider: Ada Lovelace. If Lucy does die, it will be worth it.

She sends the maidservant off to accept the invitation, then has a brief moment of panic over what she’s going to wear. Her wardrobe is functional, and suitable for a spinster schoolteacher of good background, but dinner with a countess in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in London is going to require a certain sort of look, and she can’t sally in there wearing her usual blouse and skirt. She also can’t go out and just buy a suitably nice dress off the rack, though the rise of garment factories and the textile industry and mill towns of northern England means that she could for cheaper clothing. Something of the caliber to be worn to expensive and exclusive social engagements, however, still has to be specially made, and even the most crackerjack tailor in London cannot sew her a dress in less than eight hours.

Then again, Lucy considers, things could be different here. As well noted, they have different capabilities and machinery, and she doesn’t need something permanent or actually quality, just enough to last her for an evening; nobody needs to know that it’s a knockoff. If she doesn’t want
to be ridiculed in the society papers for her gauche taste (there are plenty of columns dedicated to reporting in detail what rich people are wearing and roasting them for their sartorial shortcomings, since some things never change), she needs to at least make an effort.

Lucy sighs deeply, then gets up, gets dressed, and cautiously ventures out. It’s a nice day by London standards, crisp as an autumn apple and clear blue skies above the coal and smog haze, and there’s a breeze that helps dispel some of that. Lucy walks until she finds a handsome brick shop with golden scissors hanging over the door. She goes inside and enquires how fast they can make her a dress – say, by four o’clock – and the shop assistant assures her that they have a new model of tocker that does the quickest work she ever did see. If Lucy would like to have her measurements taken and choose a fabric and style, they feel confident that they can meet demand.

Accordingly, Lucy does so, picking a fashionably cut, high-necked dress in a flattering burgundy velvet, with black lace trim and a ruffled skirt. The price that is quoted makes her wince, but she supposes that you have to pony up for express service no matter when. Since she’s not going to sit in the cramped, noisy shop all day and wait for it to be done, and it’s still nice weather, she says she’ll be back at four, and heads out.

She is briefly tempted to stroll down by the riverfront, but the Thames, while less stinky, is not yet particularly scenic, and besides, she doesn’t want to get too close to Traitor’s Gate. She’s already feeling a little exposed walking around like this, so she heads to St. Paul’s out of a probably irrational conviction that even Flynn’s thugs can’t burst in and snatch her in the middle of a large public cathedral, and generally sightsees. Then she goes back to the boarding house, puts on some jewelry and does her hair properly, and tries to find a bag that is both fashionable enough to take to dinner, and big enough to contain all of her guns. She can fit the Colt and the derringer, but given as this is going to be the major test of whether the automaton wants to kill her, it’s kind of important that she also brings the tocker dropper. Can she tell Ada about her dilemma? Borrow one of her prototypes? Finally, Lucy decides that she can withstand the social opprobrium of being thought peculiar, and besides, the kind of people Ada is likely to invite to supper are probably odd ducks themselves. She crams all the guns into her smaller valise, tells Mrs. McBride not to expect her until late, and heads out.

The shadows are starting to cover the cobbles in deep violet hues, the last touch of sun golden on the higher reaches of the buildings, and the air feels still and crystalline. Lucy rides to the dress shop and is greeted by her finished apparel for the evening, which fits very nicely and makes her do a little twirl in front of the mirror. Nobody is going to actually arrive at five o’clock, even if that’s what the invitation said, as the point is to be fashionably late. Instead, she takes a leisurely hackney the long way around (which isn’t difficult, since London traffic is still London traffic; she barely has to try hard to waste time) and finally directs the driver to St. James’ Square around half-past. It’s not quite as tony as it used to be, as the serried set are moving to Belgravia and Mayfair, but it’s still plenty posh, and tall white-stone rowhouses, occupied at one point or another by a laundry list of prominent people, surround a small public garden. The driver joins the row of carriages pulling up at number twelve, leaving Lucy to wonder just how many guests are going to be at this dinner. They’re also all getting out in twos. It is very awkward to be part of this kind of social life by yourself.

A white-gloved footman opens the door and hands Lucy down, after a brief, confused peer into the carriage looking for her husband, and Lucy shoulders her bag with a clank (earning herself another horrified stare from the footman) and starts up the steps. She gives her name to his counterpart at the top, not sure what comes next, if she should find Ada and let her know she’s here, or just mingle in the drawing room with everyone else. The house is brightly lit with newfangled electric lamps, done in the usual polished-wood, molded-plaster, gilded-furniture style, with oil portraits gazing down from the richly papered walls. A servant offers her a tray of crystal brandy glasses, and Lucy takes one, weaving awkwardly through the crowd of cravat-wearing
gentlemen and bouffant-sleeved women. Feels like all the parties she went to back in college (which was very few anyway), where she didn’t know anyone, thought it was too loud, and mostly wanted to stand in the corner and not be noticed.

After a few more minutes, to her relief, she finds Ada holding court in the larger parlor, waits for an opening, and then steps up. “Ah – Mrs. King?” It occurs to her that she doesn’t really know how to address her. “Good evening. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Yes, yes, Professor Preston, how lovely to see you again. And none of that ‘Mrs. King’ nonsense, William died many years ago, and I do not altogether miss him.” Ada sniffs. “Please, dear, do call me Ada. In turn, may I presume to address you as Lucy?”

“I – yes, yes, of course, please do.” Lucy tries not to gaze at her too adoringly, or monopolize the hostess, even as Ada is the only person she knows here and she would be happy to pick her brain for hours. They chat briefly about how Lucy is finding London, and whether she’s planning on returning in the holidays (that would be a definite no, but Lucy doesn’t say so). The “where are you from” question is a bit dicey, but Lucy tells her that she was born in San Francisco, which is the truth, and went to Radcliffe College in Massachusetts, which is not. Stanford was founded two years ago, but that’s too late for her to have attended, and none of the Ivies are co-ed yet (and won’t be for a depressingly long time). Ada is very interested in her education and keeps asking various questions that Lucy has to be clever about answering, and she’s almost relieved when someone else appears to take over.

Seeing that Lucy has been freed, seems unaccompanied, and is thus available for approach, a toff in a silk cravat comes swooping over, and she is thus subjected to his lengthy disquisition on what he thinks happened to the airship. Lucy stands there with the universal polite, fixed smile of a woman forced to listen to a man monologue on a topic about which she knows much more than him, though she just about can’t do it when Mr. Monopoly says, “Still the greatest pity about Mr. Stanley, isn’t it? I always thought if the man ever died, the savages in Africa would get him. Though if he survived them, there may be hope yet.”

“Of course,” Lucy murmurs, looking around to see if any of those brandy trays are passing by, and also if literally anyone else at this party appears to be in between conversations. She spots a middle-aged woman with slightly flyaway ginger hair and a dress several years out of fashion, lurking by the fireplace, and decides that maybe they can be wallflowers together. So she extricates herself from that disaster (reminds her of a few dates she went on in grad school) and makes her way over. “Excuse me, ma’am? I’m Lucy Preston. I hope I’m not intruding, I just… I don’t know anyone else here either.”

“I’m Priscilla.” The woman looks at her with slightly protuberant eyes, and doesn’t quite reach to take Lucy’s offered hand. “Priscilla Mackenzie.”

Given the transparent air of social awkwardness, the odd looks, and the strong Scottish accent, Lucy can suddenly guess why this poor woman has chosen to self-sequester in a corner, rather than subject herself to the slings and arrows of London high society. She gives Priscilla an encouraging smile, hoping to convey that she’s not here to judge. “Is this your first of these parties? Mine too. Did you have to travel far?”

“From the – the Black Isle.” Priscilla’s fingers worry at the fabric of her skirt. “It’s in the Highlands. I was just the train down from Inverness. The countess invited me. She has an interest in my – my skills.”

Lucy supposes that Ada probably has the ability to suss out interesting women from across the country and gather them toward her like a mother hen and its chicks, which strikes her as the exact sort of life she would like to have one day. “What are your skills?”
Priscilla glances at her nervously, then away. “It’s nothing, mam. Just something the countess was hoping I’d demonstrate at— at supper.”

From the expression on her face, she’s hoping that she gets eaten by a mob of rabid bats first, rather than to have to stand up and give a public showing. Lucy doesn’t blame her; she’s used to standing in front of a lecture hall of undergraduates and explaining something that they may only marginally care about, but having to do it in front of this crowd would be tough. She’s trying to think what else to ask Priscilla about, when a smart-jacketed butler appears, tinkles a bell, and asks if the guests will please follow him. A tide of watered-silk waistcoats and bustled skirts trails after him, into a lavish dining room with a chandelier overhead and a table set for forty. They are shown to settings with china and crystal and silver, and Lucy ends up a few places away from Priscilla, down the table on Ada’s right side; as hostess, she’s at the head. Everyone waits until she takes her seat, then does the same.

As the servants bring in the appetizers, and Lucy remembers some vague etiquette rule that you should start with the utensils on the outside and work your way in, the butler and his assistants move around the table, pouring wine. When he reaches Lucy, he almost trips over her valise, which she has set at her feet, and gives her a rather supercilious look. With a discreet glance at her name card, he says, “Mrs. Preston, would you perhaps permit me to remove that for you?”

Lucy supposes that hauling your bag full of guns to a fashionable dinner party is definitely not in any of those etiquette books, and she’ll retrieve it before she leaves. Still, she glances over her shoulder worriedly as the butler speeds it out of the dining room, in case he blows it up as a precaution. She did keep the derringer in her stocking garter, and she touches it briefly through her skirt. No way to hike that up without scandalizing everyone in the house and probably being the talk of the town for the entire season (“did you hear that she exposed her thigh at supper? And she had a gun?”) but again. Hope for the best, plan for the worst.

There is a murmur of cultured conversation for a few more moments, until Ada rings a spoon against a glass, and an obliging silence falls. The eminent mathematician rises to her feet and makes a brief speech welcoming them to supper, and that she is glad they have been socializing so freely. She would particularly like to welcome (among others) Mrs. Lucy Preston, on her way to take up a history post at Oxford, at the college named for her dear late Mrs. Somerville. As well, Miss Priscilla Mackenzie, a descendant of the famed Brahan Seer, Kenneth Mackenzie, a seventeenth-century Scottish man of shadowy and mystical abilities, including the gift of prophecy. Miss Mackenzie manifests the talents of her famous ancestor in a particular way: she can see and speak to the dead. Ada is hoping she may honor them with a small demonstration.

At that, Lucy sits up sharply, frowning. She seems to recall that, like other figures of Scottish folklore, the Brahan Seer is quite sketchily documented, and may have been made up entirely by the Scottish historian Alexander Mackenzie— is Priscilla his daughter or sister or cousin, or someone else he can give a suitable pedigree by the invention of a famous forbearer? Her skeptical, analytical response, however, is very much the odd one out. The entire table of wealthy, well-dressed, prominent people leans forward at once and breathes, “Oooh.”

Lucy shoots a sympathetic glance at Priscilla, who is clearly hoping not to be asked to do this. However, she has accepted Ada’s invitation and traveled all the way down, and it would be rude to refuse. Victorian society is absolutely mad for the macabre, the mystical, the spiritual, the strange. These are the people who tour lunatic asylums to gape at the patients and rate the landscaping of the grounds, buy up ancient Egyptian mummies and hold unwrapping parties, are absolutely gaga for séances and tarot cards and tea leaves and any other sort of quasi-arcane bullshit you can possibly think of. This is the case even for regular, non-magic Victorians, so it’s probably several orders of magnitude higher here. Several of the guests look like they’re on the verge of leaping out of their chairs and asking if Priscilla can contact their dearly departed first.
Ever since she took this up as an occupation, it’s not been Lucy’s job to say what is or isn’t possible, but there’s still part of that rational historian’s brain that insists that psychics are frauds and just good at cold-reading or fishing with enough general teases to make it sound specific. Everyone is whispering keenly, and Priscilla clears her throat, obviously uncomfortable with the attention. She then turns to their hostess. “Countess, did you want me to – do it with you?”

“Me?” Ada laughs. “Gracious, child. I do not imagine that my Papá is quite the visitor that one wants at a dinner party – he would drink all the brandy, cause a terrible scandal, and doubtless somehow bed a marchioness and a footman on his way back out the door. I should like to talk to him, mind you, but perhaps in a somewhat more discreet situation. My dear Mr. Babbage would also be very grumpy at being interrupted from whatever bit of mechanical miscellanea he’s got stuck into in Heaven. Perhaps one of the others, just to start?”

Priscilla considers that, nods, and glances around the room in search of a friendly party. Her eyes fall on Lucy. “Mrs. – Mrs. Preston, did you want a reading?”

Lucy hesitates. Honestly, no, she doesn’t, and she doesn’t know if that’s because she’s more convinced that it wouldn’t work or that it would. But now the entire table is looking on in eager anticipation, and she was trying to help out earlier. She manages a decorous little smile, gets to her feet, and says, “Of course.”

She makes her way up to Priscilla’s chair and isn’t sure what she’s supposed to do. She doesn’t know anyone who’s ever died in this world, and she isn’t sure how the afterlife works – do they all get gathered into the same energy cluster after death, no matter which one they originated in? The many-worlds/multiverse theory is what got her here, it’s supported by sound scientific principles, so it’s possible. There’s certainly something very poignant about it. But Priscilla nods for her to hold out her hand, and Lucy does, wondering if this is why Priscilla didn’t shake it earlier. Then Priscilla takes hold of it with both of her own, and closes her eyes.

Nothing strange happens, unless you count a table of forty gossipy aristocrats sitting in perfect silence. The temperature might seem to drop a degree or two (it’s hot in here with all these people and all these lights and all these dishes, there’s no central heating or cooling system) but that’s probably just Lucy’s imagination. Then Priscilla frowns, something passes over her face like the spring melt under the ice, and she tips her head back. There’s something different in her eyes, and her timorous manner is gone. Her mouth opens. “Lucy?”

Lucy goes cold from head to toe. It isn’t Priscilla’s soft Scottish accent – in fact, it’s a voice that she has begun to fear that she would never hear again in her life. (You’d think that was the point of this, but still.) She almost rips her hand out of Priscilla’s, she doesn’t want this to be done in front of the entire room, when it might be a risk that they all know her name. But something else, something hungry and that wants desperately to believe, to hear it for just another moment, stops her. She tries to collect herself. “Amy?”

“Sis?” Priscilla looks up at her. “Oh my God. Lucy. Where are you? It looks – it looks fancy.”

“I – I really can’t explain right now.” Lucy’s voice catches. “Where are you?”

She waits for the usual patter of a medium contacting the dead – they want to be paid, they want their customer to be pleased, they’ll tell you that your loved one is safe and happy in a better place with Grandpa and the dog and whoever else. But Priscilla-Amy frowns. “I honestly don’t know. I don’t know how long I’ve been here. It’s like I’m just… stuck.”

“I know.” It bursts out of Lucy convulsively, despite herself. On some mad chance that this is any fragment of her sister, she wants to say it. “Amy, I – I’ll find you. I haven’t forgotten. I haven’t
forgotten. I love you, all right? I love you.”

There’s a sigh at this touching utterance from the dinner guests, although it seems mixed with a tinge of confusion. Finding one’s deceased loved ones does not usually happen until one’s own death, after all, and perhaps “Amy” should be uttering some comforting Anglican platitudes about the reality of the afterlife or the necessity of a morally virtuous existence. Instead, she turns her head as if looking over her shoulder, at something Lucy can’t see. She frowns. “Lucy?”

“Amy?” Lucy’s grip tightens on the slim, freckled hand. “Amy, are you – ”

There is a brief, sharp sensation as if a cold wind has passed over the room, and the light in Priscilla’s eyes goes out like a candle. She tilts forward abruptly, and Lucy reaches out to steady her. “Pris – Miss Mackenzie? Are you all right?”

Priscilla lifts her head, blinking several times. “My apologies, Mrs. Preston,” she says, in her usual voice. “I’m not sure what happened.”

“It’s – ” Lucy would really like to ask more questions away from an audience of staring baronets. They’re all applauding as if they’ve just seen an excellent parlor trick, although a few of them look as if it was not quite the genteel correspondence they were expecting. Others look even more excited by this hint of danger, as if speaking to the dead should involve some element of the shocking or disturbing and they are altogether ready to see more of it. “Who was that, Mrs. Preston?” a gentleman with a large silver mustache asks. “Clearly you recognized her.”

“It was… ” Lucy’s throat feels tight. “It seemed like my sister. She – she died a while ago.”

The gentleman nods in condolence, and Lucy hopes that Priscilla’s gift has been demonstrated enough to allow them to eat in peace for the moment – if nothing else, she is now extremely hungry and would like to do that. And indeed, they have gotten through the appetizers and the soup course and have started the entrees, and Ada has told interested parties that they can consult Miss Mackenzie more privately over dessert, when the butler rushes back in with an urgent look on his face. Lucy wonders if the china has been mismatched or they have served the wrong vintage of champagne or some other pressing tragedy, but the butler leans to his mistress’ ear and whispers rapidly. Ada’s eyebrows draw down in a frown, and she presses a gloved hand to her mouth. “Gracious. How shocking. Are you sure it’s him?”

“Quite sure, Madam. He resembles the newspaper lithographs most… most clearly.”

The dinner party is rapt with attention, several people missing their mouths with their forks as they strain to hear what’s going on. Ada looks briefly unsettled, then takes a deep breath. “Mr. Woolsey has informed me that there is a dead man on the doorstep. Furthermore, that this dead man is none other than the famous African explorer who went missing after the airship tragedy, Mr. Henry Morton Stanley.”

There is a moment of stunned silence, and then an absolute uproar. Lucy briefly considers that “Woolsey” is somehow exactly the name you would expect a butler to have, but it is washed away in the same shock. So Stanley is dead (which again, he absolutely deserves, but still) and he’s been dumped on Ada’s doorstep? Why on earth? Is this some kind of –

Everyone is hastening to offer advice on what to do. Some of them think they should send for the constables immediately, others want to know if Woolsey saw any miscreants running for it after ditching the body in such an ungracious fashion, a few ladies are swooning over the thought of the dashing explorer meeting such a terrible end, and then someone shouts above them all, “By Jove! We’ve a woman here who speaks to the dead, don’t we? Send them to fetch Mr. Stanley in straight away, and if he is still in any shape to recall anything, he can tell us who murdered him!
Surely it must be the same perpetrator of the airship tragedy?"

It only takes an instant, and they barely remember to ask Ada if she’s all right with it, for this to be decided upon as the favored course of action. The butler looks aghast at the idea of a corpse on his starched white linens (poor Mr. Woolsey, this has been A Night), but several of the younger men, not even waiting for the servants to do it in their enthusiasm, strip off their dinner jackets and dash out. They return promptly with Stanley’s stiffening body hauled between them, everyone lets out another “Oooh!” of fascination and disgust, and a few salvers and tureens and glasses are cleared off to make room. It is certainly an appropriately ghoulis sight. Stanley’s face is mottled grey and blue, he is dressed in the tattered, soot-stained traveling suit he must have died in, and dried brownish blood is crumbling around the neat bullet hole in his forehead. Lucy can feel the appetizers threatening to come back up, and swallows hard, looking away. The swooning ladies have now had the vapors, however, and she is determined not to have smelling salts waved under her nose. She wonders if she should open her mouth and forestall this entire gruesome entertainment, tell them who killed Stanley, but that would then throw her unpleasantly under the microscope, and they have been thoroughly carried away and probably don’t want this stopped now. These people have problems.

Stanley is placed with a thud on the table, Woolsey has recovered himself enough to produce another clean tablecloth to be draped over him from the head down (rule number one of butler school, be prepared for anything, even unexpected dead men at dinner) and hands from every side are eagerly pushing Priscilla forward. She looks rather queasy herself, as communing with the safely spiritual does not mean you like to see them in freshly-deceased corporal form. She gingerly takes the corpse’s blotchy hand, then grimaces and drops it. “He’s – it’s too recent, it’s quite chaotic, I don’t think I can ask him anything that he’d – ”

Ada snaps her fingers. “You know, I have a rather ingenious device upstairs. I originally built it in hopes of treating madness, but with some alteration for the purpose, it could siphon off some of Mr. Stanley’s excess essence and restore his critical faculties. Woolsey – that small bronze whatsit by my bed, the one with the conductor coil and the alembic, if you don’t mind – ”

Lucy considers wryly that of course Ada has meddled around with a mechanical cure for madness, as it was thought to be the Byron curse, her grandfather was literally known as “Mad Jack,” and she was instructed in mathematics in her childhood in part to stave off any lurking poetical insanity. Frankly, given the Byron family reputation (as Ada said earlier, not exactly your upright dinner guest), Lucy figures it’s probably hereditary syphilis. Yet something has already struck her as rather off about this, and she clears her throat. “Ada, should I fetch the device? I’m sure Mr. Woolsey has enough on his plate right now.”

Ada frowns at her in confusion, as to say the least, the gentility do not volunteer to do servants’ jobs for them, and Lucy is likewise unfamiliar with the house, hardly a close friend who visits often. But it is true that Woolsey has just been distracted by the need to fetch more smelling salts (those ladies are really making good use of the fainting couch), and Ada waves a beringed hand. “It’s on the second floor, dear, last door on the end. Should be on the night table.”

Lucy nods and hurries off, feeling the slap of cooler air on her face after the pressing heat and murk and noise of the dining room. Once out, she glances warily down the hall toward the front door, but it’s deserted. This is the exact situation she was thinking about when she brought that bag of guns, though even she didn’t expect something quite this outré. Never underestimate a dinner party with a Byron involved, apparently. They just seem to attract drama.

After another glance has confirmed that there’s nothing in the front hall, Lucy shakes her head and hurries up the grand staircase, then down the second-floor corridor, past tall closed doors. Obviously, she is not going to snoop in a stranger’s house, even if that stranger is Ada Lovelace.
and seems fine with allowing Lucy to run and get something from her bedroom, but a pang of
desperate curiosity cannot be denied. She also should decide what she’s going to do with the
madness coil. Does she really want it to work, and Stanley to perform a Lazarus act, at least
ventriloquismally? Can he actually tell them who killed him, and why? Some of them have to
have heard of Flynn. But everyone in London will definitely hear about this dinner party; the tale
will spread like wildfire. Is this the plan to – to what?

Lucy reaches the door at the end of the hall and pushes it open, glancing around into Ada’s dim,
palatial bedroom. A majestically canopied bed takes up most of the space, while tall windows are
covered with velvet curtains, and the furniture is painted white and gilt-leafed. Books and papers
are also heaped on most of the flat surfaces, as apparently she has continued to work into her
seventies, and disassembled bits of machines lie in glittering pieces. She said the device was on the
bedside table, so Lucy steps inside. Better get back down to the main event and –

It’s just then, although there’s no wind in the room, that the door swings shut with a thud. She is
aware of someone standing behind her, in a way that she wasn’t an instant before, and can
likewise sense a gun being held on her in that instinctive way that makes her hackles rise. A soft,
mocking, accented voice says, “Good evening, Lucy.”

It says something about what she has already learned about this man, what he does and how he
thinks, that Lucy is somehow not in the least surprised, even if she is startled, exasperated, and
outraged in almost equal measure. Did he – did he actually find out that she was invited to Ada’s
party, make hasty arrangements to dump Stanley’s corpse on the doorstep as a distraction, and
then – and then what? Hold her up at gunpoint in Ada Lovelace’s private boudoir, get a few back
on her for the recent embarrassments and bodily injuries she has caused him? She grits her teeth,
swearing intensely under her breath, before she turns around. “You son of a bitch.”

Garcia Flynn – because of course nobody else could possibly be this unnecessarily theatrical –
grins at her, teeth flashing white in the low light. He is dressed for an evening out, in sharply
pleated suit, stiff collared shirt, and burgundy silk cravat (it matches the color of her dress, which
is even more annoying) and gives her a sarcastic little flourish with his non-gun hand. “You look
lovely too, by the way.”

“What the hell do you want?” Lucy looks around for something she can possibly deck him with,
even though she is pushing her luck to think that she’ll get away with it a third time. She eyes the
muzzle of his gun warily; he’s holding it casually, not pointing it directly at her, but it’s clear he
can adjust that in a hurry if he needs to. “Did you do all this?”

Flynn shrugs. “I didn’t invite you, if that’s what you mean. But I know a man who works next
doors to a dress shop. He saw you going in and made arrangements to find out why. He then
conveyed them promptly to me, which was a smart thing to do. So… here we are, yes?”

Undone by the demands of high fashion. Brilliant. Lucy rubs the bridge of her nose, reminding
herself not to use that shop again, convenient as it might be, if she needs a last-minute gown in the
future. “You killed Stanley,” she says. “Did you know about the medium too?”

“What?” That seems to catch Flynn on the hop. “What medium?”

“Priscilla Mackenzie. She can apparently speak to the dead. Were you hoping that Stanley would
broadcast it to the world?”

Flynn frowns at her, not quite understanding her use of “broadcast,” and there’s something else on
his face as well. Both a sudden apprehension that his perfect sting might bend around and nail him
in the backside, and – something like a brief and hungry desperation, as if he wants to know with
all his might if Priscilla’s gift is real. But in the next instant, it’s gone, and he shakes his head.
dismissively. “Never mind that,” he says. “We didn’t finish our conversation from last time, before we were so rudely interrupted. You said something about Rittenhouse. I want to know what you know about it.”

Lucy stares at him. She is still struggling to process how he knows, but trying to turn the interrogational tables is not going to go well. Surely someone is going to wonder what is taking her so long to fetch the madness coil? Though it might be a good thing that she came up here instead of Woolsey, or Flynn probably would have just shot him on the spot and then Ada would be down a butler. She’s about to ask how Flynn knew it would be her that came, but then realizes that she doesn’t need to. Instead she says, “You knew that I’d suspect something was up from it being Stanley, didn’t you? How did you get into the house?”

“Like I’m going to tell you that?” Flynn raises an incredulous eyebrow. “Don’t avoid the question, Lucy. Rittenhouse. Now.”

“I know that they’re – ” Lucy stops. “Was Stanley one of them?”

“I asked him a few things, yes. Now I am asking you.” Flynn’s patience seems to be wearing thin. “Or do I need to kill you and have this Priscilla Mackenzie ask you later, if that seems to be how things are going? You might be a little more cooperative.”

“Rittenhouse – ” Lucy flounders. She can’t recall that anyone has ever asked her about this. She chases their agents or rescues their targets or avoids their plots, and nobody on her trips is ever the wiser. Finally she says, “If you’re trying to stop them, that’s also what I’m doing. If you’re working for them, then – ”

“Work for them?” Flynn looks honestly horrified, as if he might be a notorious crime boss, a connoisseur of things that go boom, a destroyer of airships, a threatener of women half his size (albeit who have gotten the best of him twice before) and a murderer of prominent and dickish explorers, but God help him if anyone ever mistakes him for a Rittenhouse agent. “No. No! I don’t – what do you mean, you’re trying to stop them? You’re American, you came from there, so you might know more. So how about we – ”

He takes a step, looking as if he’s going to grab her arm and – what? Turn into a bat and fly out the window? It suddenly doesn’t seem all that impossible, and Lucy shifts her weight, preparing to defend herself – it’s going to be a pain getting the derringer out of her stocking, it’s only one shot, and he can cause a lot more mayhem first. But just then, there’s a rattle at the doorknob, and it pushes open. “Good heavens, Mrs. Preston, whatever is taking so long to – ”

At that, Lucy freezes, then whirls around, waving frantically at Ada not to come in. She’s also mortified that Ada thought she might be rifling through the jewelry boxes rather than fetching the madness coil, and starts into a flustered explanation of that, rather than the large and suit-wearing madman standing by the French vanity. But then Ada steps in, looking around – and, of course, sees Flynn. There is a very unpleasant moment. Then with considerable composure, Ada says, “You’re that dreadful scoundrel from the broadsheets. Please inform me what on earth you are doing in my house.”

“Lady Lovelace.” Flynn raises his free hand to tip an imaginary hat. “I am an admirer of your work. Please forgive the intrusion. I just need to borrow your guest here.”

“You what?” Ada draws herself up like a small and fire-breathing grandmotherly ninja. “In case it has escaped your notice, which it seems altogether likely to have done, you have made a most serious error, you utter clod-hopping Romany nuisance! If you wished to speak to Mrs. Preston like a sane gentleman, you would have called around her house in the accustomed fashion, though I have no notion why a lovely woman like her would ever entertain overtures from you! You have
murdered Mr. Stanley and caused his corpse to be dropped upon my dinner table, you vexatious, you myopic, nit-witted, interfering blackguard! You unspeakably uncivilized poltroon! Out, sir! Out at once, I say!"

With that, Ada snatches up a painted Chinese fan from the desk and actually swats Flynn with it, like he’s a buzzing horsefly and she just got a good angle to squash him. He looks genuinely astonished, not least because he’s even taller compared to her than he is to Lucy, and he’s still holding a gun. Ada whacks him again, and since he’s taken his eyes off her, Lucy fumbles up her skirt for the derringer, frees it from its garter prison, and by the time Flynn looks up, she is once more pointing a gun at him, which quickly seems to be turning into their preferred method of interaction. A tiny, ridiculous stocking gun that would barely manage to hurt him, since it feels like you’d need a hunting rifle to drop him, but at least the odds are a little more even.

Flynn looks wildly between Ada and Lucy, as if once more unable to comprehend how his brilliant plan has gone tits up. He seems oddly unwilling to shoot either of them – it would not make sense to murder Lucy, despite his bluster, if she has valuable intelligence on Rittenhouse – and well, he did say he was a fan of Ada’s. Ada, for her part, has now laid hands on a sharp-pointed corset busk and is jabbing him ferociously like a hoop-skirted hornet, and Flynn clearly decides that if he needs a new career, he is not going to take up kidnapping women, it isn’t worth the hassle. He runs across the bedroom floor, pushes open the tall picture window, and clambers out, as they hear swift scraping sounds that must mean he’s climbing to the roof. What, is he going to do the chimneysweep dance up there? Good Lord, this man is ridiculous.

“Are you all right, dear?” Brushing herself off with an angry, determined air and satisfied that the scabrous interloper has been removed from the premises, Ada turns to Lucy. “That horrible man didn’t hurt you, did he?”

“No, he…” Lucy still has no idea what all of that was. “I – I’m so sorry, I don’t think he would have turned up here tonight if it wasn’t for me. The whole scene with Stanley and it totally ruining your supper party, I – I’ll just…"

She stops, even as Ada is offering her a handkerchief and patting her on the arm and assuring her that they will be reporting this directly to the Metropolitan (and raking them over the coals for the sort of terror and disorder that they permit to go on at well-mannered society soirees). Then she says, “Ada, I’m – is there any chance we don’t use your device on Mr. Stanley? It – I can’t explain right now, I’m sorry. But I need to keep secret whatever he might say, and it has to do with why I’m really here. It’s – it’s not just to teach at Somerville.”

Ada looks at her with her head cocked, shrewd dark eyes bright and inquisitive in her face. After a pause she says, “I thought there might be more to it, yes. Well, my guests have had quite the evening already, and besides, I would not object to having that nasty thing off my linens. We’ll just say we couldn’t find it. And there is still dessert, if anyone has any appetite for it. I would be rather surprised if so, wouldn’t you?”

Lucy nods gratefully, and they return downstairs to explain to the disappointed masses that they have not been able to locate the madness coil. Priscilla at least appears to be deeply relieved, Woolsey and his assistants convey Mr. Stanley to the icehouse until the coroner can be called, and everyone struggles to recollect themselves. Ada announces that dessert will be served in the parlor instead, and while the cut-glass dishes of ice cream look tasty, Lucy discovers that she has in fact lost her appetite. She is not sure she is up for another few hours of aghast and delighted whispering about how scandalous it all was, and she turns to Ada. “I’m – if Woolsey could be so kind as to get my bag, I’d like to retire for the night. If that’s all right?”

“Oh course, dear, of course. You’ve had a shock.” Ada pats her arm again in a maternal fashion, orders the butler to retrieve Lucy’s bag, and walks her out to the portico to put her into the
Lovelaces’ own carriage, since Lucy rode here in a rented hackney. “Do let me know when you settle in at Oxford, won’t you? I daresay it will be quite pastoral after all the excitement you’ve had here.”

“We’ll see.” Lucy manages a smile for her. “Thank you. I’m sorry again.”

“Nonsense, dear. It’s not your fault he possesses the social skills and deft touch of a trumpeting warthog in the savannah. Men are so very handsome, but so very dense, it’s the rule for the lot of them. Good night then, Mrs. Preston.”

With that, Ada steps back as the footman shuts the carriage door, and Lucy closes her eyes, wanting to sink into the seat, as they roll away down the dark square. God, one day, one day (or rather night) without running into Flynn and for – whatever disaster keeps happening every time they’re in the same vicinity, that’s all she asks. But yet again, the picture has been complicated. He’s not working for Rittenhouse; in fact, he wants them taken down, just like she does. He wanted to know what she knew, even if he thought that kidnapping her from the dinner party that he literally crashed with a dead guy would be the best way to do it. And whatever happened with Priscilla, if that was actually Amy in any way that she spoke to. God, it sounded just like her, it was her sister’s voice, and Lucy doesn’t know if that could have been faked. Is there still in fact something of Amy left, that can be fought for, that can be saved? It galvanizes her and breaks her heart all at once.

She is consumed in her thoughts all the way back to Bloomsbury, and peers out nervously as they clip-clop up before the dark boarding house. The spot under the lamppost where the automaton usually stands is empty. Is that a good thing? That should be a good thing. Right?

The footman steps off the running board and opens the door for her, and Lucy allows him to help her down. She thanks him for the ride, and they wait gallantly to see that she gets inside, which she does, before cracking the carriage whip over the horses’ backs. Lucy watches them go through the ground-floor window, then climbs the stairs as quietly as she can; the rest of the house is asleep, she should take care not to wake them. How long can she keep this up? Even Monday feels like it might be too late to leave. But they won’t be running any trains on Sunday. One more day (one more dawn, one day more). She can get through this. She can.

Lucy reaches the top floor, and turns down the corridor. Reaches her room, and notices that the knob looks scuffed and crooked, which makes her frown. She pushes at it. It’s open, might have been forced. What the – oh no, if Flynn sent the B-Team here to make sure all bases were –

That, then, from behind, is when the automaton grabs her.
In Which The Thick Plottens

Similar to her encounter with Garcia Flynn in Ada Lovelace’s bedroom earlier on this evening that has apparently not remotely gotten done with being eventful, Lucy’s first reaction to being grabbed from behind by a large and murderous Tin Man is one of boundless irritation. Not to mention incredulity and exasperation – she went to all that trouble, she took her bag to dinner, she brought all of her guns, she checked when the tocker arrived and left, she went inside straightaway, and she still gets snatched? How the hell did it get in here without alerting the entire boarding house, or did Mrs. McBride let it in? This is not necessarily evidence of nefarious intent on her part; if the cops knocked on the door and told you they needed to come in, especially in this era, you’d do what they said. And yet. None of these questions are germane to Lucy’s present conundrum, which is that the automaton has her by the throat, she’s uttering a bruising, gurgled squeal like a leaky pipe, and if she can’t get it off, she’ll probably die.

Her feet flail several inches above the worn carpet, as she jabs uselessly at its unyielding metal face. She can’t hit it in the eyes (or the balls) like a human, it keeps cranking its gears tighter with deliberate clicks, and stars are starting to pop luridly in her darkening vision. Just as she is thinking that this is in fact going to be it, the automaton seems to judge that it has choked her into the correct degree of submission, shifts its grip on her from neck to waist, and lifts her over its shoulder with measured, programmed precision that is more unsettling than a careless fling. Her face bangs into the riveted plate, she’s still retching, and bile burns up the back of her nose as the automaton trundles out of her room, down the stairs with thumps and bumps (someone has to hear this… someone has to hear this?) and across the dark foyer. It thrusts out a gear-hand and opens the door, then emerges into the night. Its heavy boilerplate feet make muffled thuds on the dirty cobbles. It’s taking her somewhere.

Wherever that is, Lucy figures it would probably be best if she didn’t get there. She’s still recovering from incipient unconsciousness, however, and can’t get in enough air from her half-crushed throat to make her brain function in its accustomed manner. It has enough to manage with trying to figure out who the automaton is working for. Obviously Flynn is a guess, but if he knew where she was staying, it seems more likely that he would have gone there himself (though it might have deprived him of his ridiculously overdramatic dead-man-party-crashing, heaven forbid). She’s also seen his henchmen, and they’re human, not mechanical. She’s also made enough of a spectacle – if not before, certainly now – that someone must have heard. With Stanley dead, they’re on high alert already. This feels like Rittenhouse.

Yes. Definitely a good idea not to arrive. The problem, however, is that Lucy doesn’t have much of a choice. The automaton is picking up speed, running on the treaded wheels that have cycled out in place of its feet, and when Lucy starts to struggle again, it cranks its grip around her almost tightly enough to snap her spine. She’s going to have to wait until it puts her down, then try to fight her way out without her guns, against God knows how many goons. Shit. Shit.

Dire as this predicament looks, Lucy still has been in worse, and she tries to use this time efficiently, clear her head and visualize the potential situation and place where she might arrive. She could use it to her advantage. Find out if Emma is here in person, or it’s just a cell of especially well-trained sleepers. God. This is one of the (admittedly many) times it would be nice to have backup. Rufus and Jiya couldn’t come, they only worked out the calculations for one, and who knows what Emma has managed. Lucy is used to operating alone, mostly. But still.

The automaton whirs for several more minutes, taking dark side lanes and skirting the theater district around Covent Garden, which is still busy with late-night operagoers, drunkards being fished out of gutters, actors and their admirers, and other society butterflies (is Oscar Wilde around
here? It feels like Oscar Wilde, probably ten times more fabulous than before, is definitely around here—he should have just become editor of The Woman's World, a Victorian ladies’ magazine. Lucy wonders if they’ll hear her if she screams, but it doesn’t seem likely. It still would be hard to do that. She can only get out a husking sound.

In another moment, the automaton hangs a right into a narrow, seedy lane just a few hundred yards north of Waterloo Bridge, which funnels into an old carriage yard. Just as Lucy is wondering if this is the end of the line, or if it’s somehow taken a wrong turn and might get disoriented long enough for her to escape, she spots movement out of the corner of her eye, on the balcony across from her. Human, not a tocker. The next instant, the night splits apart with a blast of blue fire.

Lucy feels the tocker get hit square in the chest; in fact, the shot only barely avoids her, and she feels a residual, jolting shock of mild electrocution sizzle up her fingers and spark in her hair. The tocker’s grip momentarily goes slack, and she wrenches at the gears, managing to pry them apart and slide free, catching her ankle on the cobblestones beneath her as she falls. The tocker is still coruscating with eerie cobalt energy, and there’s another boom from the balcony as whoever is up there shoots again, taking it in the head. A hiss and pop of scorched wiring follows, along with a cloud of alkaline white smoke, and the tocker starts springing gears and spinning wildly in a circle, a garbled string of unintelligible metallic sounds pouring out of its mouth grille as its circuits blow. It remains upright for a moment longer, then falls hard and flat on its face, bolts scattering, as Lucy scrambles backward on all fours. What the hell.

She looks up sharply overhead for her mysterious rescuer—not least because it very well could not be a rescuer, but someone interested in procuring her for their own purposes. For a wild moment, she thinks it’s Flynn. He certainly has plenty of the correct kind of guns and a vested interest in keeping her alive at least long enough to talk, and he could have hung around the Lovelace residence in order to see her leave and track her home. But if that was the case, why wait so long to make his move? There were other dark alleys he could have chosen, other out-of-the-way corners. Unless he just needed this particular one for reasons, not that she knows what those could possibly—

“Ma’am?” It’s a man’s voice, but not Flynn’s, as someone climbs off the balcony, shimmies down a drainpipe, and jumps the last few feet to the ground. “Are you all right?”

“I…” Lucy sits up slowly, still feeling jabs of sharp pain in her ankle that seem to mean more running, as she has been doing a lot of recently, is out. “I think so.”

The man glances at the fallen tocker, gun still out, and seems to debate whether he should give it another blast for good measure. From what Lucy can see of him, he’s square-shouldered, stocky, and looks like a soldier; he’s wearing plainclothes, a brown suit and houndstooth overcoat and felted bowler hat, but she can still tell. He has leather holsters slung on both hips, one for the tocker dropper and one for a Colt quite similar to hers. That and the accent is what gives her pause. “You’re American?”

He gives her a look as if to say that apparently, so is she. “Sergeant Wyatt Logan, ma’am. Formerly of the Texas Rough Riders.”

Lucy is surprised by this. The Rough Riders aren’t supposed to exist until 1898, they’re cowboys and ranchers recruited from the Southwest to serve as cavalry for the Spanish-American War, famously led by Teddy Roosevelt. Maybe things are different here, or it’s in reference to another branch of service. He did save her life, so she refrains from pressing immediately for details. She allows him to give her a hand to her feet, though she still has to sit down on a nearby orange crate, and they regard the smoking remnants of the tocker. “I hate the damn things,” Sergeant Logan says. “Give me the creeps. You have any idea why that one grabbed you?”
“No.” Lucy glances at him. Grateful as she is for his timely assistance, it has not escaped her attention that it could be a little too convenient. “Why did you shoot it for me?”

“Looked like you could use the help.” He shrugs, checking the gauge on his gun and dialing off the charge, but still not quite moving to put it back in the holster. He’s looking at her with a slight frown, as if trying to place her face. “Do I know you from somewhere?”

“I don’t think so.” Lucy gingerly works her ankle, but has to stop with a hiss. Is someone going to come looking for her, if the tocker fails to deliver her on schedule? For that matter, where is she going? She can’t really feel safe back at the boarding house, and after the whole scene with Mr. Carr, she’s probably persona non grata at every brothel and winesink across the city. (She would like to point out that Flynn shot him, not her, but the owners don’t want their property stolen.) “How long have you been in London?”

Sergeant Logan gives her another look as if to say that they’re both well aware he doesn’t have to answer that, but after a moment he says, “I arrived three days ago. You?”

“Recently.” Lucy jumps at a muffled thump from one of the windows overhead. “I think we should probably get out of here.”

Logan concurs, and offers her an arm, which Lucy doesn’t take. She hops along as best she can on her one good foot, though it’s difficult enough that she finally relents and allows him to help her through the maze of crates, barrels, broken stones, wagon wheels, old barrows, and other junk that leads out of the alley. At the end, he says, “Didn’t I see your picture in one of the papers? After the airship crash at Regent’s Park. I swear it was you.”

“What?” That doesn’t sound entirely good. “Did you?”

Logan thrusts his hand into his jacket and comes up with a folded scrap of newsprint from one of the daily rags, which he holds out for her inspection. The black-and-white photograph is obviously grainy and blurred, but it looks like some conscientious citizen, first on the scene with his homemade camera, managed to capture exclusive footage of the crash and then sell it for a tidy profit. Sure enough, Lucy’s in the picture. Not fully, but enough to see a good amount of her face, backlit by the burning zeppelin. Probably was just as she was starting to run after Flynn. There’s no name, obviously, but if anyone was looking for her, well. There she is.

“I suppose it looks like me, yes,” Lucy says, as lightly as she can. “What do you know?”

Logan gives her another, more deliberate look. “Turn up by a burning airship, then you were snatched by a tocker tonight, huh? Your life usually this eventful?”

“No,” Lucy says, which is obviously a bald-faced lie. “Thanks for the assist, but I can probably figure it out from – ”

“Do you know a man named Garcia Flynn?”

That catches her sharply in the back of the head, just as she’s trying to make a feeble effort to stride away, and she stops short. She isn’t sure what answer he’s expecting or that she should give, and she takes a moment to compose her face before turning around. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I’d like to find him,” Logan says, as if this was probably obvious. “He’s the main suspect in the airship crash. You were standing right there. Did you see anyone who looked like him? Tall man, dark hair, Slavic accent. Armed and dangerous.”

looking for him? Some ongoing turf war? That’s you boys’ business, leave me out of it.”

“I’ve been hired by certain people to look into this situation.” Logan’s hand drifts casually to the hilt of his Colt, though he doesn’t make a move to pull it. “I’ve worked in this capacity for a while. I specialize in these kinds of marks, and the Metropolitan can’t go all the places it needs to for a case like this. So. That’s why they brought me in.”

“All the way from Texas? That fast? It happened barely a week ago.”

“No. I came from Berlin, I’ve been in Europe for a while. So, do you know Flynn or not?”

Berlin. That catches at Lucy, though she doesn’t know if it should or not. She can guess that Sergeant Wyatt Logan, no matter his previous occupation in the Wild Wild Steampunk West, is now a private mercenary in the handsome pay of any number of powerful and undisclosed employers, solving problems like Garcia Flynn. Either someone at Westminster didn’t feel confident in the usual channels’ ability to catch up to him, if Flynn has been operating in the city for two years without being stopped, or someone else altogether decided to bring in more firepower. Lucy can’t be certain exactly who Logan is working for, or why they want Flynn (the obvious reasons, probably, but still). She manages a smile. “No, I haven’t met him.”

“Are you sure?” Logan’s light blue eyes remain intent on her. “There’s plenty of money in it if you can tell me where he is. And I’ve heard a few rumors, asked a few questions. Does the name Frank Carr ring any bells?”

“Should it?”

“Seems to me it might.” There’s half a look on Logan’s face as if he’s starting to suspect her of being Flynn’s moll, which is rather horrifying. “Are you protecting him for some reason?”

“Look, Sergeant,” Lucy snaps, losing her patience. “Grateful though I am for your swift assistance in the matter of the automaton, that does not mean I am obliged to render you anything else, information or otherwise. I already told you that I don’t know the man, so unless you’re planning to tie me to a chair and pull out my teeth, you can just take my word, as a gentleman is supposed to in this day and age, and get along with your – ”

Logan opens his mouth, then shuts it. There’s a slightly uncomfortable pause. Then he says, “Apologies, ma’am. I didn’t catch your name earlier, by the way.”

“Oh?” Lucy debates whether it’s something she wants him to have. Rittenhouse could easily have hired him, though they usually prefer to handle things themselves, and wouldn’t want a private-sector, trigger-happy American mercenary galumphing in and causing problems. It’s more likely that Logan has been discreetly enlisted by some under-secretary in Gladstone’s cabinet, who would rather outsource the thankless job of catching Flynn to hands that can afford to get considerably dirty. The Met have laws, rules and regulations to follow, and when Flynn won’t play by them, that limits their options. That still leaves the mystery of the automaton, though. It can’t have been working for the Met if Logan shot it, since nominally they’d be on the same side. Unless he somehow doesn’t know that, but that seems unlikely.

There’s a continued awkward pause as they stare at each other, Logan in expectation of a name and Lucy still stalling. Finally she says, “Kate Drummond.”

“Kate… Drummond.” Wyatt considers that, then nods. “Very well, Miss Drummond, where exactly are you staying in London? I can escort you back.”

“I’d rather you didn’t.”
“Do you want to get snatched by another tocker?” He seems frustrated, as if she is deliberately and perversely thwarting him (well, perhaps she is, but still). “It’s late, it’s not safe for you to be out here alone. Besides, I’m not convinced that you don’t know more than you’re –”

Lucy is just wondering if she might have a spare hatpin or sharp end of a brooch to stick him with, though he obviously has the guns and she does not, when there’s a flat, short crack from the second-floor brick parapet across the street. Logan reacts instinctively, shoving Lucy to cover, even as he’s drawing his own Colt and preparing to return fire. Lucy herself was perfectly able to identify that as another gunshot, thanks very much, and it crosses her mind to wonder in despair if literally everyone in London is shooting at her tonight. But the angle they were standing at, there’s no way the attacker could have gotten a good sight line on her, if she was actually the target. No. Someone’s now taking potshots at Logan, and she’s just in the way.

There are obviously plenty of people in the underworld who would want a government-hired bounty hunter off the streets, especially if he might smoke any number of other rats out while he’s after Flynn. But something about the sound of the shot is familiar to Lucy, and though it is a very bad idea, and ignoring Logan’s hiss, she scuttles to the other side of the building, keeping low and moving fast. To judge by the recoil and the muzzle flash, that is definitely one of the specially modified guns purchased off Dooley in the Croft a few days ago. Which means –

Just as the man in the impromptu sniper’s nest takes another shot, crumbling the bricks very close to Lucy, she catches a glimpse of his face in the blue backwash. It’s Karl. And just before he ducks, since Wyatt has decided to hell with the Colt and is returning fire with the high-powered piece he used to take out the tocker, Karl looks down and sees Lucy. She’s sure he does; their eyes lock through the smoke and ozone billowing across the alley. If this was not a terrible situation, the expression on his face would be extremely funny.

Well then. That explains it. Karl’s job tonight was to track down the bounty hunter chasing the Flynn gang, while Flynn himself was supposed to nab Lucy from the party. The fact of her presence here means that Flynn has somehow blown it, again, and it throws a wrench in Karl’s heretofore straightforward objective of blowing Logan sky-high by any available method. Lucy crab-walks sideways, under the canvas awning, as bolts of sizzling blue energy thunder and splash in midair like dueling lightning strikes. Wyatt is leaning out of cover as far as he can, though he and Karl both have sufficiently protected positions that they can’t quite get a clear shot at each other, and are just causing a lot of property damage in the meantime – if those guns are powerful enough to destroy a giant tocker, they can pulverize everything or everyone else in their path. A milk wagon blows up behind Lucy in a shower of splinters, and she can hear shouting from down the street, lights coming on in adjacent houses. Obviously, dramatic as it is, you can’t have a pitched gun battle in a London alley at midnight without somebody noticing.

Right then. This looks distinctly like Wyatt Logan’s problem, and maybe if she’s lucky, the constables will turn up and arrest both him and Karl, though that doesn’t seem likely. Lucy’s balky ankle is still very unhappy about the idea of bearing her weight, but she’ll do something about that later. She has no idea where she’s going, but Not Here tops the list. There’s another flash and strafe behind her, booming like cannons at close range, and between that and her slight remaining deafness from Flynn shooting Carr right next to her ear, it’ll be a miracle if she comes out of this with her hearing intact. Or anything, for that matter.

Lucy run-hops as fast as she can, gritting her teeth at every step and aware that she can’t make it very far, as she bursts out of the alley and picks another at random. In the maze of narrow, dark lanes around Covent Garden, it’s all seedy, the kind of underground that caters to any exotic or perverse taste you have, so long as you’re prepared to pay. Red lamps swing past her, opaque windows, narrow stairs down to doors that echo with eerie dancehall music, cranking hurdy-gurdies. A very drunk man staggers up to her and seems inclined to ask how much she costs,
darling, so Lucy decks him with a well-placed uppercut to the chin and tidily picks up her skirts to step over his prone form. However, this satisfying action comes at a price. Her ankle is screaming bloody murder, and it almost gives out entirely with her next step. Limping and dragging, she makes it to the door at the end, pushes it open, and falls inside.

A wave of warm, sickly-sweet air washes over her, almost making her gag, so that it is clear at one whiff what kind of establishment this is. At least all the patrons will be too blissed out to see or take any note of her whatsoever, and she really doesn’t have a choice. Frankly, a hit or two herself doesn’t sound that bad. Or a stiff drink, if they’re serving it. God, what a night.

Lucy hops painfully down the hall and into the low, dimly lit opium den. It is decorated in appropriate “Oriental” style, with Chinese characters inked on silks, painted screens and paper lanterns, a man strumming a sitar and a thick, befuddling fug of incense hanging in the air even over the stultifying reek of opium. Smokers sit or sprawl glassy-eyed on cushions, shishas set on bamboo mats before them, pipes fallen out of their mouths as they stare at nothing. Britain has already fought the First and Second Opium Wars in their relentless drive to open China to British markets, to keep the Chinese population hooked on the opium they deliberately imported from India, and to deny the Chinese reciprocal trading rights and economic privilege. In other words, this drug is a deliberate and ugly artifact of imperialism abroad that has become widespread among users at home as well. Lucy feels light-headed just from breathing in the fumes, reels to a halt, and has to sit down.

She remains there for several moments, trying to make the world stop spinning, before a small man with a pigtail comes up to her, bows, and asks if madam would like a bowl to begin with. Lucy supposes she can’t stay here all night without paying, though she’s not sure she has any money on her; it’s all back at the boarding house, along with the rest of her things. Oh God, what happened to Mrs. McBride and Seamus? Were they just told to stay out of the way and it would be fine, or was it something else? How long was the tocker waiting there? Was it always meant to go after her since it first appeared, or did someone reprogram it to –

Just as Lucy is trying to think what to say, there’s a swish of beaded curtains across the way, and three people, who are clearly not here to enjoy a late-night hookah, stride through. Lucy sees them, freezes, then grabs the grimy scarf draped over the settee and throws it over her head, concealing her face, just as they stop less than five feet away. Nostrils flaring, expression deeply critical, green silk ruffles immaculate and red curls picture-perfect despite the ungodly hour and decrepit surroundings, Emma Whitmore says, “What a shithole.”

The two large henchmen make vaguely agreeing noises, as Lucy sits as still as she can, trying to look like another blotto smoker. Her heart is pounding in her throat. Yes, on an intellectual level, she knew Emma was probably here, but that still didn’t quite connect to the fact of walking into the same dive opium den, less than five minutes apart. Emma must have been in the neighborhood already – was she waiting for the tocker to turn up with Lucy, got tired of waiting, and discovered it blown to bits in the carriage yard, with an ongoing gun battle a few streets over and no sign of Lucy? Started to canvass the area to see how far she could have gotten away? God, it was Rittenhouse that sent the automaton to snatch her tonight, whether or not it was intended for that purpose before. Get it to what, wait and info-gather first? Wyatt Logan destroyed it, so hopefully they can’t mine it for whatever it picked up, but that doesn’t mean –

“You.” Emma snaps her fingers at the owner, who approaches with a wary expression. “We’re looking for someone. A woman, small, dark-haired. Someone on the street above said they saw her run in here. Sound familiar?”

The owner pauses. Lucy sees his eyes flick halfway to her, then back to Emma. “I am sorry, madam,” he says. “I do not know who you mean.”
“Do you?” Emma takes a step. “Think hard, little man.”

“It has been a quiet – a quiet night.” The owner gestures around at the slumped smokers. “Nobody like that. Does madam want a bowl? It is for free.”

“I don’t want a bowl of hash,” Emma snaps. “I want to know what happened to the woman who ran in here. All this paper, this silk, these pipes – this place is a firetrap, don’t you think? I’m sure you don’t want anyone to knock over the oil lamp. So why don’t you go look?”

The owner pauses again, then puts his hands together and executes an infinitely polite bow, excusing himself to the back. Since he is obviously trying to delay them (it’s entirely possible that he just doesn’t like Rittenhouse either, whether or not he knows who they are), this might be a moment for Lucy to try to get away, but the only exit is directly past Emma and her goons, her ankle is a problem, and a smoker high as a kite on opium wouldn’t be moving anyway. She has to remain entirely still, scarf over her face, pretending to be visualizing *Kublai Khan* or whatever (technically, she thinks that was down to absinthe, but whatever). Emma shifts her weight impatiently. “Jesus, this place is depressing. I feel like we should burn it down anyway.”

“Are we sure the tocker snatched the right person?” one of the goons ventures. “You know how those things are, they’re not exactly – ”

“Yes, it snatched the right person.” There’s an edge of ice in Emma’s voice that makes it clear the goon should not insinuate her incompetence, even indirectly, again. “Besides, I had a word with the old lady who runs the boarding house. Took her and her son and made sure she confirmed that it’s Lucy. I’ll probably have to kill them later, but it’s her.”

Lucy’s stomach turns over at hearing that Rittenhouse did indeed grab Mrs. McBride and Seamus, who have been nothing but hospitable to her even after Seamus’s face got smashed by a paving stone, and extort them, probably in the painful way, for information. God, where are they now? Where is Rittenhouse using for headquarters in the city? Do they know about –

“Yes,” the second goon says. “It’s Lucy. But we’ve clearly missed something, haven’t we? That whole fuckin’ mess with Stanley. Who knows what he might have said? Now he’s dead, and everyone we could have gotten to through him is going to be running scared. Lucy’s not the only one screwing things up for us here.”

“No.” Emma’s voice is even more dangerous. “I have a score to settle with an old friend, believe me. God knows no one else seems capable of doing it.”

“What’s his face – Flynn? That’s the guy, right? Why haven’t they found him yet?”

“These people couldn’t find their asses with both hands, so it doesn’t surprise me that they’ve been totally ineffective at catching him.” Emma sounds coldly disdainful. “Unfortunately, he does know what he’s doing. Or at least who he’s after.”

“Wait,” the first goon says. “You know him?”

“Knew him,” Emma corrects. “I haven’t spent the 1880s entirely out in the ass-end of nowhere, after all. He was a useful and promising recruit. Then things went bad. We had to take some unfortunate steps. Not my fault he never got over it.”

She utters a short, sharp laugh, even as Lucy’s mind continues to reel. If she’s following this, Flynn and Emma knew each other a few years ago, and Flynn might even have been a Rittenhouse member, or working with them in some capacity, before things blew up. Lucy remembers the research she did at UCL the other day – Flynn killed his wife and child in 1884
and got to London in 1885, shortly after the Berlin Conference. He knows about Rittenhouse somehow, obviously, and hates them. So if he discovered the truth about what Emma and her compatriots were up to, and disagreed with it, is it possible that he’s not the one responsible for the murders? Lucy is extremely familiar with Rittenhouse’s methods of operation, after all. There was that brief, heartbroken look on Flynn’s face when she mentioned that Priscilla could talk to the dead. It’s entirely possible to murder your own loved ones and regret it forever, of course, and Flynn might be wishing that he could apologize. But his behavior has been – not exactly what you’d expect for a feared crime lord. He’s grabbed Lucy a few times, by the wrist and then as a shield from Carr, but he’s never actually tried to really hurt her (and certainly not to the degree that she’s definitely hurt him). He jumped out the window rather than shoot or even punch Ada Lovelace, a tiny seventy-two-year-old woman attacking him with a fan. He’s dangerous, he’s killed people directly in front of Lucy, he’s clearly not to be taken lightly, but if it’s been directed to the same end, to finding Rittenhouse and stopping them –

Before anyone can say anything else, the owner reappears from the back. “I have searched, madam,” he says. “I do not see this woman.”

“Really?” Emma glances around at the slumped smokers. “Then you won’t mind us going through one by one and making sure?”

“Please, do not disturb my customers. If it is only opium that the British give to the Chinaman to make any living, then surely the Chinaman can give opium to the British?” This little pigtailed man is proving to be unexpectedly iron-willed in standing up to the leader of a terrifying secret society and her heavily armed minions. “I have looked, madam. Now buy a bowl, yes? Or go.”

There’s a long, tenuous pause. Lucy can hear Emma sizing up whether she’s going to shoot this man and/or burn down the den, both of which seem likely. Then she says, “Fine. We’re going to be back tomorrow morning, if we still haven’t found her by then. If we ever discover that you purposefully kept her from us… well. You two, let’s go.”

With that, Emma jerks her head, and the minions turn and tramp down the low hall after her, the sound of their footsteps disappearing up the steps, as Lucy continues to sit very still. Then, when she’s sure they’re gone, she throws the scarf off her head and looks at the owner. “Th – thank you. Thank you. You saved my life. Thank you.”

“You are welcome.” He inclines his head, watching her with intent, bright eyes like a robin. “My name is Li, Mr. Li. I do not like those people. You can sleep in the back, but I think you should leave before dawn.”

“I’m sorry for putting you in danger.” Lucy allows him to help her to her feet, with a small, papery hand, and to the tiny room behind the painted curtain. She is more than ready to pass out for hours, but she isn’t sure that Rittenhouse – or someone else – won’t come back. Besides, she needs to rescue Mrs. McBride and Seamus somehow. Emma said she hasn’t killed them yet, and Lucy hasn’t told them anything too incriminating, but that might not be enough to save them. Plus there’s a bounty hunter after Flynn, a shootout in the street, Rittenhouse definitely here and very angry, and the bruises on her throat from the automaton. Ada’s dinner party, and the excitement there, already feels like years ago.

Lucy collapses onto the old chaise indicated by Mr. Li, he puts a blanket over her, and, drifting in the ambient opium haze, she falls asleep quickly and has crazy dreams. She wakes up with a very dry mouth and sticky eyes, as he’s shaking her gently. “Madam. Time to go.”

Lucy sits up slowly, accepts the cup of water he hands her, and drinks it down at a slug. She’s still in her fancy dress from dinner, now torn and dirty, and her stays are wearing grooves into her torso. Her ankle doesn’t feel any better, but Mr. Li gets out a small pot of something he calls tiger
balm and hands it to her. “It may help. Be careful, madam.”

“Thank you.” Lucy hobbles through the den, pale and washed-out by the grey morning glow, a few smokers still prone on the embroidered cushions, and makes her way slowly up the steps to the street. The cobbles glisten from a predawn rain, and the air is cold and clear and bracing after the cloistered poppy haze. The eastern horizon is split with pink and purple and red, the just-rising sun a golden fingernail among bloody clouds. The steeples and rooftops of London are stark and black as India-ink, and even the clattering telegraph wires and aetheromagnetic antennas are almost still. Lucy is very hungry, very sore, and really wants a proper bed.

At last, all she can think of is to go back to Ada’s. It will probably be another scandal to appear on her doorstep at the crack of dawn and in total disarray, with a hair-raising tale of what happened to her after leaving the party, but Ada seems to like her, and she will probably be sympathetic to Lucy’s ordeal. She just needs to not die long enough to leave for Oxford. If she ever actually gets there, which is starting to seem less and less likely.

Lucy doesn’t have any money to hire a hansom cab, though a few are just starting to appear on the street, and it’s just under a mile’s walk from Covent Garden to St. James’ Square. Not more than twenty minutes under regular steam, but takes her close to an hour on her bad foot, and she’s starting to worry that she’s permanently damaged it by the time she drags into sight of Ada’s house. Gritting her teeth, she summons up some final reserve of energy and makes it up the broad white steps, then knocks on the door.

It takes a while, as even butlers have to sleep, but at last Mr. Woolsey, in nightshirt and cap, trousers half-pulled on, opens the door and squints at her. Then his jaw drops. “Mrs. Prest – ?”

“Yes, I’m sorry.” Lucy has no idea how to explain this. “Can I please come in?”

Mr. Woolsey clearly has all sorts of opinions on what he might do if this was up to him, but he is not one to stand between a lady in distress and suitable refuge, and clearly knows that his mistress would agree to it. He gallantly offers an elbow for Lucy to take, and swiftly finds an appropriate chamber for her repose, packaging her inside and promising to let Ada know that she’s here as soon as she awakes. Lucy thanks him and falls on the bed, struggling out of her dress and letting out a painful whoof when she finally unknots her corset and removes it. Between her messed-up feet and now the ankle, she is probably going to be permanently lame, and she groans in pain as she gets her shoes off. She doesn’t think it’s broken, but she isn’t in any shape for extended foot chases. Or really, any at all.

Lucy lies on the bed in her shift, hurting all over, trying to think what to do. She doesn’t have any obvious way to contact Rufus and Jiya – it’s one thing to leave messages in history, but this isn’t their history. Even if she put something in a newspaper or magazine, they’re never going to see it, because they exist in an entirely different branch of reality. This was always the risk of this mission, running it solo. But if Rittenhouse gets their hands on aether or any of the other things they could bring from this universe into ours, it’s over. It isn’t just history that they could change, then. It’s everything. The rules of reality, of science and magic alike, a power that nobody could counter. Of course Emma wanted to come here, and she’ll stop at nothing until she has what she wants. Lucy has bought a little time thanks to Mr. Li’s heroics, but not much.

The more she turns it over in her head, the more she can’t really come to any other conclusion. There is only one potential ally here, much of a loose cannon as he demonstrably is. Only one person who hates the same people and who has, however disastrously, tried to make contact with her. Their previous meetings have been a complete fiasco. She’s not sure this one won’t be.

Lucy imagines Mr. Woolsey’s face when she asks him if he can contrive an actual invitation for the outlaw and ruffian who dumped a dead body on the doorstep, broke into the house during a
Karl Popovich did not actually set out to be a criminal. After all, most people don’t. In fact, he was born on the twenty-fifth of October, 1854, a date otherwise notable for the doomed Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War, an event swiftly immortalized in verse by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. At first, Karl took it as a sign that he was destined to do great things, but now he’s realized that it’s the opposite. He is destined to do stupid things and die because of unclear orders from incompetent bosses, apparently. But at least his epitaph will be great.

Not that he’s going to say this out loud. He’s been with Flynn’s gang for just over two years, since the man rolled into London in early 1885 and started recruiting, and for the most part, they’ve been top dog. Karl inherited the surname, a high tolerance for alcohol, and an enjoyment of punching people from his Russian father, and strong organizational skills and a long-suffering tolerance of terrible situations from his Swedish mother, all of which has made him an ideal candidate for henchmanhood. He thought about trying to break away and run his own ring, but frankly, he prefers the supporting role, rather than the spotlight. He speaks four languages, is an excellent cheat at cards, knows which officials can be bribed, can get his hands on pretty much anything the boss asks for, is proficient with any number of guns and other weapons, and generally doesn’t ask questions or for anything more than steady pay and the occasional night out to get shit-faced. God dammit, Karl Popovich is good at his job, and he deserves to be recognized for it. Really standout henchmen are not a dime a dozen. You can always get sheer dumb muscle to break heads and start brawls. The kind of skills that Karl brings to the table are essential and, he is starting to feel, literally criminally underappreciated.

On that note, Karl is totally baffled as to how, if what he just saw in the firefight is accurate, the boss has managed to yak it yet again. He was supposed to go capture a tiny woman, even one who’s gotten the better of him twice (and Karl has plenty of opinions on that, believe him) from a fancy dinner party, where the most dangerous thing she could be armed with was a broken champagne glass. Evidently either Flynn has developed a crippling fear of fine dinnerware, or – well. Karl has gotten stuck with cleaning up several messes after Flynn can’t bring himself to actually hurt this Lucy bird. Which, yes, they need her alive and to talk, but just bang her over the head and knock her out, or anything else at all. How fucking hard is that?

Apparently, very. Once more, Karl has gotten stuck with the difficult job, trying to shoot Sergeant Logan in the middle of Covent Garden and not be arrested, while Flynn whiffs it for the third time straight, and he deserves a decent explanation. He has to bail out of there before the peelers arrive, or before he’s killed Logan, and runs across the rooftops, sliding on the shingles. He’s quite sure that if it had been left up to him, he would have snatched Lucy, no problem. He’s also increasingly sure he knows what Flynn’s problem is, and that’s no good at all.

It’s close to dawn by the time Karl, breathless and grimy and having had to take the long way around, finally makes it back to the gang’s hideout in the cellar of an old brick warehouse in Southwark. Despite the lateness, or rather earliness, of the hour, he isn’t surprised to find Flynn awake; he probably never went to sleep. He’s sitting in his shirtsleeves at the battered table, dimly lit by an old wick lamp, cleaning and polishing his gun, and looks up sharply at Karl’s entrance. “There you are. What the hell took so long?”

“What do you mean, what took so long?” Karl slings his own gun off his back and glances around for the nearest open bottle. “I had the hard part!”

Flynn snorts. His face is drowned in shadow, and his eyes spark like coals. “Is Logan dead?”

“No.” Karl grabs something and takes a long slug. Tastes like piss, but he’s not feeling very particular right now. “Is Lucy captured? Wait, no. Let me answer that. She’s not. You wanna...
know how I know? Because I saw her in the middle of the damn street, as Logan and I were shooting at each other. Nice job, huh?”

Flynn’s head jerks up. “She what?”

“Why didn’t you grab her at the party?”

“Did you shoot her?”

“No, I was too busy trying to shoot Logan. She ran off, I didn’t see where she went. If you’re gonna have me stick my neck out, how about you at least – ”

Flynn sharply pushes the chair back and gets to his feet. “I didn’t realize you were suddenly an expert on all my plans, Karl.”

“I didn’t realize you were suddenly incapable of grabbing a tiny lady!” Karl has had a night, and if Flynn is going to try to punch him, it feels like he’d probably miss that too. “What the hell is it about Lucy, huh? She’s caused more problems for us in a week than anyone in two years, and honestly, it feels like you’re letting her get away with it.”

“I’m not letting her get away with it.” Flynn’s voice is a growl. “But she knows about Rittenhouse. Obviously I would prefer that she was able to talk about it.”

Karl rolls his eyes. Flynn’s psychotic fixation on these Rittenhouse bastards he holds such a grudge against is annoying at the best of times, right now it’s just sad. “Come on. Like that’s the only reason you’re going easy on her. I think you have a bit of an eye for her, and it’s – ”

Flynn moves toward him so fast that even Karl, who is feeling substantially freer with his thoughts than usual right now, bites his tongue hard. Flynn stops just short, exuding a tangible air of menace, as if to make it clear that he’s holding back and expects Karl to appreciate it. He folds his arms, staring Karl down. Then he says, “First a strategic genius, now a romantic advisor. You have all kinds of hidden talents, don’t you?”

“Actually, I do.” Karl would like that to be established. “Look, if you really want to talk to her, send me to get her. I can promise I won’t mess it up.”

“You just failed to kill Logan.”

“Little bit of difference there. Or a lot.”

Flynn can’t argue that point, but rather than concede it, he grunts. He turns away, striding back to the table and his gun, oddly reticent to grant Karl permission to take over on the vexing Lucy question. This does absolutely nothing to disabuse Karl of his theory that Flynn doesn’t like the idea of anyone but himself dealing with this lovely and troublesome American female, for whatever reason or another, and he muffles an exasperated sigh. Flynn’s wife died three years ago, nobody ever said that the man had to be a monk, and yet, so far as Karl knows, he hasn’t so much as gone for a single night at a brothel. Once Karl and the boys pooled in to buy Flynn a nice whore, thinking it might help with the stick up his arse, and after he had politely shown the woman out, he practically pounced on them. He’s never said anything about them consorting with assorted ladies of the evening, as long as they keep their traps shut and don’t inadvertently brag about what they do and who they work for, but he maintains an icy distance of his own. From everyone, really. Lives out on his island, and follows his crazy plans. Karl is under no illusions that he himself is in this until the end. He’ll have to jump ship before Flynn totally goes down in flames or up the gallows steps at Newgate, and he wonders if the time is drawing near.

After another pause, Flynn straightens up. “We need to deal with Logan,” he says curtly.
“Someone in the government hired him just to make trouble for us, and I don’t want him sniffing at our heels. So try to actually shoot him next time, huh?”

Karl restrains himself, with difficulty, from pointing out that he’s not the one here who needs to prove that he can still do his damn job. “Fine. But you made a lot of important people mad by killing Stanley, so if that’s why they went to Logan – ”

“Stanley deserved it,” Flynn says, utterly indifferently. “I was right that Rittenhouse tried to recruit him, by the way. But it was still in the negotiating stages, so he didn’t know enough about what they wanted to do next, or overall. We need a better source.”

“Like, say, Lucy?”

Flynn eyes him for a long moment. Then he growls, “Yes, like Lucy.”

“What makes you so sure that she knows? She could be bluffing.”

“Then I’m going to question her and find out.”

“Right,” Karl says. “Let me know how that works out for you.”

Flynn’s glare is nearly hot enough to scorch his hair off, but he pretends not to notice. Karl finishes the bottle of piss, wonders if he has the ambition to find anything else, and then decides he doesn’t and staggers off to his bunk. You know, sometimes he really hates this job.

Karl sleeps for a few hours, wakes up in midmorning, and emerges to find the lair mostly quiet, though his some of his fellow henchmen have wandered in to sleep as well. Flynn himself isn’t there, which is probably disastrous. If he’s currently getting beaten for a fourth time, then –

Karl is just wondering if he should possibly pack up and leave, whether temporarily or longer-term, when he hears a knock on the warehouse door above. A knock? What the hell? The henchmen don’t knock, neither does Flynn, and anyone coming to visit them would be of the unwelcome variety. Unless this is the Met doing due diligence before they break the door down, but those idiots can’t find this place. So really, what?

Since he has to do everything around here lately, Karl grabs his gun and goes upstairs, reaching the door and jerking it open a bare inch before he steps quickly to one side, anticipating shots. They don’t come. A very long-suffering voice says, “Excuse me. Would this be the Flynn… residence?”

That startles Karl enough to push the door open another inch. A man who looks like a butler is standing outside, having not even bothered to dress down for his excursion into a bad part of town – he’ll be lucky if he doesn’t get immediately jumped and robbed, but two brawny footmen with muskets are standing behind him, clearly on bodyguard duty. Well, this is bizarre.

“Can I help you?” Karl aims the gun at the butler, who quails but holds his ground. “Get lost collecting for the ladies’ auxiliary?”

“I did not.” The butler whisks a card out of his sleeve. “My name is Woolsey, sir. I have been dispatched to this – place – by my mistress, the Countess of Lovelace, in order to invite Mr. Garcia Flynn to.” He stops and grimaces horribly. “Tea.”

Flynn being invited to tea? Flynn being invited to tea? Flynn being invited to tea? Flynn being invited to tea? Karl can’t even decide what part of that statement is the most incredulous, aside from the fact that Woolsey has apparently strolled right up to the hideout of the most notorious criminal gang in London to deliver his missive. Not that it matters, because this is clearly a trap.
Flynn broke into the Lovelace mansion just last night, Ada will have the peelers ready and waiting for him the instant he walks up. Toss him in the paddywagon, and there you –

“I have also been instructed to convey to Mr. Flynn,” Woolsey goes on, “that this invitation is at the request and by the contrivance of Miss Lucy Preston. So, er. Convey that, would you?”

*Lucy* invited Flynn to tea? Oh Christ. Oh, *Christ.*

You know what, Karl thinks. Changed my mind. I have absolutely got to see this.
In Which A Tea Party Absolutely Happens

There is no etiquette book in existence, in this reality or other, that can adequately cover the specifics of the rather demented social situation that Lucy Preston presently proposes to embark upon. When she woke up and went to breakfast with Ada, who somehow didn’t seem all that surprised that she’d turned up in a renewed pickle, she finally gave in and told the truth. Not all of it, but she confessed that she is fighting a secret society known as Rittenhouse, that Flynn is pretty much the only person she has ever met who seems demonstrably interested in doing the same, and no matter the obvious and extensive drawbacks to asking London’s most notorious crime boss if he likes cream on his crumpets and one lump or two, that is what she wants to do. Spilled as well that the McBrides got kidnapped on her behalf, that there isn’t actually a Mr. Preston in America, and that even when (?) she does get to Oxford, she’s mostly there to take advantage of their historical archives, see how far Emma and her cohorts have gotten embedded here, and what they’re proposing to do about it. She’s only taken the job at Somerville for a year. After that, she’ll have to leave. Maybe sooner. It all depends, and she doesn’t know.

Ada watches her with that shrewd gaze and seems about to ask where she will be going, then stops. “Well,” she says at last, briskly. “Lucky thing I’ve never been adverse to being scandalous, dear. If that terrible oaf breaks any of my best china, though, I am going to be very annoyed. Mr. Woolsey, use the second-best set, won’t you? Oh, and I suppose we have to go about actually inviting him. Where does he live, do you think? Rent a dismal flat in Wapping? It seems like the part of town for his sort.”

Mr. Woolsey looks very alarmed at the notion that his morning is going to involve tracking down Garcia Flynn, but he is the Consummate Butler and his mistress has given a command. He discreetly assures her that he will look into the casual task of finding the feared Flynn gang’s hideout, thus to walk up and bestow its leader with a lacy scalloped tea card, and Lucy tells him to stress that the invitation is from her. Woolsey dutifully checks if that is Mrs. or Miss Lucy Preston, since he heard her tell Ada that she doesn’t have a husband, and jots that down, then tidily withdraws. Once he’s gone, Lucy says, “Is this a completely ludicrous idea? I mean, he did break into your house and dump a dead explorer on your doorstep. If you don’t want – ”

“It certainly has the value of novelty.” Ada daintily pats the scone crumbs off her lips and puts down her napkin. “Though I think it’s best if we keep Miss Mackenzie upstairs, don’t you? She seems to have been through enough shocks, and her disposition is rather delicate.”

“Priscilla’s still here?” Lucy doesn’t know if that is a good thing or not, if Flynn might learn that fact and want to enforce further questioning. He certainly had an odd reaction to hearing about the medium in the first place. “I suppose it was too long a trip back to Inverness?”

“Yes, and I am still interested in her talents. I do have a few deceased individuals I wish to speak with, my lord father and Mr. Babbage not least. Though the policemen may wish to question her if they uncover her gift, during their investigation into Mr. Stanley’s death. But just between me and you, dear, I cannot feel that his demise is entirely undeserved. Leopold of Belgium is a nasty piece of work, so was everything that Stanley did for him in the Congo, and none of the gentlemen regrettably in charge of the Government seem to realize it. Color me altogether shocked. In any event, perhaps we simply don’t mention to the Metropolitan, whenever they belabor themselves to get here, about Miss Mackenzie’s talent?”

Lucy blinks, not least because an elderly Ada Lovelace roasting absolutely everyone left and right is a thing of beauty in itself, but also because this seems to hint that Ada is already half-convinced of the necessity of getting one’s well-bred hands dirty, if the occasion arises. Or at least, keep back
vital information from the police about who murdered Stanley and to protect Priscilla, after noticing that she was uncomfortable last night. She might look like the perfect Victorian society matron, but there’s plenty of rebel in her too, and for the first time, Lucy wonders if she has actually found a real motherly role model, an older woman who genuinely cares about her and wants to help and has taken an interest in her. She doesn’t know what it would be like. She thought she did, for a long time, but of course, that was a lie.

There’s also the possibility that Rittenhouse could find out that Lucy is hiding here now and come barging in to kill everyone, and she spends several hours nervously looking out the curtained window of the sitting room. Mr. Woolsey finally returns with a harried expression and announces that he has in fact delivered the invitation (all the authorities in London can’t find Flynn’s hideout for months, a determined butler does it in one morning – you have to wonder if there’s a future for him in police work). He has no idea if it was accepted, as he delivered it to some minion of Mr. Flynn’s rather than the man in person, so he supposes they will just have to wait and see. Would the mistress like him to lay out the tea for three o’clock or four?

Ada tells him to aim for three, just to be safe, and Woolsey straightens his bowtie and decamps to the solarium, pulling a loaded cart, as if determined to absolutely civilize Flynn’s face off. There is then an awkward moment when Priscilla comes downstairs and is startled by all the industry, and Lucy can’t think of any other reason to tell her to stay in her room for the afternoon except for the truth. Priscilla goes pale. “Him? He’s even condemned in the Scottish papers, and they usually love anyone who makes a muck of things for Westminster, begging your pardons, Countess. He blew up an entire wing at the University of Edinburgh last year.”

“Really?” Lucy tries to think what attraction Edinburgh would have for Flynn. There could certainly be something. It’s a hotbed of studies for science and medicine, and the Encyclopedia Britannica has been printed there since the eighteenth century – well, that’s the gold standard for knowledge right now, if Rittenhouse gets their hooks into it and circulates their own approved version, that would obviously be a problem. Has Flynn in fact become a crime boss almost by accident, since whatever he’s done to hunt Rittenhouse has obviously been terribly illegal? Emma knows him, they met sometime in the early 1880s, before it went wrong. Flynn hasn’t gotten into the business to smuggle opium and aether and diamonds and phosphor, all the other dangerous substances that leave and enter this Britain, or for run-of-the-mill extortion and kidnapping and burglary rackets. This has been targeted from the start.

“Aye,” Priscilla confirms. “He’s a bad man, Mrs. Preston, you need to be careful. Especially after what he did last night, there’s no way to say he won’t just walk in and – ”

“Just Lucy is fine. And I know, but I’m not frightened of him.” It surprises Lucy, as she didn’t realize it was true until she said it aloud, but it is. It’s hard to be frightened of a man, no matter how tall and scary-looking, when you’ve come away with the decided upper hand in your last three meetings. If Flynn does decide to throw his weight around in any sense of the word, she’ll deal with it then, but she thinks she can offer him something he wants. In return, a man with some organization, a lot of guns, and intelligence that even she can’t easily acquire has attractions as a Rittenhouse-fighting partner. It’s dangerous, but so is everything.

Just then, there’s a crisp knock as the London coroner and a pair of Met detectives arrive to collect Stanley’s frozen corpse from the icehouse, and Priscilla is hurried back upstairs so they can’t talk to her. Lucy really hopes that they’ll be quick about it, as it’s now two o’clock and if Flynn turns up early, he might run into the police, conclude this was a trap, and then do something spectacular to get away, as well as never being willing to trust her in the future. Fortunately, Ada seems to be thinking along the same lines, and she hurries them to get Stanley, says that at some point they will be along to give a full deposition about the circumstances that led to him appearing in a defunct state upon her front step, and practically pushes them out the door. Then she shuts it behind them,
turns to Lucy, and says, “Not too obvious, dear, was I? Oh, and you’ll want to change. I have a few gowns that might fit you.”

“Oh – yes.” Lucy supposes she can’t really wear her dirty dress from last night to high tea, even though she doesn’t have anything else. “What exactly should I choose?”

“If you ask me,” Ada says, “I’d select something rather daring. I find it works marvelously to stupefy men upfront, and that one, well. A few square kicks in the behind, of a delicately feminine nature of course, would likely be advisable. I daresay he’d also thoroughly enjoy it, if you were the one doing the kicking.”


“I know he’s a horrible ruffian,” Ada goes on, as if this is what Lucy is objecting to. “But nobody said you had to marry him, dear, did they? I think the white damask one, the one with the little blue flowers, and a rope of pearls. Ask Colette, my lady’s maid, if the useless girl isn’t asleep in the powder room again. Go on, chop chop.”

Feeling as if she has been kicked in the behind a few times herself, and still wanting to clarify to Ada that no part of this plan involves seducing Flynn, Lucy allows herself to be sped off and changed, primped, pinned, and otherwise put on show for tea. She ends up in the gown Ada suggested, an off-the-shoulder confection with a full skirt and tightly laced corset (Colette is really good with the yanking) that nonetheless displays a fashionably tiny waist and just the shocking hint of cleavage when she’s done. Lucy takes a gander at it in the mirror, and grimaces. It’s entirely modest by the standards of any other era, but here in Victorian England, when she’s gotten used to ankles being considered a risqué body part, she feels like she couldn’t look more as if she’s going to saunter up and throw herself at Flynn if she tries. “No,” she starts, turning to Colette. “I don’t think this is going to work. Let’s pick another one.”

The maid is puzzled. “But you look very beautiful, Mademoiselle.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Lucy mutters, not entirely under her breath. Not that she can say why, and if Flynn is going to be rendered stupefied upon sight of her bare shoulders, he’s easier to manipulate than she thought. But just as she’s about to insist that they go back to Ada’s closet and have another look, she hears a knock on the front door, echoing through the house. The kind of knock that makes it clear that knocking is only one of the possible actions it could have undertaken in this circumstance, and it would be a wise idea to pay immediate attention.

“Oh, shit,” Lucy says, earning herself an aghast look from Colette. She looks around, grabs a silk-fringed shawl off the bedpost, and drapes it over herself, wondering if she’s ever going to be able to wear a bikini again when she gets home. Then she pulls on a pair of fingerless white lace gloves and moves to the top of the stairs, looking down tensely, as Woolsey leerily advances on the door. After all, he has no idea if he’s going to open it and find himself faced with another dead body, the business end of a gun, or worse. You’d think that if that was in fact Flynn’s plan, he wouldn’t have bothered to knock, but you never know.

Woolsey opens the door with impeccably correct decorum. “Good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon.” Lucy can’t quite see the speaker, since she’s still standing on the top landing and the foyer chandelier is in the way, but she recognizes the voice at once. It’s ostensibly polite, if edged with subtle mockery. “Mr. Flynn here to take tea with Miss Preston and the Countess of Lovelace. Oh, and my associate, Mr. Popovich.”

Mr. Woolsey allows himself the tiniest of sighs and makes a beckoning gesture. The next instant, Flynn and Karl step into sight, both scrubbed and dressed and shaved; it even looks like Flynn has
taken a wet comb to his hair and parted it neatly down one side. He is wearing what is probably his best suit, a sleek dark-grey pinstripe with another starched white collar and burgundy cravat (it seems to be his color) and has donned a tophat and walking stick like any other gentleman of quality out for an afternoon social visit. Karl’s trim is somewhat less nice, though still suitable for a call of this caliber, but his main accessory seems to be the heavy, clanking bag he is carrying like a rucksack. Lucy estimates there are at least a dozen guns in it.

Woolsey glances at it, seems about to ask if he can take that off Mr. Popovich’s hands for him, and then decides that he would really rather not. Instead, he clears his throat and gestures up the stairs. “Miss Preston? Your… guests, ma’am.”

Since that seems to be her cue, Lucy places one hand on the banister and descends with all the assumed debutante grace that she can, fixing a smile onto her lips. As she comes into view, she can briefly see Flynn’s face flicker with something he can’t quite control, though he turns his head fast enough that she doesn’t make it out either. When he looks back, he’s all cool, controlled sass once more. “Miss Preston?”

“How could I refuse?” Flynn seems to be enjoying this, if nothing else. Maybe it appeals to that innate thirst for drama, who knows. “You will recall Mr. Popovich?”

Lucy and Karl stare narrowly at each other. After all, she saw him just last night shooting high-powered weapons adjacent to her in an alley with a Texan mercenary, and before that with their tussles in the Croft, not even counting the situation when he got to the London Zoo with an unconscious Stanley. They both give each other – well, just call it smiles. “Charmed, ma’am,” Karl says with rather spurious gallantry, doffing his bowler hat. “Not going to shoot the boss again over a nice Earl Grey, are you? At least wait for the biscuits.”

Flynn gives him a shut-up-you-idiot look and pivots smoothly on his heel, offering his arm to Lucy. She has nothing else to do but take it, as the two of them appear to be trying to literally kill each other with courtesy, to prove that they have the better manners. They stroll sedately down the corridor to the solarium, Woolsey and Karl trailing behind, and make an entrance, as Ada rises to her feet from the pristinely laid tea table. “Mr. Flynn,” she says sweetly. “We are so very delighted that you could fit this into your busy schedule of mayhem.”

Flynn lets go of Lucy’s arm to take Ada’s hand and kiss it, with one dark eyebrow sharply cocked. “Your hospitality is immaculate, Lady Lovelace. I apologize for my own rudeness last night.”

“Yes, well, you were extremely rude.” Ada waits as Woolsey pulls out the other two chairs for Flynn and Lucy, who in turn wait for her to be seated before taking theirs. Karl is directed to take up a servant’s post in the corner; he’s here to keep watch and spring into action at a moment’s notice if called for, not to palaver and nibble cucumber sandwiches with a highborn hostess. He puts his bag of guns with a clunk on one of Ada’s chairs that looks expensive, and she looks at him in annoyance. “You over there. I know you work for him, but do mind the Morris.”

Karl opens his mouth, then shuts it smartly at another searing look from Flynn, and does his best impersonation of a slightly judgmental classical statue. Woolsey rolls in the tea cart and begins to serve everyone, as Lucy’s thigh almost brushes Flynn’s under the table and she resists the urge to jerk it back. As usual, he looks much too big for the delicate, spindly-legged furniture, knees crammed under the edge and having to be careful not to rattle all the place settings when he moves. He politely removes his hat, which Woolsey whisks away, and shakes his head when the
butler offers cream or sugar for his tea. There is a brief interlude as they all sip demurely and eye each other over the gilded rims of their cups. Then when Woolsey has set out the crumpets and pots of clotted cream, and bowed himself out, Flynn says, “So what, exactly, is this all about?”

“We thought – Miss Preston and I – that there was some advantage to getting you into my house when I had actually asked you to be there, rather than your nonsense last night.” Ada shoots a glance at the sideboard, as if to judge that her trusty fan is in reach if she needs it. “We do not have any intention of turning you over to the authorities, at least presently, though heaven knows you are an absolute rascal and would entirely deserve it if we did. I used to be prone to the odd spot of wagering on horse races – not that I still am, of course – and the tales they used to tell about you at the track, all when they thought I wasn’t listening. My goodness.”

“I only arrived in London two years ago,” Flynn says. “Of course your ladyship was not visiting the racing tracks that recently?”

“Oh, don’t try to be clever. It doesn’t suit you at all. Very well, I may not have entirely abandoned my old gambling habit, but don’t let the papers get hold of that, it would be very tiresome. In any event, it serves to demonstrate that you tend to make yourself quite the memorable pain in everyone’s nether aspects. My dearest Miss Preston here was wondering if that extended to a certain society of her acquaintance. Rittenhouse.”

A tangible change comes over Flynn’s expression at that. His mouth is still more or less smiling, but his eyes are hard and flat as lacquer, a nearly automaton-like blankness. For once, he doesn’t lunge at Lucy, or hold a gun on her, or otherwise violently demand what she knows, but she can feel the full and formidable weight of his attention as it turns on her. “I think it’s clear by now that it does. Wouldn’t you say?”

Lucy didn’t really expect him to deny it, or figure that he would, but this definitely means she needs to tread carefully. They stare at each other for a tenuous moment. Then she says, “How do you know about Rittenhouse?”

“How do you?” Flynn is still clearly inclined to play close-mouthed with his information, for which she can’t really blame him. This entire situation reeked of a potential setup from the start, and even if Ada has assured him that they’re not calling the cops on him, that doesn’t preclude unwelcome consequences in any number of ways. “Karl says he saw you last night with Sergeant Logan. A man who, as he likely disclosed to you, isn’t any friend to me.”

Karl raises an eyebrow in an oh-am-I-included-now sort of way, but continues to hold his tongue, and Lucy wonders how much of an explanation she owes him. Fine, what the hell, she invited him here. “I met Sergeant Logan because he saved me from the automaton that grabbed me at the boarding house, right after I got back from Ada’s party. Rittenhouse sent it to retrieve me, but Logan shot it and I managed to escape. Both from it, and then from him, once your associate over there turned up and started lighting up the night. I hid out in an opium den, where I had a very close shave with one Emma Whitmore. From what she said, you two know each other. Is that true?”

Flynn’s mouth twists savagely at the mention of Emma, but he doesn’t answer immediately. “Knew,” he says at last, the same past tense as Emma herself used, as if both of them are keen to stress that they no longer have the least bit to do with each other. “I met her in 1882, in a cabin out on the Missouri frontier, in America. We were working, or at least I thought we were, on the same side of some business that I’d been dispatched to do. I returned home to Dalmatia when it was done, and she arrived a few months after that. Said that she thought we’d worked well together, and she had more jobs for me, if I was looking. I took on a few, but something about it didn’t smell right. In short, I discovered who Rittenhouse were, and what they wanted. They exacted revenge on me for it. Ever since, I’ve been trying to take them down.”
Lucy is surprised that he’s actually been so forthcoming with this information, even as she can feel herself trying to decide how to parse it or what to focus on first. Emma’s been here for at least five years, then. Arrived in America and has been building alternate-history Rittenhouse there, before traveling to Europe in pursuit of bigger and better things. And Flynn said he discovered who they were – discovered all of it? Time-travel, other-reality part included? His grip is so tight on his teacup that he looks about to shatter it, the reason Ada insisted they use the second-best china, and he belatedly loosens his fingers and puts it back on the saucer. “So,” he says. “Fair’s fair. How do you know?”

“I’ve been… I’ve been following them for a while.” Lucy looks at his face, trying to decide how far she can trust this man. *The enemy of my enemy is my friend,* supposedly, but does that hold true here? “And hunting them. I’ve recently arrived in London to do the same. If you said you know what they want, you know they want to control everything, they want to embed their people in governments and political structures and other places of influence, and they’re willing to go to extraordinary lengths to achieve it. I was… familiar with them, growing up. I told you back in Traitor’s Gate that they took everything from me too. I mean that.”

Flynn scrutinizes her with an intensity so raw that it’s Lucy’s turn to feel like she wants to look away. That answer stopped him from going after her once, but it’s still clear that she’s keeping something back, and he could push in any number of ways for more. They continue to stare at each other, daring the other to call them a liar, but at last, Flynn flicks his eyes to one side, deflecting the gaze without quite breaking it. He picks up his teacup and takes a sip, in a clear attempt to look poised and put together. “You must have had quite a career if you’ve been hunting them for – how long now?”

“Five years.” Lucy thinks it adds up to that, give or take, though it’s obviously hard to count when it’s the last thing from sequential. “Same as you.”

Flynn’s eyebrows go up again at that. “All by yourself?”

“I had help on other missions. I don’t on this one.”

“Who else knows?”

“Nobody who can get to us here.” That’s the truth, after all. “So that is why you shot down the airship? You thought Rittenhouse might have recruited Stanley?”

“They did recruit him,” Flynn says. “But he hadn’t officially joined as a member, he didn’t know as much as I needed. I did get him to talk, a little. Rittenhouse is apparently well involved in the funding of the railway the tsars are having built across Siberia, but that doesn’t do me a fuck of a lot of – ”

Just as he realizes that he did in fact say *fuck* in front of Ada Lovelace, and is trying to decide if he should apologize for it, Lucy frowns. “The Trans-Siberian Railway?” she blurts out. “That’s not supposed to be started for another three years.”

“What?” It’s Flynn’s turn to frown at her. “What do you mean?”

Lucy bites her tongue, as that was a slip. Construction on the famous railway begins in 1890 under Tsar Alexander III, finally finished in 1916 under Nicholas II of murdered-Romanovs fame, but that, of course, is in her reality. Apparently Rittenhouse has gotten the ball rolling earlier here, and she dimly remembers that plenty of American entrepreneurs are involved in convincing (and funding) the tsars to build rail connections into Siberia, of all godforsaken places. Perry Collins and Hiram Sibley, American telegraph pioneers with interests in Russia, are in on it, Collins at
least has London connections too, and Nicholas is going to marry Queen Victoria’s granddaughter, Princess Alix of Hesse and Rhine, in 1894. Assuming that Stanley wasn’t just lying under torture (Flynn doesn’t need to spell it out, but it’s clear that he didn’t give up this information voluntarily), then there are certainly some useful spiderwebs for Rittenhouse to twitch, but why? Why Siberia? There’s even less there now than later.

“I mean,” Lucy says, realizing that Flynn is still waiting for an answer. “I know there were proposals for a railway, but I didn’t realize that any of them had actually commenced.”

“Are you usually well informed on the intricacies of Russian railway developments, then?”

“It depends.” Lucy looks back at him coolly. “What were you doing in Edinburgh?”

Flynn looks briefly startled that she’s heard about that, though he seems to concede that very well, she could have read a newspaper. “Adam Black, the printing company, they’ve produced the last several editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica. If you’d seen what Rittenhouse had done to the most recent batch of them –”

“Oh, so it was Britannica?” Lucy feels mildly pleased that she guessed correctly. “Stored in a wing at the university, so you just dynamited the lot of them?”

Flynn looks at her appraisingly, as if he’s either impressed that she put thought into deciphering the rationale for his criminal misadventures, or she guessed that his solution was to just fucking blow up a lot of very expensive volumes containing the Rittenhouse version of reality – this one, at any rate. He does something with his tongue that doesn’t seem quite appropriate for tea. “You have a suspicious mind for a lady, Miss Preston.”

“And you have impolite methods for a gentleman, Mr. Flynn.”

He snorts, as if to say that he’s never presented himself as one, elegant tea manners and starched collar aside, but a small, furtive smile curls his lip, as if he’s enjoying this barbed society banter. “I wouldn’t be pointing too many fingers in that regard. You’re the one who keeps causing scenes.”

“I am not causing scenes.” Though to be fair, Lucy thinks, she’s definitely found herself in the middle of them. “And if you weren’t such a pain in the –”

“I assume in a metaphorical sense, given the repeated physical incidences you’ve visited on me, so you hardly have any call to –”

“Why, Mr. Flynn.” Lucy spoons raspberry jam onto her crumpet and gives him a wide, sweet, you-die-tonight smile. “Surely you can’t be afraid of me, can you?”

Karl is abruptly overcome by a fit of coughing in the corner. Flynn glares at him ferociously.

“More tea, anyone?” Ada says loudly, possibly to stop a crime boss from murdering his henchman on her expensive Turkish carpet. She has been observing the bickering interchanges between Lucy and Flynn with a well-that’s-fascinating expression, which makes Lucy feel that she very much needs to clear all this up later. “Still some in the pot.”

Lucy holds her cup out for a refill, more as a distraction than because she really wants it, but she does have the crumpet to wash down. She carefully avoids looking at Flynn as she does this, and there is a rather strained silence. Then Flynn says, “So what exactly are you asking? Do you think we’re going to – what, team up, fight Rittenhouse side by side? I don’t think so. You keep getting in my way.”

“Actually, you keep getting in mine.” Lucy sips her replenished Darjeeling. “Now that you have
the entire Metropolitan and Sergeant Logan on your tail, it doesn’t feel like you’ll be able to show your face for a while. As well, Rittenhouse knows you’re here. Emma said she’s personally out to settle old scores with you. You need to be careful.”

“So what?” Flynn snorts again. “You think you’ll appoint yourself my damn bodyguard?”

“Honestly,” Lucy snaps, “I’m not sure you don’t deserve everything coming to you. But I can guess that both of us might be tired of trying to do this alone. You know things I don’t, I know things you don’t. We could help each other. Weren’t you the one who dropped Henry Morton Stanley’s dead body on the doorstep in the middle of a dinner party last night, just to try to talk to me? Or were you only bored and needed something else ill-advised to do? So what do you want from me?”

Flynn opens his mouth, then shuts it. He manages a rather weak simulacrum of a scoff. “I don’t want anything from you.”

“Sure.” A few square kicks in the behind, Ada said, of a delicately feminine nature. Lucy has pretty much entirely abandoned the latter; straight-up square kicks it is. “After you also came rushing to Traitor’s Gate when someone told you I was there?”

“That’s – ” Flynn makes a low growling noise of unspeakable aggravation. “That’s different.”

“Is it?”

They continue to stare each other directly down, like a pair of feral cats fighting over a dead fish in a back alley, until Ada clears her throat. “If it is going to come to pistols, would you two please do it in the garden? I don’t want poor Mr. Woolsey to have to spend all night scrubbing in here, and I daresay the neighbors could use the entertainment.”

Flynn and Lucy snap their mouths shut in more or less unison, though it’s not clear if this means they have actually stopped fighting. There’s another uncomfortable pause, until Lucy finally says in a more conciliatory tone, “Could we at least try it?”

“What? Shackling yourself to a wanted man?” Flynn smirks at her. “Don’t you think that might be too conspicuous, Lucy? Or have you had some brilliant idea otherwise?”

God, he is the worst. Lucy reminds herself what’s at stake, several times, before managing a teeth-gritted smile. “Well, when you get arrested, don’t expect me to pay your bail.”

“And could you contrive it that I wasn’t?”

“I don’t know,” Lucy says. “But it feels that either we can decide to work as some sort of team, or we can keep running into each other and butting heads, double back on what the other has already done rather than going forward, and otherwise being so busy shooting each other in the foot that Rittenhouse can do whatever they want. So?”

“Neck,” Flynn points out. “You shot me in the neck.”

“What?” Lucy was going to apologize for it, but he’s just so annoying. “That’s my point. I’m not going to give up. Neither are you. So do we try to get what we both want, or not?”

Flynn continues to study her face. His usual expression of smug jackassery is certainly present, but there’s something else as well, the barest hint of a man who has worked alone for most of his life and is naturally suspicious of any attempt to join forces now. As if he can’t quite believe that she hates Rittenhouse as much as he does, is willing to do the same things, and expects that if he did agree, she’d spend the entire time nagging him about his scorched-earth tactics. Which – yes,
Lucy thinks he could stand to tone down the explosions, but she’s not here because she expects she’ll get him to take up letter-writing campaigns and petitions to Parliament. She needs some of that violence, that darkness, and she has more than a little of her own.

“Fine,” Flynn says gruffly. “If we were to do this. What would it look like?”

“I don’t know,” Lucy says again. “Some kind of shared intelligence, a way to tip each other off if we heard something, working together on jobs if we could. You know I can handle a gun.”

Flynn briefly looks as if yes, he does, and no, he does not object in the least. “And?”

“We could work out the rest of it as we go. You could see if you could find anything about why Rittenhouse wants in on the Trans-Siberian Railway, if Sergeant Logan or Rittenhouse or whoever else doesn’t get to you first, and I’ll go to Oxford and do what I was intending there. I’ll be back at Christmas. We could compare notes then, or before.”

There’s another pause. Flynn might actually be on the brink of agreeing, it’s hard to tell. Just then, however, they’re interrupted by the sound of the solarium door opening. “Countess? There’s a man who wants to – oh. I’m very. Very sorry.”

Everyone glances around to see Priscilla Mackenzie staring at Flynn, who in turn stares back at her. He clearly doesn’t know why exactly she’s frightened of him, aside from the obvious, but he apparently just cannot pass up the opportunity to troll. He leans over the back of his chair and says, “Boo.”

Priscilla jumps.

“Oh, you complete nincompoop, leave the poor lady alone,” Ada orders. “Dear, you’re not a servant, you don’t need to be running my messages. What man, though?”

“An inspector from the coroner’s office. He had a few more questions about Mr. Stanley.”

Everyone exchanges looks. Then Flynn clears his throat, gets up, and looks around for his hat. “That seems to be my cue to leave. Lovely tea, lovely company, but I think – ”

Karl grabs the bag of guns off the chair, as if suggest that they might have to blast their way out of here, as Ada and Lucy get hastily to their feet and wonder if some frivolous feminine conversation might be needed to distract the police inspector while Flynn sneaks out the back. He appears to feel they can keep the hat, and starts to shove past Priscilla in the doorway. This is entirely ill-mannered of him, as usual; he could just ask her to move. But he knocks her off balance, grabs at her belatedly to steady her, and –

Whatever happened at dinner with Priscilla’s connection to Amy, if that’s what they’re going to call it, it took several minutes. Whatever this is, it happens immediately. Priscilla goes stiff, and then she lets out a bloodcurdling scream. It is not her own scream, it is not her own voice. It is that of a child, a young girl perhaps, and she sounds utterly terrified. “Tata,” she sobs. “Tata! Pomoż! Pomoż – ”

With that, Priscilla cuts off in a short, gurgling sound, even as she sways and collapses to the floor. Lucy runs to her in alarm, even as she stares up at Flynn, who is utterly white-faced, stunned, and looks like he’s just relieved the worst moment of his entire life. He opens his mouth, then shuts it, shakes his head, and backs away from Priscilla as if she is radioactive. For once, Karl likewise doesn’t have anything to say, and runs after him.

“The back door, remember,” Ada calls, looking rather shaken. “Mr. Flynn, the back – ”
Flynn is already out of sight. They can hear him blundering down the hall, Karl speeding on his heels. Presumably to make his way out the back, as instructed, rather than cross paths with the police inspector waiting by the front, but everything has gone to hell so quickly that Lucy doesn’t know. She kneels by Priscilla, who appears to be in a faint, and shakes her. “Hey. Hey. Ada, should we get some water, is she – ?”

Ada continues to stare after Flynn, a furrow creasing her brows. There is no sound of a scuffle from the foyer, though there is the distant sound of banging patio doors that seems to indicate he has successfully made his exit. It’s not clear if that unpropitious two-second encounter just destroyed all the progress made in their entire conversation, or if Flynn ever intends to see them again, and Lucy, once she has awoken the shaken and nauseous Priscilla and given her over to Mr. Woolsey’s competent care, looks at Ada. “What just – ?”

“I’m not quite sure. But I did holiday on the Dalmatian coast for several summers, and while I’d not say that my command of the language was particularly remarkable, I do remember a few things. If that was what it – well. I suppose I can’t blame him for running.”

“Why?” Lucy frowns. “What did she say?”

“She said help me.” Ada glances at her, and then away. “To be quite precise, she said, Daddy, Daddy! Help me! Help – and then was cut off. She – or whoever was speaking just then – does not appear to have ever finished it.”

Lucy feels cold all over. She was rattled enough by her own encounter with Priscilla’s gifts, and whatever just happened then. . . she has a bad feeling, even if she doesn’t want to say so. Did she just make Flynn relieve the moment that his daughter was murdered by Rittenhouse? Were those her last words, her scream of terror? Was he trying to get to her in time, and couldn’t? Watched her die in front of his eyes, and been so haunted by it ever since that Priscilla is almost possessed with it, by the merest passing touch?

Lucy rubs her face. It wasn’t her fault, she knows it wasn’t, but she can’t help but feel a small, uncomfortable weight of guilt anyway. There’s still the police inspector to put off the scent, and she needs to tell him about the McBrides, if nothing else. Though it’s not likely the Met is going to be able to find whatever bolthole Rittenhouse has squirreled them down, they need to try. And she needs to pack, or see if Ada can send someone to get her things from the boarding house. Oxford. Oxford tomorrow. Finally.

(They doesn’t know if Flynn is ever coming back. They doesn’t know that she would.)

Still shaken, she straightens her shoulders. Dons her smile, yet again, and goes to tell some lies.
Lucy leaves for Oxford the next morning. She had started to become entirely convinced, not without reason, that she was never going to get there, and even as she is standing in Paddington Station with her things, which were retrieved from the boarding house by Ada’s underlings last night, she can’t quite believe that another distraction, diversion, or disaster won’t crop up and stop her. Paddington is full of pale morning light, crammed with passengers in hats and overcoats and umbrellas, beggars and newsies, echoing with the hooves of horses pulling the crates unloaded from the cargo platforms, smelling pungently of smoke from the puffing stacks of the iron-horse locomotives. Soot-faced boys push heavy hoppers of coal to fill the boilers, there’s a faint patina of cinders on everything, and as Lucy climbs into the first-class carriage and makes her way down to her compartment, she can’t help a slight smile. Steam trains are just cool, all right. Make you feel like you might be going to Hogwarts.

Once she has managed to put her luggage up on the rack without an obsequious mustachioed gentleman magically materializing to assist her, she sits down and lets out a long breath, some of her excitement dissipating in the ever-present cloud of worry. She feels bad enough about leaving London like this, when the McBrides are still Rittenhouse’s prisoners, even if there’s not much she could do about it. She debated how much to tell the Met, as police work and solving crimes hasn’t really advanced beyond the “walk around in tall helmets and ask people if they did it” method. (There was Eugène François Vidocq, the famous French detective who basically invented modern criminology, though he died thirty years ago.) Also, if Rittenhouse realizes that Lucy is onto them, they’re going to throw the kill switches and change everything. As much as she hates it, does she just have to swallow the McBrides as a bitter but necessary sacrifice?

That’s not even getting into the whole Flynn mess. She hasn’t heard hide nor hair of him since he left tea so abruptly, after Priscilla’s possession, and given how regularly they’d been running into each other before, that is unusual. It feels like whatever accord they were about to reach is completely up in smoke, and as much as Lucy tells herself that that was a stretch anyway and he was always a dangerous wild card and it’s for the best that she’s back to what she can control, by herself, it stings. She doesn’t even know why. Maybe for a few hours, she actually got a little attached to the idea of having a partner in this, in not being totally alone. Not that it was going to be him. They would never have worked. Butted heads the entire time.

(Ada’s knowing looks were definitely very wide of the mark. Very wide.)

They pull out of Paddington and chug into the low green countryside, still bucolically dotted with hedgerows and old trees and stone cottages in places, and built with factories and millwheels in others, tall brick warehouses emblazoned with the names of looms and lumberjacks, ironmongers and soapmakers, clothiers and clockworkers. Britain in the full grip of the Steam Revolution, and Lucy sees more automatons rolling by on the canal towpaths, which makes her shudder. They’re nothing like the one that attacked her the other night – the bruises on her throat are turning a rich purple, like amethysts – but she is too aware of them now.

Then and odd, an airship cruises overhead with a low droning noise, and the conductor appears in his brass buttons to check Lucy’s ticket. He makes friendly conversation, seems surprised to hear that they allow ladies at Oxford now, and asks if her husband has stepped out of the compartment and he should return. Lucy tells him that it’s just her, gets the usual look, and muffles a sigh. Maybe her spinsterhood will be less shocking at Somerville.

It’s about two and a half hours later, as steam trains are obviously slower than their electric counterparts, when they finally huff and puff into Oxford, the whistle blasts, and they roll to a
grinding, sparking halt at the platform. Lucy gets her things and follows a nearly entirely male queue off the train and out of the station. Clockwork Vaucanson carriages are lined up by the cab rank; the eighteenth-century inventor Jacques de Vaucanson, another Frenchman, is famed as the Father of Automata here, a career he pursued in Lucy’s world as well, but to less lasting success. The carriages are another of his creations, but it’s not far to Somerville, and Lucy is still leery of extended contact with tockers. She hefts her suitcase and valise, and starts to walk.

Oxford is still Oxford in any age or reality. It’s slightly smaller and muddier and stranger than she remembers, but the dreaming spires rise into the gauzy horizon, the streets are narrow and winding, and she emerges into the intersection of Broad Street, Cornmarket, and Magdalen Street, with the tiny church and graveyard still there to the left and Boswell’s Department Store to the right, with the Bodleian Library and the Sheldonian Theatre ahead. Lucy turns left down Magdalen, walks a few blocks to Woodstock Road, and finally finds the gate and porter’s lodge for Somerville. It’s two buildings purchased from St. John’s, has about thirty women enrolled, and none of them are able to graduate yet – they were only allowed to take exams for the first time three years ago. Well. Here goes nothing.

Lucy is properly received by the porter and shown to the small, sunlit Senior Common Room. Here she is greeted by an elegant lace-collared, mid-fifties matron: Madeleine Shaw-Lefevre, the first Principal of Somerville Hall and Lucy’s new boss. “Ah, Professor Preston,” she says, moving to shake Lucy’s hand. “Welcome to Oxford, it’s wonderful to finally meet you. We’re so pleased to have you on faculty.”

“Thank you.” Getting a job here in advance was obviously difficult, even if not as much as it will be later (academia is academia, unfortunately). But Lucy deliberately struck up a correspondence with Madeleine, impressed her with her scholarship and her interest in the subject, and of course, graciously accepted when Madeleine asked if she would like to take up a visiting lecturer’s post. “I’m glad to finally be here.”

It’s a good thing that Madeleine doesn’t know exactly how much finally that means, and they sit down for tea and to lay out the basic expectations of Lucy’s new role. Since there are so few students, there aren’t really any separate degree courses, and she will teach all of them, in several small seminar groups and in individual tutorials for more dedicated students. Classical history is the most prized, though there may be some call for early modernism as well. Medieval history is viewed as rather a romantic and less rigorous option, and they discourage the girls from it, but if Lucy can contrive a curriculum that is not merely repeated readings of Sir Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe, that is up to her. Competence in Greek and Latin will (thank God) be attended to by the classics master, so Lucy doesn’t have to cover that. She will be introduced to the students at dinner in Hall tonight. Formal academic dress is of course expected, though if Lucy does not have her sub fusc yet, she may rent some out from a shop in the High Street.

Lucy asks about library privileges, and is assured that she enjoys full access to the Bodleian reading rooms and the Radcliffe Camera, though she will doubtless be stared at judgmentally by young men in starched collars the entire time. She is encouraged to participate in the social life of the University, and will be allotted sufficient time for her research interests. The compensation isn’t much, three guineas a month, but that’s generous for a female academic, and room and board is free. Michaelmas term begins in a week. Madeleine hopes she settles in well.

Lucy hopes so too, though anything with fewer explosions would be a good start, and allows the porter to conduct her to her new room, overlooking the small quad. It’s cramped and steep-roofed, and the window doesn’t exactly open, but there’s certainly a charming quality to it, and at least all those creaky stairs mean she will definitely know if another automaton comes lumbering up them. She sets down her things, unpacks just so she doesn’t have to do it later, then goes out to acquire her cap and gown.
It’s a short walk up to High Street, and Lucy notices that Carfax Tower has a strange new aerial setup on it that is probably related to some esoteric scientific experiment some esteemed Fellow is doing. It makes her smile again, despite herself. The air is gritty and golden and crackling with energy, every clouded-glass shop window makes you want to stop in and peer in, and the instruments inside spin and click and hum. Leather-bound books are stamped with handsome gilt titles, collegiate regalia emblazoned on flags and seals and coins. There’s just enough magic in this world for you to know that the laws of reality aren’t quite the same, and sometimes you run into someone like Priscilla with a clear and unusual talent, but otherwise, it is subtle and unspoken and understated, and Lucy doesn’t know enough about aether science to mess around with it anyway. But it feels closer in Oxford, sharper, clearer and more powerful. It hangs from the horns of the moon and sounds in the distant striking of bells. Shadows might move that bit on their own. The world is possibly not quite where you left it when you glance back, and some of those lanes may lead somewhere else after nightfall than they do by daylight.

She wants to slow down and look, which she does, and almost forgets that she needs to get to the shop before it closes. So she hurries over and rents her things, then heads back to Somerville. It has not escaped her attention that if there is anywhere in this world where she can figure out how to get in contact with Rufus and Jiya, it’s in Oxford. It would be difficult, obviously, but not impossible, and she needs to think hard about who might be here right now and working on applicable experiments. Nothing is immediately coming to mind. But she won’t give up.

Lucy changes, goes down for the introductory dinner, and is respectfully greeted by the students, who rise to their feet as the faculty enter and do not resume their seats until after the high table has taken theirs. The hall glitters with aetheric lamps, burning a different hue than electric, and Lucy can feel a hum and tingle on her skin, the hairs raising on the back of her neck, until it almost seems as if she could push her hand through the air like a veil and pull it open on the far side. Like simply stepping from one dimension to another, like falling through the looking glass (she has most certainly gone to Wonderland). And in that case –

She doesn’t quite do a jig and shout “Eureka!”, but it’s close. She shakes hands with her new colleagues, decides that she should also send a telegram to Ada tomorrow telling her that she made it with no more catastrophes, and when supper is finished, heads upstairs to her room. Sits down on the bed and stares at the wall, thinking that she has finally made it here, and yet, now she’s not even sure if this is in fact where she should be. She left a lot undone in London, very little of which she was actually expecting, and while it would be dangerous to make trips into the city every weekend, she might need to go back sooner than Christmas, risk or otherwise. Ada is a useful ally, but she’s seventy-two. Can’t exactly go running around dark alleys and disreputable drinking dens. It’s where it would have been useful to have someone else to do that, but –

No. She’s not getting hung up on Garcia Flynn, not in any sense of the word. Even if it feels like they have something left undone, Lucy can’t put any eggs in that basket. Besides, she might finally be able to contact her real allies, for the first time since she traveled into an alternate reality. She doesn’t know how the fight against Rittenhouse stands at home, if Emma’s been here for a while. Is it over? Are they safe? She’d be foolish to think so, but it’s the sort of vain hope she likes to permit herself, every now and then.

Lucy sleeps eventually, though she’s woken with a start in the wee hours by the sound of distant banging, and grabs her gun, lying tensely under the covers until she concludes with some embarrassment that it was probably just the radiators. She snatches a few more hours of shut-eye, then wakes up at eight and wonders how early is too early to go visiting. How old is he now? Is her hunch that he might be working on this completely off-base? Has he gotten eccentric and reclusive? There are plenty of other questions as well, but one thing at a time.

It’s a cool, drizzly morning, and Lucy dons her hat and buttons her coat, then adds her scarf,
cameo brooch, and gloves, parasol and purse in hand. The wind is damp and whisking as she walks up mostly-empty Cornmarket, but rather than turning onto the High, continues down St. Aldates, toward the distinctive round tower of Christ Church. At the gate she knocks, and when the porter squints at her suspiciously (Christ Church is the proud home of aristocratic toffs, and won’t admit women for almost another century), asks if Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is here.

“Are you a fan, ma’am?” The porter looks leery. “They do turn up and attempt to harass Mr. Dodgson into signing their books and such, I cannot permit you to –”

“No,” Lucy says. “I have a mathematical question for him, actually. I’m a lecturer at Somerville Hall, I’m a professional colleague.”

The porter looks as if in his opinion, a recently established hall for ladies is nowhere near equal with this hallowed institution founded by Henry VIII, but still. “Mr. Dodgson no longer holds his mathematical lectureship, he’s not in active teaching. Or are you a reporter?”

“No,” Lucy repeats. “I can come back later, but I will come back.”

The porter sighs, withdraws into his cupboard, and presumably rings the esteemed author. When he finally emerges, he informs her (in a tone expecting her to be grateful for the favor) that Mr. Dodgson has in fact agreed to receive her, and his office and rooms are just by the Deanery, far side of the Quad, by the cathedral. Please, do try not to disturb him too much.

Lucy decides it’s better not to say anything to this, and heads down the walk, scrupulously keeping off the grass, as is the rule in any day and age. She reaches the indicated building, goes inside, and heads up the stairs, down the unevenly carpeted floor, to the door at the end. She raises her fist, but before she can knock, it whisks open. A tall, slender man in his middle fifties looks back at her, brown curls well frosted with grey and cravat neatly tied despite the hour (it’s barely nine o’clock), an expression of both curiosity and confusion on his face. He looks Lucy up and down, fumbles in his pocket for a pair of glasses, and perches them on his nose. “I was informed you wanted to meet me?”

“Yes. I’m sorry for the early visit. My name is Lucy Preston, Mr. Dodgson. I was hoping I could ask you some questions of a mathematical nature.”

“Very well.” Dodgson stands back to admit her to his rooms, low and comfortable and crammed with papers and postcards and pens and cameras and a thousand different sorts of small inventions, from a notepad called a nyctograph (so you don’t have to get out of bed and fumble for a lamp when struck in the middle of the night by an idea) to a margin corrector for a typewriter to fairer rules for tennis tournaments. A faded photograph of a solemn-faced ten-year-old girl sits in a frame atop his desk, and he looks at it as if wondering whether to turn it face down. “Ah – Mrs. Preston, shall I put the kettle on?”

“If you want to.” Lucy looks around for a place to sit, eyeing the photo of Alice Liddell (as she guesses it must be) again. She recalls that there are some murky rumors about Alice’s connection to Dodgson, and the story that led to him becoming famous. Suspicions of possible pedophilia, latent if never acted upon, a too-keen interest in photographing naked young girls (though to be fair, all Victorians tend to do that, because this society is very weird, and Dodgson certainly photographed plenty of other things as well) and the mysterious fallout with the Liddell family and its three young sisters in the summer of 1863. She wonders how much she likes Dodgson, exactly, but he hasn’t done anything horrendously objectionable yet, and she needs some answers. When he returns with the tea, she says, “Thank you.”

“Of course.” He sits down across from her, though the look in his eye is still wary. “Newly
arrived in Oxford, Mrs. Preston?"
“I can pay you. But I’m not a laboratory rat, and I am not a little girl. Just so you remember.”

“You must not think that there were any improprieties in my friendship with the Liddell sisters,” Dodgson seems to have guessed where she was going with that. “I was very fond of Lorina, Edith, and Alice alike, but I certainly never transgressed that.”

Lucy supposes that’s what he would say either way, and frankly, she doesn’t need to get too dug into any potentially-sordid details. “Very well, but still. I’ll answer some questions for you, if you need that, but that’s as far as it goes. I am human, you’ll just have to take my word for it. It would also be helpful if you did not mention it to anyone.”

“I can be trusted to discretion.” Dodgson takes another sip of his tea. “What year did you travel from, in your reality?”

“I left in the year 2017,” Lucy says, after a pause. It seems almost surreal, as if it is the dream and the strange land, not this. “I arrived here in 1886. I don’t know how long it’s been back there, time doesn’t run in synchronization, and technically, it can’t pass twice. It could have been just a few months since I left, or shorter, or longer.”

“2017.” It clearly sounds just as strange and fantastic to Dodgson, even a man who writes about such things. “And who did you want to contact?”

“Their names are Rufus Carlin and Jiya Marri. They’re my… teammates, back home. They modified our time machine to move me sideways in time and space, as well as backwards, because we had to chase – someone here.” Lucy doesn’t think he’s ever heard of Rittenhouse, but she doesn’t want to put him onto any dangerous independent study trails. “We’d taken a few trips into our own past, but for this, I had to go by myself, they could only work out the calibrations for one person. The machine is back in New York, where I first arrived. Well hidden. It doesn’t have any communication functions, and a return trip is going to be risky.”

“So you are quite a traveler indeed.” Dodgson, a man who only went abroad once in his life, and has been at Oxford for almost forty years, looks as if he isn’t sure what to think about that. “Well, Mrs. Preston. To say the least, you have given me a great deal to cogitate on. You were at Somerville, you said? I shall send a letter there when I have anything to report.”

“Thank you.” Lucy puts down her untouched tea and gets to her feet, once more discreetly avoiding a handshake. “I’ll be on my way, Mr. Dodgson.”

Outside in the grey damp, she turns up the collar of her overcoat and starts to walk. Hopefully the Bodleian won’t be too busy if she went for a research visit now, and she needs to figure out more about aether, since it has been her sense all along that that is what Rittenhouse really wants here. After all, it’s not their home reality, so they don’t care that much about influencing history (or do they? Does that transfer somehow? If it was just about harvesting aether, they would have done that a while ago and peaced out) as on other trips. It’s difficult to define what exactly aether is, as it’s a quasi-mystic substance that has been theorized about since antiquity. It hung on in scientific theories until at least the nineteenth century (or rather, now) and has been assumed to be everything from the special air in the realm of the gods to the substance of light and time itself. It is essentially the name that humans give to the mystery in the world, the part that they don’t quite know how it works: in short, the particulate essence of magic. One of the reasons that this history is different is because it exists here as a real and actionable force, rather than a theoretical, alchemical abstract. If Rittenhouse is trying to figure out how to move it from this reality to their (and Lucy’s) own, that is obviously bad.

Lucy heads up St. Aldates, turns right onto the High, and then left onto the narrow passage of Catte Street, past the university church, emerging in the broad, cobbled plaza before the Radcliffe...
Camera. This is the heart of Oxford, with most of the spectacular tower bits and most famous old colleges, and as Lucy climbs the steps into the courtyard of the Bod, she is already aware that she is starting to fall in love. Yes, there are a lot of misogynists and slightly creepy authors and upper-class snobs and the other obvious drawbacks of a bastion of elite male British privilege in the late nineteenth century, but that isn’t everything. She just feels more like herself here than she has anywhere else, like she could be here every day and never get tired of it, and as much as she doesn’t want to think about it, she’s starting to wonder. If she wants to leave and take the airship across the Atlantic. Go back to the Lifeboat. Go home.

(She does. Of course she does. This is not her world and there is no reason for her to stay.)

(No reason at all.)

Garcia Flynn is no stranger to hunting monsters.

He’s done it in some shape or form for almost as long as he can remember, and he does not appear set to stop any time soon. His life has been marked by it from the start. He was born in 1845 in Dalmatia, so he was three years old when the riots of 1848 rocked Europe and deposed Chancellor Metternich, the archconservative foreign minister of the Austrian Empire and the mastermind of the strict system intended to keep peace on the continent after the upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars. In one sense, the people succeeded, but it also made the powers that be decide that a little magic for the masses was a very dangerous thing. It was hardly as if it was easy for commoners to get their hands on it before, but after 1848, it became close to impossible. New restrictions and regulations and qualifications to make sure that anyone who even sniffed it had at least three peerages in the family tree and made no less than a thousand a year. It has become more and more restricted and rarefied, and most of the establishment seems to prefer that it was not used at all. The study of the theory is all well and good, and it is always a laurel to call oneself a Magician. But actually doing anything with it – really, must you? It is wild and woolly and far from scientific. It is the province of the Dark Ages and should be viewed as such.

And yet, shockingly, pushing the problem underground, denying its existence, and pretending it no longer has any part of polite society has not in fact solved it. This is not a world for broken people, or even the slightly strange. There is something called the Commissioner for Lunacy, the Idiots Act was passed last year, the fascination for a pseudoscience called eugenics is general, and it’s essentially a punishable offense to be a pauper. These are the people who are shoveled en masse into workhouses and insane asylums and debtor’s prisons, and when those are your choices, you’re certainly not going to go to the authorities and tell them that you think you – or your son or daughter – might be magical. You hide them at home, you tell the neighbors they are ill. Sometimes they can manage it, they repress it like everyone else around here does with everything, and they pass as normal. Other times...

Flynn started this job when he was fifteen years old, when an older man came to Šibenik and began recruiting for monster hunters. He was paid one florin a month and expected to supply his own firearms, and his first job was to kill a beast in the remote reaches of Slavonia, after training that consisted of being told to run fast and shoot faster. Flynn did it, because he was young and invincible, and only later realized that the beast must have been human once. Before it spent so long in hiding, in rage and in pain, that it began to change.

By now, Flynn has traveled most of Europe, as well as parts of Africa and Asia. He specializes in difficult cases. He has been to remote Transylvanian castles and dark Bavarian forests, to the steep Swiss Alps, the steppes of Mongolia and the souks of Marrakesh. He has seen things he is grateful to have forgotten, and some he only wishes that he could. Some of the creatures he is called in to stop are completely insane, evil and blood-maddened, and those are the easiest to take down. Others are just pitiful, whining and cringing and pathetic, and those are less so. Some used to be
human, others never were. Where they come from, Flynn doesn’t know, and doesn’t ask. But he
knows all along that society has made its monsters, every one. It did not have to be like this. It was
never destined that they had to die.

That was his job, in any event, until he met Lorena Kovac.

It was autumn 1875, she was snatched by a were-creature while traveling in Bulgaria, and her
family hired Flynn to save her, though it was clear they thought he would only be recovering her
corpse for a decent burial. Flynn spent a week tracking the monster into the jagged, forbidding
Rila Mountains, and when he finally got to the lair and prepared for a fight, found Lorena sitting
most sociably with a scrawny and confused old man, grey and shivering, who could not remember
his last ten years. She had made him tea and was asking about his family’s names, see if she could
help him find them, and in fact grabbed the poker and hit Flynn over the head when he tried to
effect a rescue. Informed him that she was clearly fine and on no account was he hurting that poor
old soul who just needed someone to listen, and while he was still angrily rubbing the goose egg,
told him that she did not intend to go back to her family anyway. Found them quite dreary. This
had been a thrilling adventure, and she was keen to have another.

Flynn was more than a little in love with her by the time they got back to Sofia five days later, but
had absolutely no idea what to do about it. Spending half his life fighting beasts of all varieties
hardly gave a man much expertise with the ladies, and he’d muffed it nearly every time he tried to
talk to her. But somehow Lorena, this woman who saved monsters, must have decided that he
was enough of one to qualify, and that he was going to be hers. She took the lead from there, and
he was more than happy to let her. They were married six months later, and for the first time that
he could ever truly remember, Garcia Flynn was happy.

He got out of the monster-hunting business, though he had spent too long in that sort of work to
leave it behind entirely. Their daughter Iris was born in 1879, and Flynn had gone out to America
for one last job, something to do with the notorious outlaw Jesse James and the Appalachian folk
monsters he was rumored to have summoned, when he met Emma Whitmore in 1882. When she
turned up in Dalmatia a few months later, asked if he wanted more work, said that she had plenty
of opportunity for a man of his talents in a certain organization that she was part of, looked
forward to their partnership –

Now Garcia Flynn once more hunts monsters. These ones might look like men, but he knows
they’re not. That this might be, his entire life, what he was preparing to do.

He doesn’t stop running until he is well away from Ada Lovelace’s house and the ghastly echo of
Iris’s terrified, pleading screams, a sound he hears often enough in his nightmares but almost
cannot stand hearing again in reality. Karl bumps along behind like a kite on a string, confused
and annoyed, until they finally make it to some place of safety in the tunnels under the Thames
and Flynn’s burst of maddened heartbreak runs out. He jogs to a halt, then leans on the wall,
gulping useless breaths, eyes closed. His mind is running madly, and nothing seems capable of
cutting through the static. He can’t believe he did that. He can’t believe he almost failed.

“Boss?” Karl says dubiously, after Flynn has remained motionless for several minutes. “Boss, we
should probably keep moving.”

“Shut up.” Flynn wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. It doesn’t seem safe to go back to
their warehouse; the butler knows where it is, dammit. How the hell he managed to find it, nobody
knows, but Flynn doesn’t feel inclined to trust Lady Lovelace’s word that nobody will follow
them there. “We need to find somewhere else to go. The hideout’s compromised. Why the fuck
didn’t you just shoot Woolsey when he arrived?”

“Oh, so it’s my fault that all went to hell?” Karl is clearly not about to be blamed for Flynn’s
failures, which is... possibly fair, but still. "Nobody made you go over there, and nobody made you go round the twist with woshername. So I don’t see how it is."

Flynn glares bloody murder at him, as while Karl may be a competent second-in-command, he has also recently gotten much too free with his unsolicited opinions. “Go get the others. We’ll stay in the Croft tonight. Now.”

Karl gives him a final askance look, but after Flynn has helped himself to several guns from the bag, his henchman scuttles down the tunnel, footsteps echoing damply, and out of sight. Flynn rubs both hands over his face, telling himself that he has restored his composure, and hitches the gun strap over the shoulder of his nice pinstriped jacket. The nicest one he owns, in fact, though he will have Karl know that he did not wear it to tea for Lucy Preston’s sake. The woman has a talent for interfering that is twice her size, and as far as he’s concerned, the near miss just proved how much he does not need anyone else to help him. The side of his neck is still throbbing where she shot him, she made his eyes burn for hours after throwing Glenglassaugh in them, and no matter how pretty she might have looked in that white dress today, he is not a mooning schoolboy whose head can be turned so easily. Yes, she seemed sincere about wanting to fight Rittenhouse, but he did not get into this job to make friends. He can certainly do without her.

Flynn presses his lips into a grim line and sets off. He’s not sure that the whole scene back there with Priscilla – Lucy saw his odd reaction, she guessed somehow that he had a particular strong reaction to the idea of speaking with the dead – wasn’t a setup. If so, he can’t decide if he’s furious or impressed. It would certainly be a cold-blooded trick to pull on a man – listen to him talk all you want, then throw a moment of truth at him to see how he reacts – but it would at least argue a level of commitment to the cause that until now, he thought he was completely alone in possessing. She *is* brave. And fiery. And half his size, but doesn’t seem to notice or care about that. Various bruised parts of him can attest to her strength.

There’s half a moment where Flynn catches his mouth curling up in a wry smile, and swiftly dashes it off. He manages to keep Lucy Preston off his mind the rest of the way to the Croft, which is looking rather empty. With so much police activity going on (which is thanks to Flynn and the airship downing, but never mind that), the London underworld is being extremely careful about venturing out of their hideouts or congregating in places where they might be spotted and grassed on to the peelers, and they mostly have the place to themselves. That’s fine with Flynn, and he stakes out a spot under the old brick arches. They may be able to return to the warehouse in a few days, if there are no unexplained events, but he’s not taking risks.

Karl and the boys drift in over the next few hours, into the evening, as the Croft’s few patrons and merchants eye them warily and keep a cautious distance. The appearance of the full Flynn gang is not something to welcome, and usually results in something spectacular of the bad sort, but Flynn curtly orders them to keep to themselves and not cause any more trouble. Once he’s relatively confident that they’re out of view here, he starts to think hard about his next move.

As noted, he has a hunter of his own on his tail – this Sergeant Wyatt Logan, some American son of a bitch, who has probably been appointed by someone high up in the Government to curtail this embarrassment before it gets any worse. After all, the airship tragedy and the shocking murder of Henry Morton Stanley has made newspaper headlines across the world, and Britain’s enemies are doubtless wondering if they can parlay this into more long-term effect, a nefarious dismantling of its power. In Flynn’s opinion, the British Empire could sorely use a good nefarious dismantle, and he’s spent time fighting for separatist groups in Dalmatia who want to split from the Austrians. But he was put off the idea of freelancing forever by what happened with Rittenhouse, so if said enemies approach him hoping to take advantage of this, they are out of luck. He only fights for his causes now, and his reasons, and his methods. Anyone who disagrees can get fucked.
Flynn shifts restlessly. There’s something that’s bothering him about Logan, aside from the obvious. By his nature, and his long years spent being paid to track down monsters, he’s gotten fairly familiar with people in this same line of work, mercenaries of one breed or another, and he’s never heard of Logan before. Perhaps he did just truck out recently from Texas, but Flynn recalls hearing some scuttlebutt somewhere that he’s supposed to have come from Berlin. That sets his hackles up – has Logan been hired by any one of the powerful people that he has upset by targeting the attendees of that conference, Leopold of Belgium not least? Besides, while Flynn has only been to America a few times, he has. Fairly recently, even. No hide or hair of this mysterious newcomer at all?

That, of course, is not necessarily a disqualifier. Maybe Logan is actually good at his job and can cover his tracks. But given that Flynn learned about his presence in London almost at once, and accordingly sent Karl to take him out, it feels less likely. He doesn’t know what he’s suspecting, exactly, but while he doesn’t know all of it, he knows that Rittenhouse is up to their eyeballs in all the strange and supernatural stuff that the various governments of Europe have so assiduously kept from their citizens. Flynn of all people is well aware that there’s no limit to the kind of things that could be sent against him. He’s fought some monsters that looked human right up until he inflicted the first wound, and their jaws opened, and kept opening.

Not that Flynn necessarily thinks Logan is some homunculus or werebeast or glamoured demon, but it does seem to suggest that there is a lot more to his origins than meets the eye, and a few pointed questions should absolutely be asked. Nor does Flynn think Logan is going to be a forthcoming provider of those answers; frankly, he would very much like to kill the annoying bastard at the first opportunity. But it so happens that the Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone, takes tea with the monarch every Tuesday, at Buckingham Palace, and it has to be either Gladstone or Victoria herself that is spearheading the response to Britain’s affronted dignity. Benjamin Disraeli, Gladstone’s flamboyant rival and Victoria’s favorite, died six years ago, and Victoria still doesn’t get on with Gladstone. But when it comes to the interests of the British Empire, and the repeated and particular nuisance that Flynn has made himself to such…

Flynn considers the amusing mental image of strolling up to Buckingham Palace the same way he presented himself at Lady Lovelace’s mansion, and doesn’t think that all the fine cloth and sharply pressed trousers in the world would make a damn bit of difference. But the Queen and the PM absolutely have to be discussing this entire sordid situation during their audience this week (or rather, Gladstone will be expositing it at tedious length to Victoria), and whether Wyatt Logan is part of that, or Rittenhouse is, or who has pulled any of these strings…

Well, Flynn thinks. Anyone else in his position really should continue to lay low and avoid any more eventful entanglements with high society. And in his defense, this time, he actually is planning not to be caught. But there is nothing for it.

He is going to have to break into Buckingham Palace.
“Wait,” Karl says. “Is this a joke?”

Instead of answering, Flynn stares back at him with a face that very much wants to know if any part of this looks as if it is joking. Karl’s reaction is replicated to varying degrees on the rest of the henchmen, who exchange glances as if Flynn might be punishing them for something they have forgotten they did wrong. Finally, O’Connell, better known as “shitmouth” because that’s how he gets when he is drunk, speaks up. “After Stanley, boss, when you’re the biggest mark in London? Think you’ll saunter in and Mrs. Brown will make you a cup of tea?”

“Of course I wasn’t going to saunter in.” Honestly, Flynn thinks, he needs to be more particular about his gang standards. His are mostly career petty criminals, a good proportion of them Irish because strict anti-Irish laws have made it difficult for them to find much other gainful employment, and because they obviously all hate England too and are cheerfully willing to work to undermine it. Most have friends and brothers and cousins in the republican movements back in Eire. They also have connections with the Shelby crime family in Birmingham, which helps with blackmail, bootlegging liquor, and fixing horse races. Useful in their way, in other words, but apparently totally daft when it comes to this current proposition, as any fool can see that it presents a significant and singular logistic challenge. “We’d need a proper plan.”

Looks are exchanged among the boys, but nobody feels like speaking up outright. They’re all in suspenders and shirtsleeves, tweed caps sitting beside them on old crates, the lantern flickering with low-burning light on the dark stone arches of the Croft above. Water drips in the distance, and Flynn reaches for the tin cup of whiskey next to him, taking a brief, cool sip to demonstrate that he, at least, is entirely in command here. “Any of you blacklegs want to run off, then?”

There’s an insulted look exchanged between the Taylors, a pair of brothers from the Northeast of England and former colliery men who got tired of going down in the coal pits for crushing danger and very little pay, that he would compare them to the blackleg miners, the scabs who break strike lines and ruin the efforts to organize against corrupt and greedy owners. Flynn has read plenty of Karl Marx, the radical Prussian philosopher and political scientist who lived in London for thirty years – died just recently, in fact, he’s buried in Highgate – and while he doesn’t subscribe to all of it, he mostly thinks the man is onto something. Rittenhouse is the very embodiment of the mechanisms that want to keep the proletariat powerless, manipulated, and oppressed, and one of the things the Flynn gang does is enable the distribution of socialist and communist pamphlets through the underground. “Come on,” Flynn says, when still nobody speaks up. “Anyone? Any volunteers to leave? You were all just shaking in your boots.”

Another awkward hesitation, as they (obviously) don’t want to get themselves stuck into breaking into Buckingham bloody Palace, but they also don’t want to look like cowards either. Finally John, the older Taylor, says, “So the idea is that – what, you’d sneak in while the old bat and Gladstone are having their meeting, get to the drawing room, hear what they were saying and that it would be about Sergeant Logan, and then get out without anyone catching you?”

“Something to that effect, yes. If any of you have any better ideas on how to get that information, please.” Flynn makes a graciously sarcastic gesture. “Share.”

“Lady Lovelace invited you to tea,” the younger Taylor, Robert, points out. “Any chance of somehow contriving an invitation for her to the Palace, she meets the Queen, then you dress up as one of her entourage and sneak in that way?”

Flynn looks at him coolly. “How do we go about getting the invitation for her? Exactly? Besides,
“I don’t trust her. That was a mistake, all of it. We don’t go back to that.”

Only Karl knows what actually happened at tea, what rattled him so much and sent him running, but Karl wisely keeps his mouth shut for once. It’s also obvious that a gang of anonymous criminal riffraff has no social leverage whatsoever to procure an invitation to a garden party for an eminent mathematician and high-ranking noblewoman, and besides, Flynn doesn’t want the damn garden party. He needs the meeting with Gladstone, when monarch and prime minister will be discussing sensitive and secret state matters, and as his plans go, he feels as if this one, while audacious, is straightforward and to the point. It even features a minimum of explosions. Get in, get directly to the source of the information, acquire it, get out. He’s broken into other notable places before, this won’t be the first, though it does have a larger margin of error and a nonexistent one for mistakes. If he’s caught, with his reputation and his record and when all of London is already convinced that he is a savage murderer of distinguished explorers and destroyer of passenger airships, he will be hanged. Lucky to escape being shot on the spot.

“I’ll go by myself,” Flynn says, when nobody ventures an alternate strategy. “We don’t need all of us trampling our muddy boots on dear Victoria’s carpet, and it increases the risk of something going wrong if we do. But that doesn’t mean you get to put your feet up. I need more information about why Rittenhouse wants to help fund the new Siberian railway. Karl, you know some of the Russians on the docks, the ones we pass pamphlets to. See what they can be induced to say. They can’t be too keen on it either.”

Karl looks wary. The Flynn gang is involved in exchanging Marxist literature with the various disorganized Russian socialist and revolutionary groups, especially the fledgling Emancipation of Labour party, and those members, if caught, do in fact risk permanent exile to Siberia. It crosses Flynn’s mind to wonder if Rittenhouse just wants to turn the entire place into their private prison camp, a perfect place to package off any and all dissenters to their brave new world, and while it is certainly possible, it still feels like there has to be more. Karl is the only member of the gang apart from Flynn himself who speaks Russian, and since he let Sergeant Logan slip the net, maybe he can come back with a juicy intelligence tidbit to redeem himself. They do good business with the Russians, it shouldn’t even be too hard.

“The rest of you,” Flynn says, “you need to find some way to make the heat die down. There are plenty of constables and commissioners in the Met who are willing to take a bribe, and I’d appreciate it if you’d locate them. Plant some information that Stanley was involved with secret seditionist groups – he was, it’s not even a lie – and that there were other undesirables on the airship, that it’s not such a bad thing for it to have been shot down. Whatever you need to say to make them believe. I know some of you know newspapermen. Change the story.”

The Taylors have a cousin who edits a broadsheet in Newcastle, though this isn’t really going to do much against the tide of public hatred in London, but drips in the bucket are better than nothing. Flynn economically selects the members he knows can smooth-talk, who can find which long arms of the law can be greased in the palm and made to go away, and otherwise divides up the gang’s next assignments. He hasn’t gotten to where he is completely by accident, after all. In fact, Lucy Preston is the first person, man or woman, who has tripped him up this much and this repeatedly and gotten away with it. Not that he is still thinking about her. Maybe if she’s finally left London, she will get out of his fucking hair. That is all he cares about.

However, Flynn does not have much time to come up with his grand plan to get into Buckingham, given as it is the wee hours of Monday morning and Victoria and Gladstone meet promptly at three o’clock every Tuesday afternoon. He naps a few hours, is woken up in a cold sweat by the echo of Iris’s screams, and rubs his hands over his face, trying to chase the ghosts out. He and Lorena were determined that she never feel different or strange, never have to wall it away and be deformed by it, and were worried about what would happen when she started school. They switch
children for writing with their left hands or forgetting lines, so what they would have done to her, especially if she slipped up – he didn’t want to think about it, and was more than half convinced that they would have to educate her at home. It would probably have been a more comprehensive curriculum for a girl, anyway. He sorely wishes he had that problem now, and not the one that he does. He would give anything for another minute with her.

In the back of his head, Flynn wonders if Iris’s nature, as it’s generally referred to in polite company, is one of the reasons Rittenhouse took an interest in him in the first place. Get to her young, shape her into what they need. She was obviously promising, and he and Lorena were forward-thinking. Yes, he had plenty of his own attractions as a man who did what he did, and that can’t be discounted, but still. Your daughter, he hears Emma Whitmore saying, studied and casual. Quite… special, isn’t she?

Flynn swears under his breath and gets to his feet, remembering just in time to duck to avoid banging his head on the low ceiling. Tata, Tata, pomozi mi, pomozi –

He grimaces, fumbles for the matchbox, and lights the lantern, wondering if it really makes a difference if he shaves or not. Not that they’re going to take much account of his grooming when putting a noose around his neck, but habit is habit, and he rubs the bristle on his jaw uncomfortably. He will have to deal with it later; most of their things are back at the warehouse. He’s ordered a few of the lads to go back and check the lay of the land, though they’ll still need to select a new permanent hideout. They can’t squat in the Croft forever, not least because some of its other denizens might consider it a happy solution for them to hand in Flynn and pacify the official witch hunt. Flynn wants to tell them that they’re idiots, that this meek-willed appeasement and accommodation will just make the Met even more eager to catch them too and finish the job, and you can’t negotiate with this society, this power. The only thing they want is to destroy you, so you have to take the initiative about doing it first.

He does up his suspenders, puts on his shoulder holsters with a heavy Prussian revolver under each arm, and shrugs on his jacket over it. Then he pulls on his cap – the gang is just waking up, boiling coffee on the brazier, but he doesn’t pass the time with them, and they have their orders, they know what to do – and heads out.

London is mostly quiet, a fine silver mist lying over the street that promises to burn off in a midmorning sun, and the air smells of damp and smoke and fish. Flynn knows a man in Wapping, just steps from the airship and steamship docks that now dominate the area, who is a dab hand at small-time concealments. Nothing too obvious or difficult, nothing that would totally alter an appearance or character, but just enough to turn a notorious face into an ordinary one, or cause it to slip past without comment in a crowd. He charges the earth for them, since his services are obviously in considerable demand by the less savory element of the city, but Flynn thinks it’s a justified expense in this case. Mr. Josef Blavatsky has stayed in business because his aunt Helena is the founder and principal medium of the Theosophical Society, and “Madame Blavatsky’s” mystical wisdom is all the rage in fashionable London circles. It’s probably a good thing she does not know (or does she?) what her nephew does to balance the books.

Flynn reaches the shop in a few more minutes and knocks insistently until a squint-eyed, groggy-looking Blavatsky peers out with a curse. In Russian, the family’s native language, he says, “What the hell do you want? Only demons are awake at this hour.”

“Open the door,” Flynn answers, in the same language. It occurs to him to wonder if Josef can be shaken up for information, while he’s here, but their connections to the motherland are few. “I need to buy a shtuchka.”

The closest translation for this is “thingie,” since Blavatsky tends to refer to his creations in such deliberately obtuse fashion, and the inventor growls, scowls, scratches his arse, grumbles some
more, and finally decides that it’s never too early to turn a profit. He lets Flynn in, though continuing his voluble remarks about when it would be decent to drop by, and they head into his small workroom, cluttered with all kinds of strange bronze machinery that whirs or wheels or clicks or claps. Blavatsky fixes on a pair of optical lenses. “What’s this one for?”

“Believe me, the less you know, the better.”

Blavatsky looks as if that’s probably true, and takes down a few quick measurements. Then he holds up whatever complicated-looking device he needs to record an image of Flynn’s face, and frowns intently. “The distinct physiognomy, the prominent nose, the inclination to activities of a low moral character. Do I guess correctly then that you are a Jew?”

Flynn stares at him coldly, as in his opinion, a man of Blavatsky’s profession has very little room for these sort of statements. The pogroms of Russia are notorious and brutal, especially after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 was blamed on the Jews, and he almost turns around and walks out. He needs Blavatsky’s skill, but still. “No,” he says. “Not that it would matter if I was, huh? A man like you, all you care about is money.”

Blavatsky seems to suppose that he should probably keep his mouth shut, and works without any more idiotic comments. He does several things to his vials that make them smoke and pop, removes a small crystallized residue from a pipe, and installs it in a small golden casing about the size of a cufflink. “There,” he says. “When you are about to start your – errand, attach that to your collar. It will last for about one hour, not much longer. But while it does, even your own mother could look at you straight and not recognize you.”

Flynn wonders if that would indeed be true, after everything, and doesn’t want to think about it. He takes the shtuchka, pays the exorbitant price that Blavatsky asks, and leaves.

He gets back to cover before the city has woken up too much, though he misses being able to walk freely in daylight, and is absurdly tempted to use the device to take a pleasant stroll. But he doesn’t want to pay for a second one, and he’s long known that magic is an idle amusement, an intriguing hobby, for the upper classes – they can patronize Madame Blavatsky’s séances and buy magical masks for masquerade balls and publish handbooks designed to instruct you how to contact the dead (or they could just ask Priscilla). All this fascination with the fashionably mysterious, and it’s still officially on the books as a hanging crime if someone is caught using it without authorization, without license and education. It is well understood that this means the lower classes, who have no way of accessing all the expensive mechanisms of legitimate sorcery. That’s how it works. Allow just enough to permit the nouveau-riche their frivolous recreation, and punish anyone else for trying to use it as an actual tool – or worse, a weapon.

Flynn, who has seen the effects of this firsthand, who has had to kill people who might have been great beyond imagination if they had been allowed to properly nurture and explore their talents, can never have the luxury of overlooking the injustice of the system. He came to London to take down Rittenhouse specifically, but with his Marxist smuggling and hiring of Irish revolutionaries, he’s not particular if that includes the rest of it. Now he’s about to break into the home of the Empire’s power, in order to illicitly acquire secret information from the Queen and PM. If he isn’t the leading public enemy, he has to be getting close.

Nonetheless, Flynn’s preparations are not quite done, as he still needs to steal a Palace servant’s livery, and the only place he is likely to get that is from an actual servant. He could do that tomorrow, but he prefers to have everything in place ahead of time, and doesn’t want to waste the clock running on his disguise while scrambling for the right clothes. So he kills time until dusk, then as the day servants are leaving, the ones who don’t live in, catches up to one of them on the Mall and offers to buy the clothes off his back for a nice price. He has disguised himself this time as well, albeit by more ordinary methods, and puts on a French accent.
The servant, apparently too-encumbered by patriotic sensibilities and not about to sell his uniform to a frog, refuses. Flynn sighs, drags him into the woods of St. James’ Park, knocks him out and strips his clothes off, and then decides that he can’t take the risk of the servant running in next morning with tales of some strange foreigner accosting him, and putting this all off the tracks before it ever begins. He breaks his neck, weighs him down with rocks, and dumps the body in the lake, very quietly so as not to attract the attention of the couples out for an evening stroll. Someone will notice the man is missing eventually, but if everything goes according to plan, they will have no reason to put his death down to anything except drunken misadventure.

Flynn makes it back to the Croft with his things, wonders how the rest of the gang is doing on selecting a new hideout, and is not sure whether to trust the report of the scouting party that the old one does not appear to have been tampered with. That is probably just what the bastards want him to think. They definitely do need to get out of here, though. Having them around has been very bad for business the last few days, and the merchants are throwing death stares.

Flynn sleeps shallowly, though at least Iris’s screaming does not make a return to his nightmares, and does not think about Lucy Preston. He wakes up the next morning and assembles the elements for his heist, and makes sure he can fit both guns under the starched jacket (it’s a tight fit, but he’s not going in there without them – the servant is also not his size, but at least not a total midget). With that, and the still-dubious faces of the gang at his back, clearly wondering if they are going to be unemployed and/or worse by the end of the day, he sets out.

Gladstone won’t arrive until three, but Flynn wants to be well-embedded in the Palace by then, and to have a clear idea of all potential escape routes. He also supposes that while he has an hour with the shtruchka disguising him, that doesn’t have to be one block – if he takes it on and off his collar, he can use it when he’s around people and take it off when he’s not. See. Planning.

Nonetheless, it is still admittedly to his surprise when he is able to enter the Palace more or less unopposed with the day servants, though they have never seen him before and he does his best to hunch and mumble and otherwise look less like who he is. He also has to avoid the chamberlain, who is responsible for assignments and is going to be very suspicious of a poorly trained newcomer who has no idea of the vastly complicated rules and protocols that go with managing any large aristocratic estate, much less the Queen’s. Flynn nips off into a side corridor, hides in a laundry cart, and makes his way through the kitchens by pretending to be a deliveryman. Once he has reached the far side, he considers his options. Actually trying to play a servant will blow his cover, and he doesn’t want anyone to get a good look at his face, glamoured or otherwise. He needs to stay out of sight as much as possible, and not draw any attention.

As a result, Flynn spends the morning bunked down in the wine cellar, surreptitiously sticking bottles into the dumbwaiter whenever it descends, and hoping that there is not some frustrated sommelier who is going to come storming down to see why all his carefully selected vintages have been ignored. He can just about tell time by the distant bongs of bells from the countless clocks, and while he briefly thinks he’s going to have to kill another servant who spends too long glancing around the cellar, eventually the man leaves. Once he’s gone, Flynn figures that there are back stairs and secret passages for the staff to use, so they don’t offend royalty by walking too brazenly through the state rooms, and that just in case, he’d better move.

By this method, working his way slowly and cautiously out of the cellar and up several levels, Flynn is just a few feet from the door to Queen Victoria’s private drawing room by quarter to three. Servants in starched aprons hurry through, making sure all is set up as usual for the audience, then withdraw to each side and bow or curtsy as Her Majesty Victoria, By The Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Britain and Ireland Queen, Defender of the Faith, Empress of India, sweeps through. She is a stout, matronly woman, barely five feet tall and sixty-eight years old, wearing the black dress that she has favored for decades after Prince Albert’s death, with a
tiara perched in her tightly pinned-back hair and a firm set to her mouth. While everyone is making sure that they are displaying the correct amount of deference, Flynn darts through unnoticed, hides behind the tall curtains of the sitting room window, and stands very still.

Victoria takes up an austere pose by her armchair, hands folded, until a pair of footmen open the door. “The Prime Minister, Your Majesty.”

“Oh, must we?” Victoria murmurs, quietly enough that only Flynn, who could probably reach out and tap her on the shoulder if he tried, hears her. “Very well, show him in.”

The tall, dignified figure of William Ewart Gladstone, craggy-faced and mutton-chopped, strides in, reaches Victoria, and bends down to kiss her offered hand. “Your Majesty.”

“Prime Minister.” Victoria seats herself, as Gladstone decorously waits until she has done so and beckoned him to the indicated davenport, though they must do this every week. “Quite a few days, hasn’t it been? Oh, and do keep it brief. We have read the state papers.”

Gladstone, who looks as if he was preparing for a proper monologue, is momentarily wounded, then clears his throat. “Yes, Ma’am. Well. I am confident that management of the public disruption has been achieved, and I assure you that I have directed the Metropolitan to take all feasible steps to the capture and imprisonment of the anarchist Garcia Flynn. I realize the concern of the people over the continued safety of airship travel is paramount, and we’ve placed extra plainclothes officers on the London Docks, as well as in other relevant locations about the city. If there is some notification of his presence – ”

Victoria makes an impatient sound, even as Flynn raises an eyebrow. “Yes, yes. That was all in the papers. What else are we doing about it?”

“What… else, Ma’am?”

“Well, surely someone is supposed to catch the horrible man?”

“Yes, Ma’am. The Metropolitan, as I said.”

“The Metropolitan has proven rather incapable of catching a beggar with two broken legs, much less this Garcia Flynn fellow and the embarrassment he has been causing to the city for almost two years. Perhaps if you weren’t so distracted with your silly Irish Home Rule bill, you’d have noticed that. Unless you want Lord Salisbury to pick out china patterns for Downing Street, Mr. Gladstone, we suggest you prove your commitment to England, not Ireland. You will never get that bill through the Commons anyway, and we all know it.” Victoria pauses to sip her tea. “Racial prejudice is far too rampant, as we’ve had cause to note recently with young Mr. Karim.”

“Abdul Karim, the Muslim servant? I have heard that Your Majesty has… taken an interest in the culture of your Indian realm.”

“Yes, and believe us, the court seems to think we have engaged a leper. Mr. Karim is a talented and personable young man, as Empress of India we should know more about our domains, and we have a mind to ask him to teach us Urdu and Hindustani. But never mind all that, we were speaking about Garcia Flynn. What special measures are being taken?”

Gladstone seems briefly flummoxed by the question, which makes Flynn frown. He was quite sure that Sergeant Logan was hired by someone in the Cabinet, with the Prime Minister’s approval or otherwise, and he can’t imagine that Gladstone would feel compelled to keep that secret, especially after a direct question from the sovereign. If Logan isn’t the government’s response to him, then where the hell did he come from? Flynn has already decided that he’s unlikely to be
Rittenhouse, since they have plenty of methods and manpower to take him down by themselves, and unless some disgruntled private citizen or bosom friend of Stanley’s has engaged Logan’s professional services to hunt down the late explorer’s murderer, then – ?

“We are taking all available measures within the law, Ma’am,” Gladstone says. “I feel confident that I will have the pleasure of reporting his capture to you soon.”

Behind the curtain, Flynn snorts. Not that loudly, and not even on purpose, but he bites his tongue as Victoria’s head half-turns. But she seems to decide it’s nothing, and looks back at Gladstone with a very pointed expression. “Mr. Disraeli would have had far more of a plan, you know. He cared about the protection of our homeland and our empire.”

Gladstone winces. Benjamin Disraeli died six years ago, but their rivalry went on for decades (the press gave Gladstone the nickname of G.O.M. or Grand Old Man, Disraeli quipped that should more properly be God’s Only Mistake) and Gladstone, a staunch and longtime Liberal, is sensitive to the implication that Disraeli’s Tories should be more trusted on the issue of national security. “Begging your pardons, Ma’am, but my government has devoted more resources to Garcia Flynn in the last week, after the Regent’s Park disaster, than we ever – ”

“Well, why did you not do it before?” Victoria leans forward. Her cool relationship with Gladstone is well known, and she is clearly enjoying prodding him in the sore spots. “We are aware that one cannot eradicate all the crime in London, but surely one can eradicate some of it, and especially one so consistently the source of it as Mr. Flynn. Where exactly did he come from? Dalmatia, wasn’t it? Somewhere in that direction? Have you found out anything about him?”

“We have,” Gladstone says, after a pause. “He seems to have been a hunter of… unnatural creatures, Ma’am, if I may speak frankly. Documentation is rather scant. Though the other day, I received a rather puzzling visit from an American woman, one Miss Emma Whitmore. She seemed quite insistent that she could be of use in the search.”

At that, both Victoria and Flynn crane forward, until Flynn almost loses his balance or stirs the curtains, and Victoria’s head once more half-turns. Then the Queen says, “Miss Whitmore? We feel as if the name is familiar, though we cannot call it immediately to mind. Who was she?”

“I confess, Ma’am, I am not quite sure. But she seemed quite… confident in her assertions.”

“Americans,” Victoria says. “They’re all that way. Entirely undeserved arrogance, if you ask me. But I do trust you gave her a hearing-out?”

“She said that the information came at a cost.” Gladstone sounds reluctant to admit that he is only now realizing that he might have been blackmailed. “But one which she assured me I would not mind paying. There is an organization of which she is part that is brimful with some new vision of government for the future, so far as I recollect it.”

Victoria sniffs disapprovingly. “More radicals? Those we can do without.”

“Their choice of a woman as spokesperson was certainly unusual. Nor do I feel as if we require any assistance from her which my own Government cannot lawfully provide. I sent her on her way, but she said that she would return, to see if I had changed my mind. Though she did say that as a free bit of advice, I was to look out for a Miss Lucy Preston. Is that in the least familiar?”

Flynn almost knocks over the Grecian urn next to him, and he’s sure this time that Victoria’s eyes lock onto directly where he’s standing behind the curtain. He half thinks she’s going to get to her feet and yank it back, but she sips her tea again instead. “Should it be? Is it not your job, Mr. Gladstone, to inform your sovereign on these matters? Does it speak poorly of your preparation if
you have a question with no answer?”

“It does not, Ma’am.” Gladstone harrumphs. “I gathered only that Miss Preston was, presumably, a fellow American or a prior associate of Miss Whitmore’s. I – er – thought that perhaps the Prince of Wales might – ”

“Oh, dear,” Victoria says. “Mr. Gladstone, if we find that you’ve been secretly sending state boxes to Bertie again, we will not be at all amused.”

“He is the heir to the throne, and perhaps if you prepared him more for the task, he could engage himself productively rather than in continued, ah.” Gladstone stalls at the ferocious look on Victoria’s face. “Licentiousness.”

“So what, you presume that Miss Preston might be some former inamorata of our son’s that he might be able to dig up again upon command?” Victoria sounds scathing. “Given the Prince of Wales’ affinity for vulgar women, you mean? Prime Minister, if that is your answer to the question, we are tempted to dismiss you on the instant and – ”

“Your Majesty, please believe me, I did not at all intend any slander upon yourself or Prince Albert. But since he – well, he does – ”

“Unfortunately, yes, he does,” Victoria snaps. “Knows half the actresses in London on far too familiar terms, if the rumors are anything to go by. No wonder he broke his father’s heart, my dearest Albert would never have had to go to confront him otherwise. But surely, Mr. Gladstone, clever man like you, you can locate this Miss Whitmore and this Miss Preston without the need to go grubbing around in Bertie’s personal affairs? Heaven knows what would come out if you did that, and we will not have any more scandals in the newspapers. Do we make ourselves entirely clear, Prime Minister?”

Gladstone murmurs that she does, that he’s certain he can properly locate these notorious women without any embarrassments for the royal family, and Victoria gives him a look as if to say he had bloody well better. (Not that she would use such language aloud, but somehow Flynn can’t help but imagine her thinking it.) They talk for a while about other matters, none of which he pays much attention to, mind still whirling over the question of whether he has any obligation to contact Lucy somehow and warn her, or if that would just draw more attention to both of them. Then Victoria says, in the tone of someone more than ready to be done with a tedious task, that surely Mr. Gladstone has a great deal to be getting on with, and he agrees that he does. He rises to his feet, kisses her hand again, and is forthwith escorted out.

Flynn has managed to stay still for the rest of the conversation, but he’s aware of a faint, rattling buzz at his collar, and when he looks down, sees that the shtuchka has run out. That means its glamour has as well, that he is going to have to get out of Buckingham Palace with no disguise, and he curses himself for his carelessness. Why didn’t he take it off once he was hidden? Does it really only take one bloody mention of Lucy Preston to make him completely forget any –

Just then, the curtains whisk aside, startling him even further. He is staring down – well down – at the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, et al, who in turn stares up at the giant man in the stolen servant’s livery, and then at his face. It is clear in an instant that she, at least, recognizes it from the broadsheets, and while she is far too self-possessed to scream, her eyes bug out. There is a very, very hideous pause. Then she says, “Good LORD.”

“Afternoon, Your Majesty.” Manners maketh man, after all, and there is not much else to do in this situation. “I was just leaving.”

“I would ruddy well say you are not.” Victoria, startled out of both royal plural and proper
language alike, takes a precipitate step backward and looks around for a bell. If she rings it, God knows who is going to come piling in here, and that would be unfortunate. He doesn’t actually want to do it, but she is not leaving him a choice. He pulls a revolver and points it at her.

“Are you – ” Victoria stares at him, then utters a short laugh. “You know, attempted assassinations do boost my popularity. There was that scene with Edward Oxford in 1840, then John Francis and John William Bean two years later, then Robert Pate in 1850, then Arthur O’Connor in ’72, and not least Roderick Maclean ten years after that. I daresay it is worth being shot at a bit, to see how much one is loved, but this is altogether back of beyond enough. You are the scurrilous, low-down, uncivilized criminal causing chaos, and if you do not remove yourself this very instant, I imagine you will be closely acquainted with the operation of – ”

“How much do you want to embarrass Gladstone?”

That, despite herself, catches the indignant Queen short. “I beg your pardon?”

“You know,” Flynn says, leaning as casually on the windowsill as he can. “Your feelings for him are no secret. You think his is the worst government you’ve ever had, that he’s a crazy and ridiculous old man, that he harangues at you like a backbencher in Parliament. Do you really want his government to get the credit for catching me?”

“That is neither here nor there. Have you been standing there for the duration of our – ”

“Never mind,” Flynn says impatiently, and sees Victoria’s eyes widen with shock. He is holding a pistol on her, interrupting her, and blowing her off, none of which ever happens in an ordinary day, much less all three at once. “You know, if you let me go, and the Metropolitan doesn’t catch me, it would be a scandal. Gladstone’s legitimacy would be undermined. He might be forced to resign. No more of these awful afternoon tea parties, eh?”

Victoria stares at him. For half a second, he thinks she might actually be tempted. “So it was you that downed the zeppelin and killed all those poor people and Mr. Stanley?”

“Mr. Stanley deserved it.” Seeing her eyes stray to the Grecian urn, as if judging if she can pick it up and hit him with it, Flynn cocks the revolver with a deliberate thunk. “I wouldn’t. Ma’am.”

Something that might be fear flickers in Victoria’s eyes. She is, after all, half his size, elderly, quite stout, and well aware of his crimes, as well as his flagrant disrespect for everything the British Empire stands for. But she shakes it off and manages a disdainful smile. “I don’t think even a scofflaw and a degenerate like you is foolish enough to kill me, Mr. Flynn.”

Possibly not, but still. Flynn raises the gun. “Do you know who hired Sergeant Wyatt Logan?”

“Who?” Victoria is clearly getting anxious that no footmen have appeared to see if she’s all right, bell or no bell. The whole royal household might be getting the sack over this shameful breach. “I’ve never heard the name. Though if the gentleman has been obligated to get rid of you, perhaps I should look into him more closely!”

Flynn supposes that he needs to be more careful, if he doesn’t want this to ironically backfire in his face (well, more than it already has), but still. “Emma Whitmore,” he says. “She can’t be trusted, so if Gladstone starts listening to her – ”

“Oh, so the lunatic hiding behind my curtains with a pistol is offering me sound political advice?” Victoria is not easily overawed, one must give her that. “I generally disbelieve Mr. Gladstone’s judgment as a matter of course, it has nothing whatever to do with you. And aside from that confirmation that you have been shamelessly eavesdropping on private conversations, if you know
so much about Miss Whitmore, the pair of you are some two-headed hydra of –”

“We are not allies,” Flynn growls. “And as much of a danger as you might think I am, I promise you, she and her organization are much worse. If you let Rittenhouse get hold of the –”

He is cut off as there’s a knock, and then the drawing room door opens a crack. “Your Majesty? Were you still wanting your –”

“Mr. Karim, dear,” Victoria says. “There is currently a rather large holdup. By which I mean he’s quite large, and he’s holding me up. Run and get the household guards, would you?”

Through the door, Flynn catches just a glimpse of the newcomer – a young, bearded Indian man in turban and tunic. He must be Abdul Karim, the servant Gladstone mentioned, the one causing the court all sorts of heart failure for a brown Muslim’s friendship with the queen. Flynn approves of this on principle, but he obviously cannot let him run and fetch backup. So he grabs Victoria by the arm, spinning her around in front of him and letting Mr. Karim see the gun at her head. “Not a –”

At that, completely out of patience, Victoria stamps on his foot, reminding him too late of Lucy doing the same thing back at Traitor’s Gate, and Mr. Karim rushes in, whipping out a ceremonial dagger from his sash and lunging straight at Flynn with it. In the confusion, Victoria wrenches free and shouts, “GUARDS!” at the top of her lungs, Flynn is obliged to block one of Mr. Karim’s slashes with his arm, and feels the edge bite through his sleeve, welling the white canvas of the livery red with blood. He shoots at Karim with his other hand, misses, and hits a porcelain vase instead, which explodes in a thousand tiny pieces. Shouts and running footsteps are audible in the corridor outside. He can’t go that way.

Instead – well. Flynn has recently spent far too much time abscording out the windows of grand houses while being chased by fire-breathing old women, and he really does not want to put it down as a repeat activity, but he also does not see any other option. He wrenches the latch open, fires again at Karim to dissuade him from interference, and the manservant stumbles, clutching his wounded arm. Victoria squeals in distress and runs to him, as Flynn feels vaguely bad about it – but it’s just a graze, he’ll be fine. The door bursts open, as Flynn thinks absurdly of that poem, A Visit from St. Nicholas - Away to the window I flew like a flash/Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash – and does exactly that. As he is presently whatever the complete opposite of St. Nicholas is, he bounds out onto the rooftop entirely unlike a sled of toys and eight tiny reindeer. Evil Santa Claus? It seems unfortunately rather apt.

He drops down eight or ten feet to the roof of the portico below, as windows crank open above him and several bullets rattle off the stone. He hastily limbers across to one of the columns, slides down it to the ground, and runs flat-footed for the fence, just as several red-jacketed guards in their distinctive bearskin hats come piling around the corner. Flynn has no idea why anyone would wear both a highly visible color and two feet of fur on their head when trying to fight, but then, the British Army has never asked him for his fashion opinions (or any opinions). He whirls and shoots the one in the front, who goes down hard. He has three more shots left in that revolver, six in the other, and though he is already well beyond the pale, he needs to quit shooting at Victoria’s underlings and to get the fuck out of here instead. Even he is well aware that this is, objectively, much worse than just crashing Ada Lovelace’s supper party.

Flynn vaults up the fence and jumps down on the other side. It wasn’t entirely useless, as he acquired some very valuable information. Gladstone and friends didn’t hire Wyatt Logan, Rittenhouse has indeed been targeting the government directly, Emma tried to get Lucy Preston framed, and, well, Flynn himself has indeed drawn a great deal of their ire and right now, all the bribes in the world to the Metropolitan will not be enough to save him. There is, in fact, only one thing which he can presently do, and it doesn’t sound like much.
He has to get out of London.
He has to get out of London \textit{fast}. 
In Which Lucy's Life Becomes Unnecessarily Difficult

Lucy spends a pleasant afternoon absorbed in research at the Bodleian, in the reading rooms and the sixteenth-century Duke Humfrey’s Library, which looks more wizardly than ever. As she waits for the elderly archivist to take his sweet time at fetching out various books and manuscripts, it half-seems to be whispering in dusty parchment voices, edged like the elegant finials of gothic script, the shadows shifting in a way that seems to be entirely without reference to the gauzy light through the high arched windows. As warned, there are a few uppity young men in jackets and ties, getting a jump on their Michaelmas reading and throwing Lucy arch looks. They seem just short of walking up to her and demanding to know if she can quote Cicero in Latin or *The Odyssey* in Greek, but she politely and deliberately ignores them, and they apparently think better of it.

Nonetheless, as enjoyable as the experience is, aesthetically speaking, Lucy still isn’t getting as much done in her research as she would like. She reminds herself that it is just one afternoon, that no scholar in the history of this or any universe found all the answers in one day, and that the only way to get anywhere is to keep on plodding, picking out information bit by bit, identifying small clues or references and following up from there. It would help if she knew what texts or authors to ask for specifically, who is recognized as an expert on aether science or the history of magic. There is not one of Ada’s Analytical Engines here like there is at UCL, and Lucy gets the sense that it might be regarded as a heresy and affront to proper scholarship to have a machine mindlessly pick out potentially relevant texts, according to an artificial algorithm. That sort of shortcutting is all well and good for lesser intellectuals, but not at Oxford. No sirree bob. You did not get into here because you were thick.

Lucy is tempted to tell them that everywhere will end up using computers, even Oxford, but that doesn’t help her at the moment. She is also aware that if a newcomer turns up here and starts trying to pull all the Restricted Section books at once, word will get around. Magic might be part and parcel of this world, as unremarkable to this England as rain on bank holidays and losing major football matches is to the other one, but it is also dangerous. Oxford is more able to get away with it than other places, but there are limits. Lucy already drew enough attention in London, and until she goes at least a fortnight without more trouble, she needs to be careful.

Thus, she calls a halt as dusk is falling and the reading rooms are about to close. The light is purple and atmospheric and broody as Lucy steps out onto Broad Street, and bells are sounding across the city, Evensong services at various college chapels. Streetlamps fire on in flares of aetheric glow, and she can’t help but look warily for more tockers. Rittenhouse can’t have hijacked all of them, though. At least she damn well hopes not.

Lucy starts to walk, since it’s not far, and jumps when a vaucanson clicks past on the cobbles, clockwork spinning in its engine. She wonders how long it will take Dodgson to build a prototype to communicate with home, and decides that it is probably longer than twenty-four hours and she shouldn’t go rushing back tomorrow morning. He said he’d send word. No use breathing down his neck. And right now, she wants to get back before it’s completely dark.

Thankfully, she manages to make it to Somerville without an incident – it’s been two whole days without one, she is in danger of getting spoiled. She eats dinner in Hall, which is an informal affair compared to last night, and strikes up a conversation with the middle-aged woman seated next to her. It isn’t until several minutes in that the other introduces herself as Dr. Sophia Jex-Blake, here to give some guest medical lectures to a few of the girls, and Lucy has a giddy fangirl meltdown which she has to try very hard not to show. Dr. Jex-Blake is basically the reason women can attend elite British universities at all, was the leader of the “Edinburgh Seven” who fought to
gender-integrate the famous Scottish medical school in 1869, founded medical schools for women in Edinburgh in London, and is a leading campaigner for women’s education and liberation. (She is also a lesbian, as she and one Dr. Margaret Todd have been together for many years.) If Lucy recalls, however, she is a notoriously brusque and impatient teacher who even gets sued by her students at one point, so any Somerville girls taking her lectures had better make sure they bring their A-game.

Lucy is mostly able to be honest about her admiration, though she can’t say exactly where she learned about Sophia, and heads upstairs after dinner with the satisfied feeling that you can only get from meeting one of your amazing genius historical heroines. (Yes, she is aware that this is a niche experience.) She is starting to feel as if this might actually work, once she figures out how she herself figures out how she is going to teach, and once she makes some headway on the research. It’s been a nice day, if she dares to go that far. Probably the closest thing to normal, to her old life, that she’s had for – well, a long time. It makes her miss Stanford.

She undresses, shrugs on her nightgown, and wonders if she can get into a decent sleep schedule with no phones and computers and social media to keep her up until the wee hours. (She does miss Netflix, admittedly.) Then she gets into bed with a book, and reads until the lamp burns low, guttering on its wick. Electricity is becoming increasingly common, and the wealthier colleges in Oxford have it already, but Somerville does not have enough of an endowment to have it installed campus-wide. It’s still a comparatively expensive luxury, and there is probably some alarmist pseudo-science somewhere about how it is bad for women. The railways were first resisted over fears that going over fifteen miles an hour might cause their wombs to fly out of their bodies, and that allowing them to travel unsupervised would encourage moral looseness.

Lucy puts her book down on the nightstand, then opens the drawer and checks that the loaded Colt is inside. Gets up to use the loo, then climbs back into bed and pulls the quilts up. Closes her eyes, and falls asleep surprisingly quickly.

She is in the middle of some murky, circular dream when the noise penetrates dimly to her subconscious. She doesn’t wake up at first – and then, in that jerking, instinctive way, that danger-lurks-outside-the-cave primal way, she does. She doesn’t know what it is, just that she’s sitting bolt upright and grabbing the Colt before her brain has even fully processed that she’s awake. Is it the automaton again? No, no, it can’t be. She saw Wyatt Logan blow it up. Unless it underwent hasty reparations and tracked her all the way to Oxford – that’s not possible, right? That’s not possible, but –

Lucy swings her legs over the side of the bed, still wearing only her nightgown, which is not exactly battle armor. She carefully steps over the creakiest floorboard, pushes the door open, and edges out into the corridor. The moon has set; it has to be very late, or rather very early, and the stairs are choked in almost total darkness as she descends, only able to realize at the bottom that she is being ridiculous. If there is an intruder sneaking around Somerville at four o’clock in the morning, it is the night porter’s job to grab them, not hers. Unless the night porter is dead, which is an unhappily melodramatic thought, but doesn’t altogether feel out of the question. Or is it just that they –

At that moment, Lucy runs very hard into something – someone – very large and solid, just coming the other way around the corner. She is then briefly and totally convinced that it is indeed the tocker back from the robot dead, and opens her mouth to scream. Then a hand clamps over her nose and mouth – a human hand, not a gear wheel – and an arm comes around her waist from behind and jerks her backward, as her bare feet kick and flail uselessly at midair. A horribly familiar and unbelievably unwelcome voice hisses in her ear, “Not a sound.”

Lucy really, really should not be surprised, but somehow this takes the biscuit. She tries to utter a
strangled squeal, at which he locks on harder, and tries to bite his palm, which gets her nowhere. He grunts as he struggles to hold her still, grunts again as her elbow catches him in the gut, and finally seems to decide that his running tally of defeats by diminutive women does not need any more marks added to the total. He sets her down, but doesn’t let go of her. “Scream, and we’re both dead, Lucy.”

Lucy lets him hear her click her mouth shut, and he slowly removes his hand. Then she pivots to face him like a deck gun being wheeled on the enemy. Yes. Yes, it apparently, in fact, naturally, somehow fucking actually is. A disheveled, soot-smeared, and unshaven Garcia Flynn, dark hair sticking up in wild fistfuls, a grubby handkerchief knotted around his forearm, is staring back at her with the worst affectation of nonchalance that she has ever seen in her life. They continue to do so for a moment longer. Then Lucy jerks a finger at the broken window that he has apparently entered by. “Get. Out.”

Flynn ignores this utterly, as she had a bad feeling he was going to do nothing. There’s a stir at the end of the hall, the flickering of a lantern and the sound of someone asking who’s there, and he snaps back into action. Grabs Lucy by the waist and pulls her quickly and quietly up the stairs with him, glances around in search of whichever room is hers, and decides it must be the only one with the door open. He shoves her through and shuts it, then pockets her Colt. Lucy didn’t realize until now that he, perhaps not too surprisingly, got hold of it when he snatched her, and was wise to the possibility of once more being shot. The silence is absolutely hideous.

At last, Lucy breaks it. “What,” she says. Was prepared to never see him again (she should only be so lucky) after the tea party went wrong, and now somehow here he is, standing in her room at Somerville, and looking as if his trip from London was anything but uneventful. “What – how. What are you do – how did you know that I – ” All her questions are crowding and tripping over each other, and she folds her arms tightly over her chest. After all, she is only wearing a thin nightgown, it is cold, and she is taking no chances on letting Flynn notice that fact. “What the hell, what the hell are you doing in Oxford? How did you know exactly where I – ”

Flynn shrugs, either maddeningly unruffled or pretending that he is. She only told him Oxford, she didn’t tell him which college, much less anything else. “I have my ways, Lucy.”

“Do you?” Lucy snaps. “Perhaps you’d like to tell me how any of them include – ” she can’t think of the proper word for this scale of ridiculousness, and just waves a hand – “this?”

“I just need to – ” Flynn seems aggravated that she hasn’t yet taken this in her stride and pulled out a sleeping bag and a toothbrush. “I just needed somewhere to go for a few days, all right?”

“So you chose Oxford? And the college where I just happened to be by accident? What exactly did you do in London?”

“I got information. Information on Wyatt Logan and Rittenhouse and a few other things. Including you. Do you want it or not?”

“What?” Lucy stares at him, even more thrown. “What are you talking about? What information?”

“Oh, so you do want it?” Flynn smirks. “Maybe you should let me stay then, eh?”

Lucy reaches up with both hands specifically for the purpose of putting her face in them, as she doesn’t know what she would do otherwise. Strangling him ranks highly as an option, though she’s fairly sure he wouldn’t actually let her get away with it. “And I’m guessing that this information wasn’t acquired by walking up and asking nicely?”

“Is that what you think I should do?” Flynn’s eyes gleam challengingly back at her. “Ask nicely?”
Lucy opens her mouth again, then shuts it. She’s not exactly in a place to judge Flynn for playing a little (or a lot) underhanded to get at Rittenhouse, though she is in a position to judge his life choices. God, this man is totally shameless, as well as the least socially gracious individual she has ever met in any reality. Someone else might apologize for the trouble or the possibility that whoever is chasing him might soon be chasing her, or otherwise display the most basic awareness or remorse for crashing into her place of business/bedroom at ass o’clock AM. But he’s completely unrepentant, as if he’s done a favor coming to her with whatever dead mouse he has to offer in exchange for her harboring London’s most wanted fugitive. He seems to have actually improved on that somehow. No, God, no. This is a terrible idea.

There’s another tenuous moment as they stare at each other. Lucy doesn’t exactly have a trundle bed or even a sofa, he sure as hell is not sleeping with her, and while she doesn’t think anyone would unexpectedly open the door tomorrow morning to find a terrorist camping out, she is still not about to take that risk. She gathers herself together, as much as remotely possible in this situation, and says, “You need to leave.”

“And what? Get myself killed by some tin-pot tocker or roving Rittenhouse agent? Is that really what you want?”

“I want you out of my room at the crack of – ” Lucy utters a sound of unconscionable exasperation, partly because if she’s being honest, she doesn’t want Flynn dead. Slapped until his ears ring, yes, but not dead. As she’d decided before, it would help Rittenhouse too much, and they were seemingly on the brink of some sort of agreement before the Priscilla monkey wrench. Has he forgotten about that – which doesn’t seem likely – or simply decided that he can overlook it in his present need for refuge? Does this man actually have no other friends or family or even a passing acquaintance to take him in, if he thought that the best option was to run to a woman who shot him less than a fortnight ago? The most feared crime boss in London, but London hates him. Frankly, if this is his usual agenda, it’s not hard to see why. But still.

Lucy shakes her head; if she starts feeling sorry for this idiot in any capacity, she might crack and let him stay, and that can go nowhere good at all. And yet, she has a large and sassy felon in her bedroom, no guaranteed way to sneak him out before sunrise, and admittedly, a desire to find out what, if anything, he acquired by all this effort and misadventure. She wavers a moment more, then says, “Fine. You can stay until it gets dark again tonight. Then you’re leaving. I don’t care where, but somewhere.”

“I’m deeply indebted.” Flynn does that graciously sarcastic hand flourish of his. Honestly, did he turn to crime after failing to make it as a vaudeville actor in the tackier brand of West End theater productions? She has never met anyone with the apparently relentless need to be as dramatic as he is. “Now that we’re roommates, should I take the chair or the bed?”

“Do not push it.” Lucy isn’t sure that there’s much point going back to sleep, as if she’s actually going to do that with him in here, and the blackness is slowly turning grey, the stars starting to fade. “You can sleep on the floor.”

Flynn raises an eyebrow at her. “Very well. But don’t worry, Lucy. I promise I won’t compromise your virtue.”

At that, while it sounds like another snarky comeback, Lucy thinks that if anyone did discover him in here, her reputation would be definitively trashed. Not as if she’s some rich and virginal young woman who can’t go anywhere without a chaperone, lest some shadow of imagined indecency fall upon her conduct and besmirch her marriage prospects. But she is an unmarried lady, he is very decidedly a besmircher of common sense and most laws alike, and nobody would believe, if they did stumble upon the two of them rooming together, that acts of a carnal nature had not taken
place. For God’s sake, this society clutches its pearls about young women stepping out of their own damn front doors alone, or riding hackneys and trains, all of which Lucy has been blithely doing. Finding all of this by her bed – well, they might believe that he had forced his way in and ravished her, if she was inclined to claim that as a defense. But for a man to ask a strange woman to hide him out like this... either he’s completely sure they won’t be caught, or he doesn’t give a damn about the consequences. It could be both or either.

With that, Lucy has to decide if she does in fact actually feel threatened around him. She said she wasn’t frightened of him when she invited him to tea, and every woman tends to have a sense as to whether any particular man is one she really wants to be alone with. Given Flynn’s recent activities, it would be entirely understandable if Lucy decided that he isn’t. He’s already presumed on her this far, seems to operate entirely out of sight of the usual Victorian morality for – well, anything, and clearly does not have much currently left to lose. And yet, in a way Lucy can’t quite articulate, she still doesn’t think he’s actually going to hurt her, in any sense of the word. This could be a mistake, and there is the possibility of her seriously suffering if it is. But he is not the only one who knows how to use a gun, and Lucy Preston does not go down without a fight. She used to, honestly. Used to be a total pushover for everyone. But things have changed, and besides, she likes to think that even her old self would have been able to get in Flynn’s face from the start. When someone is this ridiculous, at least it makes it easier to call them out on it.

They settle down extremely awkwardly. Despite his bravado, it’s clear that Flynn is exhausted, and Lucy has likewise decided that it’s still a little too early for her to be skipping about with the larks. She gets back into bed, watching him warily under her eyelids, as he lies down with a pained grunt on the floorboards – which really aren’t that comfortable, especially after the night that he appears to have had. Lucy feels a faint prickle of guilt, then reminds herself that she has absolutely no obligation to provide for the comfort of the criminal who broke into her college. She’s doing him a huge favor, which she may yet regret, by letting him stay at all.

Lucy dozes uneasily for a few hours, never quite slipping all the way under, even as soft snores from the rug seem to attest that discomfort or no discomfort, Flynn has had no trouble popping off to dreamland. Despite herself, she can’t help finding this just a bit – a bit – absurdly amusing. There he is, curled up on her floor like a large and ferocious growly dog that barks and scares everyone with its size, but doesn’t get around to actually ever biting. Though it is clear that his exit from London was spectacular, and she’s certainly not about to let her guard down yet. She thinks she senses some kind of rogue’s honor beneath the rough-hewn exterior, but that does not necessarily extend to altruism.

At last, as the distant bells are calling seven, Lucy gives up, gets up, and goes into the bathroom with her clothes to wash and change. When she emerges, Flynn is awake, sitting in the chair in his trousers and undershirt and gingerly unwrapping the bloody handkerchief from around his forearm. It has been cut fairly straight and deeply along the underside, right where he would swing it up to block a knife being slashed at his face, and Lucy wonders if she even wants to ask. Her eyes flicker halfway to the heavy muscles of his shoulders and arms. Apparently, performing nonstop villainous actions really keeps you buff.

Sensing her looking, Flynn glances up, but he seems to think that her attention was on his wound. “You have a needle and thread? I can stitch myself up.”

Lucy supposes wryly that this is the first of his recent injuries, at least as far as she knows, that has not originated from her somehow. In fact, she has more than that, has a modern and well-equipped first-aid kit, since it’s generally a wise investment in this line of work. Should she take it out around Flynn, though? It is obviously not from around here. Nor, after all, is she.

After a pause, Lucy goes over to her wardrobe, opens it, and digs the kit out, though she tries to
avoid letting him get a good look. “I don’t want to know how you got that cut, do I?”

Flynn grunts, with a hint of sardonic amusement. “I imagine it’s in all the morning papers by now anyway.”

Lucy rolls her eyes heavenward, wondering what on earth it says about her own life and choices that he is the most promising not-exactly-ally she has come across on any of her trips. Nothing good, probably. She pulls out the tube of antiseptic ointment, twists the cap off, marches over, and hands it to him. “You might want to start with this.”

Flynn squints at it. “What the hell is that?”

“It’ll stop you from dying stupidly of an infection. No, wait, start with these.” Lucy rips open a few sterile wipe packets and wonders if she should lecture him about washing his hands first. Germ theory does exist, Louis and Marie Pasteur have been working for several decades in France, but it’s unclear how much a man of Flynn’s rough-and-tumble background knows about it. “Clean your arm with it.”

Flynn raises an eyebrow again at hearing her snap orders like a sergeant-major, but he doesn’t appear to object. Nor does he ask if she’s trying to poison him or what these strange white cloths are, as honestly he could (though she’s grateful that he doesn’t). He sucks in his breath with a hiss as he dabs. “Jesus, that stings.”

“Good,” Lucy says sweetly. She offers him the wastepaper basket to throw the used wipes in, and once he’s gotten the dried blood off, nods at the ointment. “Now that.”

Flynn picks it up and struggles to squeeze it one-handed, not quite managing to get it into the palm of his good hand, and drops the slippery tube with a curse. He starts to move to pick it up, but Lucy bends down first, and they almost knock heads. There is another very awkward moment, until she clears her throat. “Hold out your hand.”

Flynn hesitates, then does so, and Lucy squeezes a few generous dollops into his palm. Flynn stares at it, sniffs it, and wrinkles his nose. “Did you make this?”

“No, I – it’s complicated. It works, though. Trust me.”

He glances at her ironically, as if to say that’s still a tall order for either of them. Then he shrugs and spreads it on, swearing again. “What is in this fucking stuff? Carbolic acid?”

“Oh, stop being such a whiner. Someone who gets as many injuries as you, surely you don’t need to fuss so much about patching them up?”

Flynn briefly looks stunned, and Lucy wonders if this, somehow, is the one unforgivable thing she’s said. Then he laughs, apparently genuinely amused. “You know,” he remarks, still snorting. “I’m quite sure I have never met an Englishwoman like you.”

“Probably not.” Lucy turns rather too quickly back to the kit. “Aside from the fact that I am American.”

“Not like any of those, either.” She can feel Flynn’s eyes on her back even without turning around. “You’re different.”

That, obviously, is true, not that Lucy wants to get into the weeds of explaining it. She reaches in for a gauze pad and a roll of surgical tape, then rather than make him do it one-handed, presses it to the wound and tamps it into place, trying to ignore the slight tension she can feel in his arm where she touches him and which doesn’t seem to be completely related to pain. His forearm is
furred with dark hair, his hands large and elegant and long-fingered. He wears a plain wedding band on his left ring finger; Lucy can’t remember if she’s noticed it before. If he did in fact murder his wife and daughter, it seems like an odd memento to keep around, a constant reminder of his guilt, as tangible as the sound of those terrified screams from a young girl at tea. Unless he’s just up and happened to get married again, but if so, that woman should be playing Nancy to his Bill Sykes. Lucy doesn’t get the sense that he has anyone, aside from his gang, and they are barely friends, let alone family.

Once again, Flynn can sense her looking. His eyes flicker up to hers. Lucy thought they were brown, and they still do look very dark at some angles, but at this close range, she can see that they’re actually greeny-hazel. The morning light turns them the color of a big cat’s, lurking in the shrub to judge the moment of its pounce (honestly, he reminds her of a cat in any number of ways, so – apt.) “Well?” he says, half as a challenge, half something else. “Aren’t you going to ask if I killed them? Isn’t that what you were trying to find out before?”

“I – ” Lucy starts to step back, but he catches her wrist. His grip completely engulfs it, and he’s not holding particularly tightly, but it’s clear that he wants an answer. “At tea. With Priscilla. That wasn’t – that wasn’t some sort of trick or setup, I didn’t ask her to come. And I didn’t know that was going to happen.”

Flynn’s eyes search her face. It’s hard to tell if he believes this, though she thinks some part of him wants to. Finally, he drops her wrist. In a low rasp, he says, “Rittenhouse killed my family.”

“I believe that.” Lucy still wants to back away, to re-establish distance of some sort between them, but she also wants to hear this out, and she might not get another chance. “That’s what Rittenhouse does. To families.”

Her voice catches a little on the last word, and Flynn – for a hardened mob boss, he is unnervingly and unwantedly perceptive – flicks his gaze sharply back to hers. “Yours?”

“Not in quite the same way.” Lucy does not want to tell him, of course, the full and terrible truth of Rittenhouse’s entanglement with her family, that Rittenhouse is her family. There is so much honesty that she cannot reciprocate with him that it feels unfair to demand any of his. “But it had the same effect.”

“On fighting them?” Even seated in front of her, with her standing, Flynn is barely shorter than her, and doesn’t need to tilt his head back very far to keep looking at her straight. “That’s what you’re doing, what you’ve been doing. For five years. You said so at tea.”

“Yes.” Lucy supposes that he wants to see if she changes her story now, tries to weasel out of anything she claimed before. “I wasn’t lying to you in anything I said then.”

“Maybe not,” Flynn allows. “But you weren’t telling the full truth, either.”

An uncomfortable prickle goes down Lucy’s spine. She can put him off the scent for a while, perhaps, but this is not a man who is satisfied with half-truths or partial solutions. It’s just possible to work with him as long as they want the same thing and share an enemy, but beyond that – she doesn’t know. He is dangerous, she’s known that from the start. Might think that the last thing to do to make a clean sweep is to get rid of her (and sometimes, in her darkest thoughts, she isn’t sure that this is wrong). He lives in a world where plenty more things are possible, but how far does that extend?

Carefully, she says, “What did you do before this? You said that you only got to London two years ago.”
Flynn grins mirthlessly, as if he recognizes that she might be trying to catch him out in turn. “You looked at the newspapers, Lucy. You know it’s true.”

Lucy feels absurdly tempted to remind him that it’s Miss – or really, Doctor, she’s never been fond of Miss – Preston, that calling someone by their first name here is something that even spouses sometimes don’t do, and she did not give him permission. Then again, he’s probably waiting to see if she bristles, if she gets hung up on protocol, and has already clearly decided that she probably won’t. You’re different. Should she at least pretend otherwise, or – or what?

After a long pause, Flynn finally tips a shoulder in half a shrug. As if it’s the most ordinary thing in the world, he says, “I hunted monsters.”

“What?” Lucy is taken aback, as well as reminded that as much as he doesn’t know about her world, there is just as much that she doesn’t know about his. “You mean what – animals?”

“No,” Flynn says. “Monsters. A woman like you, doing this kind of work, and you’ve never stumbled across any of those? If only we were all so fortunate.”

Once again, Lucy is not quite certain what to say. She knows that magic here isn’t just beautiful sunsets or strange gizmos or reluctant Scottish ladies who speak to the dead, but Flynn seems to be hinting at something considerably darker. She isn’t sure if pressing for details will be suspicious, or if polite society doesn’t know about this (or “doesn’t know about this.”) It does seem like the sort of job he would be good at, though she’s tempted to ask about monsters by whose definition. “So what?” she says. “Now Rittenhouse are the monsters?”

Flynn flashes a dark, rakish grin that Lucy feels to the back of her spine, and which gives her a sudden and shockingly visceral moment of imagining that mouth between her legs. “Something like that.”

Lucy glances away, since he seems annoyingly good at reading her and she doesn’t want him to get any of that, in any sense of the word. Yes, it’s been a while since – well, anything on that front, and it’s not like she’s morally opposed to one-night stands. She’s a grownup, she’s had a few. But Flynn is about as unsuitable as it is remotely possible to get, and she doesn’t even like him (the voice in her head reminding her that you don’t have to like someone to sleep with them can go jump in a lake). That was one of those intrusive thoughts like WHAT IF YOU SUDDENLY TOLD YOUR BOSS TO GET FUCKED AND CRASHED YOUR CAR AND RUINED YOUR ENTIRE LIFE? that sometimes pop in from nowhere, not anything a sane and reasonably well-balanced individual intends to ever really act on. Lucy has considerable doubts about Flynn’s status in that department, but she likes to imagine, however vainly, that she’s still hanging onto hers. Barely.

“I’ll go out and get some food,” Lucy says, partly because she will and partly because she needs to think of a reason to end this conversation. “I’ll lock the door. Don’t you dare make any noise or let anyone know you’re here.”

“I’m not interested in getting an up-close and personal look at the Tower of London.” Flynn’s mouth twists. “I’ll lie low.”

Lucy doubts that is something he is even physically capable of, but she wants to get out of here, and someone might have heard them talking already. She doesn’t know for sure if Somerville has a no-men-in-the-dormitories policy even for lecturers, as it certainly applies for the students, but as noted, she does not want to be labeled a hussy and have her moral fitness for instructing young ladies be called into question as a result. She puts on her coat and boots, grimaces over the possibility of more walking – her ankle is holding up all right, but it’s still sore – and grabs her hat and handbag. With that, leaving Garcia Flynn sitting by her desk in his wifebeater and grubby suit
trousers, like the world’s largest and most homicidal lost puppy, she steps out. Turns the key firmly in the door, wonders if she has in fact lost her mind, and goes downstairs.

The porter and a few of the groundskeepers are gathered around the broken window when Lucy passes, clearly trying to figure out what happened there, and one of them looks up. “Morning, mum. This got smashed up last night. You hear or see anything that you can recall? Urchins throwing rocks, could be? Doesn’t seem like anything was taken.”

“I – no, I don’t know, sorry.” Lucy forces a smile which hopefully does not look as fake as it feels. “But I’m certain you’ll find out.”

With that, she hurries past and steps out into the cool, partly sunny autumn morning, wondering if she should run her normal errands and then return, rather than rushing out and back with a hand-delivered breakfast for a man who probably does not give a shit about adding petty B&E to his very, very long list of high crimes and misdemeanors. Lucy is not cruel; she’s already let him stay, helped him patch up his wound, and isn’t going to make him starve. But she is not running the Ritz on his behalf, and they both need to be careful. Besides, she still needs to find out what the hell he did in London yesterday.

That, at least, does not take long. The newsies along Cornmarket are doing a rip-roaring business with morning editions of the Times, and once Lucy has paid a halfpenny for her copy, she barely restrains from groaning out loud. Seriously? She thought he’d done – well, considering that he started off their acquaintance by shooting down an airship and murdering Henry Morton Stanley, she should have realized that he was only going to scale new heights of he did WHAT? from there. But even by his standards, this is flagrant. No wonder he felt it prudent to get out of London post-haste. And he is sitting in her bedroom.

Lucy fights the urge to turn around, run back to Somerville, and order him to clear out immediately, Rittenhouse or no Rittenhouse. He still hasn’t told her what he supposedly learned about them, possibly as a safeguard against exactly this – as long as he strategically withholds important information, that makes him a useful asset that she can’t outright discard. Technically, that is correct, if a considerably cold-blooded way to look at it, and Lucy is not eager to get caught up in his disaster vortex. God. One day. One day, that’s all she asked. Apparently, that was indeed all she got. Why do they keep running into each other, despite their – or her – vigorous efforts otherwise? (Well, the tea party was intentional, but aside from that.) It feels like some kind of uncanny gravity, a force out of her control, and Lucy doesn’t think she likes it.

She buys a batch of hot rolls, sticks the brown bag into her purse, and goes to Blackwell’s to pick up a few books that she should probably read before teaching starts next Monday. Then she heads back to Somerville. As she’s stepping through the gate, the porter sticks his head out of the lodge.

“Mum? Visitor for you.”

“Another one?” Lucy barely restrains herself from blurting out Another one? Surely – surely Flynn didn’t sneak out and return to present himself as a legitimate guest, especially with his face splashed all over the papers? “Are you sure?”

“Aye.” The porter tilts his head. “Just through there.”

Is it Dodgson? That is the only other man she can think of who might be visiting her here. Did Ada send Woolsey up to make sure she’s still alive, since Lucy hasn’t had a chance to send the telegram yet? Or –

She steps in, and stops short.

“Miss Drummond.” The way he says it, it’s now clear that he knows it’s not her real name. Wyatt
Logan politely removes his hat, but his blue eyes are cool and sharp. “I was hoping we could talk.”
In Which Flynn Faces a Dilemma

“Sergeant – Logan,” Lucy says, after a moment too long. She hopes her reaction can be excused as understandable ambivalence – they didn’t exactly part on the warmest of terms, even before Karl started shooting at him – and not of immediate, telltale guilt. She doesn’t think so, at any rate, but either way, this does not seem good. He must have tracked Flynn from London, since there was no doubt who was responsible for the Buckingham Palace break-in, and since he already knew that she had something to do with Flynn, decided it would be potentially very illuminating to drop in here. “It’s – nice to see you again.”

Logan raises an eyebrow at her, as if to remark that he appreciates the courtesy, but neither of them believe it. Then he says, “You can call me Wyatt. And what, exactly, should I call you?”

Lucy recognizes that this is a fairly obvious ploy to fish for a better name than Drummond, though she isn’t sure if she should humor it. They’re still standing in the small reception room by the Somerville gate, just off the pigeonholes, and surely Wyatt, as a presumably respectable gentleman, is not expecting to be invited up to hers. Standards are different in America, but not that different, and obviously, there is a (literally) very large problem in there already. There is another pause. Then Wyatt says, “I promise, I’m not here to make trouble for you. I’m just looking for – well. I’m guessing you’ve seen the newspapers.”

“I have,” Lucy says, coolly noncommittal. “What makes you think I’d know anything?”

“I know you’ve seen him,” Wyatt says. “A few times, at any rate. Like I said back in London, I know you were there when he killed the brothel owner, Frank Carr. Carr was a son of a bitch by all accounts, I’m not trying to get any kind of justice for him. But the gossip also puts you at some dinner party of Lady Lovelace’s that got crashed – by him – and now I followed reports of, let’s see, a dead servant in St. James’ Lake, a suit stolen from a tailor in Islington, a train conductor killed in High Wycombe, a private vaucanson hijacked in Abingdon, and when I got here just now, a broken window in Somerville and other unexplained property damage.” He finishes ticking off the list on his fingers, and shrugs. “All in the last twelve hours. Seems like the kind of pattern that Flynn likes to follow, and a trail that would lead him here.”

Lucy has to grudgingly admire the way Wyatt has apparently sniffed this out, not that it sounds as if Flynn was making that job particularly difficult for anyone. She muffles an exasperated curse at this account of the trail of mayhem he blazed on his way out of London, which by the sounds of it includes at least two murders, grand theft, petty theft, and God knows what else. Has he ever heard of the word overkill in his life? Because he really, really needs to do that.

“Oh,” Lucy says, after another pause. “I see. Yes, that does sound like him, but I’m afraid I can’t help. I haven’t seen him.”

“He came all this way, and you haven’t seen him?” Wyatt looks politely incredulous, suspecting (correctly) that he is being bald-facedly lied to. “Are you sure?”

Lucy hesitates. She isn’t going to sell out Flynn quick as spit, especially after they finally managed to have a conversation that did not end in bodily injury and/or running like hell on either of their parts, but she also needs to know more, if at all possible, about who Wyatt is and what he is doing, who has sent him to hunt down Flynn and why. “Did Downing Street send you?” she asks at last. “Or the Palace? But you were on Flynn’s tail even before that.”

“Before he broke into Queen Victoria’s official residence, grabbed her, held a gun to her head, shot her Munshi, and stole sensitive information from a private state meeting?” Wyatt says,
Lucy can’t deny this, and if they’re going to be talking, standing here doesn’t look like the place to do it. She pauses again, then jerks her head, and they step through the door at the far end, into the corridor, and make their way to a small sitting room, with paneled-mahogany walls, riveted-leather armchairs, bookshelves crammed with handsome matching volumes bound in green buckram, and an unlit fireplace, very classic-Oxbridge in its ambiance. Wyatt takes the armchair by the door and beckons Lucy to the other, which she sinks into awkwardly, and they sit there, staring at each other. Then Wyatt nods at the bruises on her throat. “Are those – ?”

“They’re fine,” Lucy says. While the question is innocuous enough, it feels like Wyatt is subtly trying to remind her that he did save her from the tocker, and perhaps should be considered for a favor in return. He’s not wrong, he’s not wrong about any of this, or the danger that Flynn poses, but she just can’t take the risk that he’s reporting to someone with Rittenhouse connections, or – well, she doesn’t know if anything would be worse, but still. “Do you want some tea? I can call for the porter.”

“I’m all right.” Wyatt is still fiddling with the brim of his hat, in the Homburg style that the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, is currently making popular, but he puts it aside on the side table and clasps his hands on his knee. “When I got here and asked for the new American lady professor, the porter said Preston. So I’m guessing that is your last name, not Drummond. Your first name could be Kate, but I don’t think so?”

“No.” Lucy sighs. She can’t keep it secret for long, she’s hiding here in plain sight, and if he looks like he’s going to go away and tell someone undesirable, she’ll – well, she’ll work it out then. “My name’s Lucy.”

“Lucy.” Wyatt takes that in, then nods. “Any reason you didn’t tell me that earlier?”

“Was it your business if I did?”

“You’re not making this easy for me.” Wyatt’s mouth tightens. “I want to think you don’t have anything to do with this, I really do, and that it’s just been a few unfortunate coincidences that have put you in the same place at the same time. But I really – ” He stops, clenches his fist, and takes a deep breath. “I really need to find Flynn.”

“Why?” Lucy asks. “What is it about him specifically?”

“I need to stop what he’s doing,” Wyatt says. “The people he’s hurting. But you…” He considers, then cocks his head. “What do you teach here, exactly?”

Lucy hesitates. “History.”

“Do you know anything about what’s it called – aether?”

Despite herself, that rocks her. Obviously, she’s just been looking for the same thing in the Bodleian, though her investigation has been so she can learn what Rittenhouse wants with it, how they might transport it between realities, and any other unfortunate thing that could happen if an evil secret society got their hands on virtually limitless power and real magic. Actually level up into the Death Eaters, basically, what with all the obvious Hogwarts comparisons that have come to mind. “Not really,” she says. “Don’t you?”

“It’s complicated.” Wyatt glances away. “But it’s magic, isn’t it?”

“Strictly speaking, yes.” Lucy considers him, brow furrowed. A sudden and startling prospect has occurred to her. She thought it was passingly odd when he introduced himself as a former Rough
Rider back in London, since they technically won’t exist for another eleven years. Is it possible, is it somehow possible, that Wyatt isn’t from this reality either? Is another traveler from home, who has somehow stumbled into this world of steam and steel and magic, and is hungry for all the impossible things that you can do here, that you can change even and above time travel itself? As carefully as she can, she says, “Didn’t you learn about it growing up?”

Wyatt barks a short, unamused laugh. “In Texas? In my part of Texas? They’d have stoned me on the spot if I started running off at the mouth about the Devil’s work.”

This is true, Lucy supposes. If he is from here, he would have been born in the 1850s, probably, in some dirt-poor Texas frontier town which, having won its independence from Mexico and joined the Union, immediately decided to leave it again in the run-up to the Civil War. Not exactly a progressive paradise. She searches for another way to ask the question without sounding completely insane, or blowing her own cover. It’s just a guess, but it might illuminate a few things. “So if you hand Flynn into someone, they’ve promised to help you with something regarding magic?”

Wyatt’s eyes flicker with a startled expression that means she has to be somewhere in the ballpark. “So you’re Mrs. Sherlock Holmes now?”

Lucy looks at him very narrowly. The woman known as “Mrs. Sherlock Holmes”, the police investigator and first female special assistant United States attorney, Mary Grace Quackenbos Humiston, won’t be called that until 1917, and is currently something like sixteen years old, well before any fame or notoriety. Then again, she doesn’t know if Wyatt is enough of a historian to know that – given his mistake with the Rough Riders’ dates, probably not – and it could just be an obvious reference for a woman who has made an insightful guess. They continue to eye each other. Then Lucy says, “What exactly do you need magic for?”

Wyatt looks as if this is a considerably personal question to be asking, especially since she won’t answer any of his, but desperation must finally win out. “I need a cure,” he says reluctantly. “A cure for an… unusual problem. And I need to stop Flynn for other reasons, but that’s the main one. I hand him in and get this aether stuff, then…” He trails off. “There you are.”

Lucy opens her mouth, then shuts it. At last, she says, “Hand Flynn in to… an organization, perhaps? Or a woman named… named Emma?”

“Well?” Wyatt looks at her blankly. “What organization?”

Well, then. If he is working for Rittenhouse, which is still entirely possible, he doesn’t know that he is, and Emma didn’t approach or hire him openly. This just keeps turning into more of a mystery all the time, and Lucy tries to guess if he’s in any more of a divulging mood. She is conscious of the fact that Flynn might have seen her enter the college, and not yet return to her room. Did he see Wyatt arrive as well, is he building an arsenal in case Wyatt storms up to arrest him? Blow up the entire front quad just to be safe? It does not seem out of the question, and she shifts edgily in her chair. Trying to nudge the conversation along, she says, “I’m looking into a few things. What do you need the cure for?”

“I…” Wyatt blows out a breath. “I just… let’s say it’s about my wife.”

“Your wife?” That surprises Lucy, although she doesn’t know why it should. It’s clear from the bleak look on Wyatt’s face that this is a sensitive subject, and she feels bad for pushing, but it’s also potentially important information. “I’m sorry. What happened to her?”

“Jessica…” Wyatt hesitates for a very long moment. Finally he says, “I lost her. It was my fault.”
Lucy’s curiosity is almost burning her up by this point, but she tries not to let on. “So is the cure for what – finding her? Saving her? Is she… alive?”

“I have no idea.” Wyatt rubs his face. “It’s a long story.”

Lucy can sense that, and she never enjoys causing people pain, doesn’t want to pick at unhealed wounds. She wonders if this entire story is just a fable designed to guilt her into spilling about Flynn, but she doesn’t get the sense that Wyatt is lying about this, may have told her more than he intended, and is belatedly trying to pull himself back together. He squares his shoulders and straightens up. “Yes, well. I have good reasons for wanting to find Flynn. Let’s leave it at that.”

“I see.” Lucy isn’t sure what to do, needs more time to process this – which, it seems, is the one thing she will never have the luxury of getting. Ironic, really. “Are you staying in the city?”

“I have a few other leads to check,” Wyatt says. “Witnesses to question. I’m almost sure he’s here somewhere, so I’m going to be thorough.”

“As you should be, of course.” Lucy nods. “When you get back to London, though – I don’t know if this will be helpful or not, but there’s a woman there, Priscilla Mackenzie. She can speak to the dead and the – the missing. I don’t know if she can reach your wife or not, but she – well, I just thought I’d let you know.”

It’s hard to tell what crosses Wyatt’s face at that. The same kind of deep hunger and wary disbelief as when she first mentioned it to Flynn, and as well, the same kind of heartache and fear and half-sense that no matter how much the loved one is missed, it might be better not to confirm the worst fears you have about them. But he firms his chin and manages a stiff nod. “Thank you, that’s very kind. I suppose I’ll leave you to get about your day, but if you hear anything about Flynn, could you – could please pass it on?”

Lucy’s insides squirrel with guilt. She has absolutely no idea what to do, and they rise to their feet in recognition of the fact that the visit is over. As she walks Wyatt down the hall to the porter’s lodge, half in politeness and half to make sure he leaves, she notices that he has some fairly impressive and grisly scars on the side of his neck, almost but not quite hidden by his high collar and overcoat. By the looks of things, they might continue out of sight, down his arm and back, and it makes her grimace in involuntary sympathy, as well as remember uncomfortably what Flynn said this morning. *I hunted monsters.* Didn’t mean just stray dogs, either. Has Wyatt had a run-in with one of those himself, and barely lived to tell the tale?

They reach the gate, and Wyatt puts his hat back on, then turns to her, holding out his hand. “Good day, Miss Preston.”

“Sergeant Logan,” Lucy echoes awkwardly, shaking it – it’s certainly an American thing to do, viewed as rather forward, but as suspected stains on her moral character go, this is the least of them. “Good day.”

Wyatt nods to her once more, then departs, striding out onto Woodstock Road and turning right, heading back toward the city center. Lucy watches him for a few more moments, then decides that no matter what might happen with that later, she needs to get back before her resident convict goes any further off the deep end. It hardly seems possible at this point, but still.

Lucy almost runs across the quad and up the stairs to her room, digs in her bag for the key, and is at least relieved that her door is intact and does not contain a large man-sized hole where it was busted through. She unlocks it, suspects a gun of some sort (her own or another) might be pointed in her direction, and hisses, “It’s me.”
This allows her to enter without being shot, and she shuts it behind her and turns on her houseguest, who looks as if he has spent at least the last twenty minutes pacing. “What took so long?” he grouses. “I saw you come in, and then – what? I was just about to go down and look.”

“I told you to stay put,” Lucy snaps. “Was that so hard to remember?”

Flynn flips the world’s most insolent shrug, as if to point out that he did stay put, and he would like his restraint to be appreciated. Lucy digs in her purse for the now-cold package of hot rolls and throws them at him, trying to decide if he can remotely be trusted with this information. Finally she says, “Had a good time getting to Oxford, did you?”

Flynn is involved in tearing off some of the rolls – he apparently didn’t steal food on his joyride, just everything else – and doesn’t immediately answer. He sits on her bed as if he owns the place, wolfs down the rolls, then wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. “Why?”

“Because – ” Lucy isn’t sure what good it’ll do to call out his methods, as he clearly isn’t about to apologize for them. “You were conspicuous. Fine, you want to know why I was delayed? Because Sergeant Logan is here. He tracked you from London, it didn’t sound like you made that hard, and I had to cover for you and pretend I didn’t know anything. He left for now, but he’s going to keep looking around Oxford. So if it becomes clear that I’ve been hiding you – ”

“Logan’s here?” Flynn bolts to his feet, looking as if he’s about to run right out and tackle Wyatt in full sight of half the Cornmarket merchants. Lucy stamps over, puts both hands on his shoulders, and shoves him straight back down, at which Flynn looks extremely surprised. Then he says, “If he’s here, I can kill him and just – ”

“No!” Lucy shouts, barely managing to get her voice down before someone definitely overhears this. “No,” she repeats, in a withering whisper. “You cannot just go kill him. You’ve already done more than enough, don’t you think?”

Flynn flashes her a smile sharp enough to draw blood. “Why this sudden concern for my morality, Lucy? You didn’t seem that worried about it before.”

“Just shut up.” It felt good enough to shove him the first time that she’s tempted to do it again, but she settles for remaining where she is, arms crossed, staring down him like a small and inexorable fury. If nothing else, it makes him blink. “You’re such a bastard.”

His response to that is to look her dead in the eye and lick his lips in a way that is absolutely not suitable for any public decency, or for that matter, much private decency either. It sends a flush first hot and then cold through Lucy from head to heel, as she is aware that she is almost standing between his knees, and tries to back up without being completely obvious about it. She clenches her fists to prevent herself from doing any number of immoderate things. Oh God, she hates him.

There is a crackling silence. Then Flynn rumples a hand through his hair, as if he has to ensure it is still the correct degree of carelessly tousled, and shrugs again. “So why can’t I kill him?”

“First, you can’t solve all your problems with murder. Second, because you’ve already caused enough chaos. Third, because I need to know more about where he’s from, and – ”


“At gunpoint,” Lucy reminds him. “When you asked the Queen of England at gunpoint.”

“Even less incentive for her to lie then, huh?” Flynn actually has the nerve to grin at her, as if they are conspirators comparing notes. “And it could be Rittenhouse, but – ”
“He didn’t know who Emma was. And I don’t think he’s working for them, or if he does, he doesn’t know who they are.”

“There.” Flynn seems (entirely unwarrantedly) satisfied. “See? We make quite a team, Lucy.”

Lucy stares at him with the coldest fish-eye she can muster, that he thinks they’ve somehow coordinated or tag-teamed on discovering Wyatt Logan’s origins, and that this portends – well, anything. He does seem eager to work with her, in a violent, misguided way, but she can’t spend all the time trying to put him on a leash. She has no doubt that he could be extremely effective, if he could dial the collateral damage all the way down and use his words instead of fists and/or guns, but that seems like too much to hope for. He’s pointed in the right direction, against Rittenhouse, but he’s a runaway juggernaut and he still can only be demonstrated to care about his own motives and results. That is not a partnership to get into, for anything.

There is another pause. Lucy swallows to wet her throat, which has unaccountably gotten dry. Then she says, “Did you do something to Wyatt’s wife?”

Flynn stares at her, almost insulted. “What?”

“He’s looking for his wife, or something happened to her. He wants a magical cure for her, I don’t know for what exactly, or why. But if he’s after you because you were the one responsible for – I’m just saying. It doesn’t seem like something out of your wheelhouse.”

Flynn continues to look insulted, as it occurs to Lucy that part of the reason he has been so consistently defeated by small members of the fairer sex is because he doesn’t seem willing to actually commit to fighting them. Yes, he has grabbed Lucy a few times, and pointed guns at her and Victoria, but that’s a far cry from punching or beating or killing them in the way in which he is clearly capable, and which has not constrained him from a vigorous and colorful career of bodily assault and murder where men are involved. If he wanted to, he had plenty of opportunities to really hurt Lucy or Ada or Victoria or even Priscilla, and since a painted Chinese fan is plainly not the most formidable weapon ever called into bear against him, it starts to appear as if Flynn just nopes out of the situation rather than have to dismantle a small woman. It could be Victorian gentility, but he doesn’t have a drop of that. Private reasons, then? But still.

“I don’t know who Wyatt Logan’s wife is,” Flynn says. “But I didn’t have anything to do with whatever happened to her.”

His voice is flat and cold and matter-of-fact, but there’s a hint of something that Lucy can’t quite place. Shame, perhaps? She didn’t think he was capable of feeling that, but there’s a roughness that’s not quite anger, that she thinks he’s a howling brute who has no trouble tearing apart innocent women and ruining other families. He clearly hates Emma and is willing to fight her if he gets the first chance, but Emma is a formidable enemy and someone who hurt him first, who meets him on the same ground and with the same tactics. The others that he have encountered have just been in the way, so he tries to forcibly get them out of it. Not exactly Prince Charming, but not Jack the Ripper either, which was what Lucy thought when she first saw him in the ruins of the burning zeppelin. Whatever this man is, he’s not a hypocrite.

“All right,” Lucy says, after another pause. “But you don’t know why he’s after you specifically?”

Flynn gives her an aggravated Obviously look. “If you’d let me go and beat on him a bit, we might find that out.”

Massively irritated with him though she is, Lucy can’t help but notice that that seems to imply that she holds the reins of whether he goes or stays, and that “we” have an interest in acquiring
information, aboveboard or otherwise. She wonders if he noticed, or he’s just griping at her for party-pooping his murder spree, which is also equally possible. Then she says, “If Wyatt is here, and he’s staying for a while, you need to be careful. I don’t know how long it will take him to finish his investigation, but I don’t think he’ll be gone by tonight.”

“Which was how long you told me I could stay.” Flynn cocks his head. “Changing your mind now?”

Lucy doesn’t know if she is or not. She doesn’t want him as a permanent or even temporary roommate by any stretch of the imagination, but it’s not clear if he possesses a subtle bone in his body, given how obvious he made it to track him from London. If she lets him rush out and wreak havoc or murder a passing flower-seller or otherwise send up the Batsignal for Inspector Javert (really mixing her pop-culture metaphors there, but whatever), it will undo all the work she’s done in hiding him in the first place. Of course, if Wyatt wasn’t fooled by her denials, and is likewise waiting for a more opportune moment to return and ask questions, with or without guns, that could be its own problem. Flynn being caught here would be the worst outcome. But what, exactly, is the alternative?

“I need to do some work and send a telegram to Ada,” Lucy says at last. “I don’t want to sit here with you all day, and I imagine you’re tired. You can use the bed to sleep while I’m out. Same rules as before. You don’t make any noise, you don’t go out. I don’t care if you see – I don’t know, anyone coming through the gates. Understood?”

Flynn continues to stare at her with the intensity of a bonfire. Then he nods once. His eyes flick to the tocker bruises on her throat, as if to comment that perhaps he’s not the only one who needs to avoid getting into trouble for three goddamn minutes, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Good.” Lucy lets out a breath and gathers up her Blackwell’s bag, composition book, and pencil case, feeling very fifth-grade (she has a nice fountain pen, but packets of ballpoints are not yet a thing). She needs to do some lesson planning, as well as more research, and doesn’t think she can concentrate here anyway. “I’ll see you later, then.”

With that, having assured tranquility in her domicile for at least… maybe… the next three hours, she puts back on her hat, locks the door, and leaves for the second time. Should she tell Ada that Flynn turned up here? No, she probably shouldn’t, or should she? Ada proved surprisingly willing to invite a crime boss to high tea, and to play mediator for the two of them in the name of helping Lucy out, but that was before the Buckingham Palace break-in. Even Ada’s libertine sensibilities might not cover as far as winking and looking the other way on that. Lucy doesn’t think she’d inform on her, but…

Finally, once she’s walked to the telegraph office on High Street and has been hemming and hawing for several minutes, while the clerk looks increasingly impatient as to what he is supposed to type into his stenograph, Lucy sighs and gives in. DEAR ADA HAVE REACHED OXFORD SAFELY STOP SOMERVILLE VERY LOVELY STOP AN OLD FRIEND POPPED IN LAST NIGHT BUT HAVE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL STOP ALL BEST LUCY STOP. It sounds mildly ridiculous, but no more ridiculous than it already is, and Ada will certainly be clever enough to read between the lines. Lucy isn’t going to cop to it openly, after all.

After that, she emerges from the reek of machine grease and Macassar hair oil, heads back to the Bodleian, and dutifully does her work and lesson planning for the rest of the day, stopping only for lunch from the famous covered market, which is delightfully daffy as you would expect. Blown-glass butterflies swoop and soar on their own accord over Lucy’s head as she eats her Cornish pasty, their fragile colored-crystal wings gleaming in the slants of sunlight, and she is briefly and inexplicably convinced that one of the booths is run by a faerie-creature of some sort and you should definitely not eat there. Whatever gave her that impression, she couldn’t say, but
the distant, haunting echo of pan pipes stays in her head even after she gets back to the library for the afternoon sessions. Finds herself humming it for no good reason, wanting to go back and get a better look at whatever face was under that hood. Out of the city, into the woods.

Lucy starts, feeling as if she might have fallen asleep for a few minutes and not noticed, and decides she really needs to learn enough about magic to protect herself. She’s made a little headway, but it is often buried under the endless, pompous academia-speak that is unfortunately popular in every era, and especially this one. She wonders what happened to Wyatt’s wife, what he wants the cure for. An ordinary ailment, or an extraordinary one? In this world or another, wanting magic to fix something that can’t be solved back home? It’s hard to say.

At last, at dusk, she decides that she’s probably left Flynn unsupervised long enough, and she’ll head back, eat dinner in Hall as usual, and sneak some leftovers upstairs for him. But she should stop by the telegraph office and see if there’s a reply from Ada first.

Lucy runs, since it too is about to close, ducks in before the clerk can close the shutters, and retrieves her telegram, printed on a stiff square of yellow card. DEAR LUCY PLEASED YOU HAVE ARRIVED STOP OF COURSE THE SILLY IDIOT DID EXACTLY THAT WHAT AN UTTER BUFFOON STOP TELEGRAM MAN GIVING ME ODD LOOKS WELL SO BE IT STOP CABLE WITH MORE NEWS STOP YOURS AFFECTIONATELY ADA L.

Lucy bites her cheek, stowing the telegram in her pocket, and is turning to go, when she bumps into someone coming the other way through the door, apparently also trying to sneak in under the wire. As they both start into apologies, she realizes that it is none other than Charles Dodgson, looking rather harried, and blinks. “Mr. Dodgson?”

“I – ah, no, no, I feel as if it can wait until tomorrow.” Dodgson shakes his head. “As a matter of fact, it is a fortuitous coincidence to run into you here. I do have a few preliminary sketches for you, I have scarcely thought of anything else since your visit. It is a most remarkable thing, you know. Perhaps you would allow me to escort you to a supper club or other establishment, and share them with you? If you are not otherwise engaged this evening, of course.”

“I – no, I’d love to see them.” Perhaps, Lucy thinks, something might once more run the terrible risk of going right, and she needs to push at anything that gets her closer to contact with Rufus and Jiya. “The Bear, perhaps, on Alfred Street? That’s nearby.”

“Ah – yes, I suppose we can go there, though it does cater to a rather student clientele.” Dodgson looks embarrassed. “By which I mean, young gentlemen. A lady of your taste might feel somewhat uncomfortable. Queen’s Lane serves supper until eight o’clock PM?”

“Queen’s Lane is fine.” It claims to be the oldest coffeehouse in Oxford, founded sometime in the 1650s, and Lucy has happy memories of its counterpart on the other side. It isn’t far either, just a few dozen yards down the High, and she takes Dodgson’s elbow when he offers it. They step outside, and Lucy allows herself to enjoy the romance of strolling down a gaslit, cobbled street in magical Victorian Oxford at twilight, arm in arm with Lewis Carroll, the horn of the moon just peering from beyond the rim of low blue clouds. She still isn’t entirely sure what she thinks about him personally, but if he gets her in contact with home, she’ll find a branch of his fan club anyway. Though she’d still like to meet Alice Liddell first.
They reach Queen’s Lane and go inside, taking seats in the corner, as Dodgson orders the evening roast for both of them and looks very surprised when Lucy seconds his request for beer – a lady is not expected to drink in public. “Your husband must have rather accommodating notions, Mrs. Preston. Is he still resident in America?”

“He – ” Lucy lied about a husband in America to Mrs. McBride (it still gives her a stab of guilt to think about the McBrides) but she doesn’t know what to say to Dodgson. It seems rather awkward to correct him at this stage that she’s not married. “Arrived recently, in fact.”

“Ah, yes, of course.” Dodgson nods. “May I show you my sketches?”

Lucy agrees that he can, and as their supper arrives, Dodgson removes them from a manila portfolio, spreading them on the table for her examination. It is, in fact, essentially a looking glass, a flat pane of some special kind of conductor material wired up with bogglingly complicated wires, coils, and aerials to both locate the correct door in time-space and to push it ajar. He says that he has borrowed from the work of the clever young Serbian inventor who just emigrated to New York three years ago – perhaps Lucy has met him? (The tone in Dodgson’s voice clearly implies that he thinks everyone in New York must know each other.) Dazzling fellow, if slightly odd. Obsessed with time travel too, by the by. Nikola Tesla?

Lucy blinks, since she obviously does in fact know Tesla, if not for the reasons Dodgson thinks. Then she remembers that she can actually tell him, since he’s the only person here who knows where and when she’s from, which is rather liberating. “Yes. He eventually becomes famous, but Thomas Edison steals the credit for most of his ideas, and it takes a while.”

“I see.” Dodgson considers her, as if he has a thousand questions he wants to ask about her version of the future, but will try, for now, to keep them on track. He explains some more of the specifics, most of which elude Lucy, though she nods and tries to look as if she’s following. At last he concludes, “If I can obtain the correct materials, and assuming the usual period of trial and error for building anything, I should have it operational by Christmas.”

“By Christmas?” Lucy doesn’t want to push him unreasonably, since he’s doing her a big favor, and the sheer enormity of what he’s trying to do means that he can’t just rig it up in his backyard with tinfoil, cardboard, and baling wire, but that is still a somewhat more pessimistic projection, timescale-wise, than she was hoping for. God only knows what could have happened by Christmas, and while she can’t just pick up a phone and call home, she… still would like to do that. “Are you sure? There’s no way to do it any faster?”

“I could try to speed the construction process,” Dodgson says doubtfully. “But without making sure it is quite targeted in its effects, I could push the whole door open, not merely a crack. And I do suspect that both of us would prefer not to meddle too much with that.”

“I – I suppose, yes.” No use accidentally blowing up the universe(s) by tinkering too much under its hood, and if Lucy really has to, she can forego talking to Rufus and Jiya and continue what she’s done thus far: wing it blindly in the dark. But she was starting to get attached to the idea that she might see them again in some shape or form, that she might be able to talk to them and coordinate their Rittenhouse-fighting efforts, and she feels the disappointment as bitterly as a blow. “I… well. I’m sure you’re doing your best.”

Dodgson can clearly tell that this wasn’t the news she was hoping for, and tactfully changes the subject, trying to light upon something of general interest. “How is your husband? Has he been in England long, then?”

“He’s, ah, he’s fine.” Lucy has no idea what this mythical husband of hers is supposed to be like, and she doesn’t want to get committed to too many lies. “Quite frankly, we aren’t that close. He is
somewhat older than me, we’ve not seen each other in a while. He’s in London now.”

Dodgson nods diplomatically and says that he hopes Mr. Preston will have a good journey to Oxford when he finally bestirs himself to join his wife, which makes Lucy choke a little. Fortunately, Dodgson doesn’t notice, and they manage to enjoy the rest of supper. When it’s finished, and they’re heading out, Dodgson says, “It is quite unthinkable that I should permit you to walk home by yourself. If I were to see you so far as Somerville?”

“Oh. Ah, yes, I suppose.” Dodgson definitely seems a little sweet on her, news of a husband or otherwise, and Lucy wonders if she’ll have to discourage him more explicitly at a later date. But then, historical figures often tend to like her, for whatever reason, and he has, of course, done nothing but mind his manners and try to help her with her crazy reality-hopping steampunk smartphone, so he has earned the benefit of the doubt. They start up the High, and have just reached the Catte Street close when Lucy hears something that sounds like the click of – something, claws or gears – on cobbles. Either way, she is sensitive to the prospect of being ambushed at night, and turns her head sharply. “Did you hear that?”

Dodgson looks puzzled. “Hear what?”

“That.” Lucy turns her head again, thinks she catches something out of the corner of her eye, and no longer thinks it is as benevolent as pan pipes or glass butterflies or whatever the fancy was this afternoon. “Just there.”

“I don’t hear anything, Mrs. Preston.” Dodgson is looking at her rather worriedly. “There are various sounds at night, sometimes. I should not think anything of them.”

They continue walking, Lucy mightily resisting the urge to turn her head. She keeps having the sense that shadows are shifting at the corner of her vision, but whenever she whips around, they’ve gone still. Her Colt is in her book bag, but what the hell would she shoot at? Scare the crap out of some poor chimneysweep or local vagrant digging through the midden heaps for supper? She’s just gotten too used to expecting the worst. That’s all.

They reach the top of the High, with St. Aldates to the left and Cornmarket to the right, and Lucy remembers her first impression of this Oxford, that it might not be the same at night as it is by day. Dodgson doesn’t seem unduly concerned, so maybe it’s common to hear footsteps (or otherwise) that aren’t there. She was grabbed by a tocker and hauled off much too recently, so unless Wyatt is planning to turn up again (or perhaps that’s his plan? Send something else to nab her, swoop in for a conveniently timed repeat rescue, see if she feels inclined to talk in gratitude? It seems much too paranoid, and she didn’t get the sense that that kind of cold-blooded manipulation was intrinsic to him – he’s an ordinary guy in an extraordinary situation, not Machiavelli) she’d really rather not. Dodgson is a middle-fifties mathematician who is not a fitness champion, and has probably never fired a gun in his life, let alone happen to be carrying one now. If guns even work on whatever this possibly is. I hunted monsters.

Lucy shakes her head wildly, and they start down mostly-deserted Cornmarket, in the direction of Somerville. In the absence of ubiquitous electrical lighting, the darkness between the streetlamps is very dark indeed, and Lucy tries not to insist that they walk faster, as they’re already going at a decent clip. But when they reach St. Michael’s-at-the-Northgate, she is absolutely certain she sees something moving in the narrow lane of Ship Street, something with horribly long, thin limbs and gleaming eyes, and –

Lucy utters a strangled sound, jerks to a halt, and fumbles in her bag, just as Dodgson apparently sees it too and lets out an exclamation. While it’s comforting to know that she’s not entirely hallucinating it, it is also not the time for it. She jerks out the Colt (Dodgson looks even more alarmed that she’s the sort of woman who drinks beer and packs firearms, possibly rethinking his
intention to pay court, but – trying to save your ass here, Lewis Carroll, hold that thought) and spins a round into the chamber with her thumb. Raises it, aims, and –

A shot goes off, close at hand, but it’s not her shot. Unless Lucy managed to pull the trigger without realizing she did, but her finger is still curled around it, and she’s altogether certain she hasn’t. Besides, she knows what the Colt sounds like, and that wasn’t it. What the –

There’s an awful, keening howl from the shadows, something jerks and twists like a spider stabbed through with a pin, and the next instant, Lucy can’t see anything at all except the dim cobbles leading out of sight. Still breathing hard, she turns around to congratulate Dodgson on his extremely unexpected marksmanship – only to see, of course, that it isn’t Dodgson at all. The man responsible is standing a dozen feet away, gun still pointed, giving not a single remote percentage of a shit that he has ignored the one rule, the one rule, she gave him for this, which was to stay fucking put. Yep. Not a subtle bone in his body.

“Evening,” Flynn drawls, slinging the gun back into its holster with a brief, easy twirl. “Nice night, isn’t it?”

“I – ” Dodgson stares at him, then at Lucy, then back at him, with a look of dawning awareness that meant he definitely read the paper this morning. “Aren’t you – ”

Flynn pulls out his other pistol, which is definitely loaded, and points it at the author’s nose. “I probably am, yes.”

“Do not shoot Lewis Carroll,” Lucy orders. “Do you hear me?”

Flynn gives her a you-never-let-me-have-any-fun look, which is a complete lie and not relevant to the point besides. Lucy glances back at Dodgson, who looks as if he’s wondering if this was all a setup and she enticed him along to get her large associate here to shake him down for money and valuables. He fumblingly removes his golden pocket watch from its chain. “I – I don’t know what this is, precisely, but if you want – it’s worth a good deal, just don’t – ”


Dodgson looks as if a fan of his work hopefully won’t murder him in a gutter, but also can’t see Flynn having the temperament for whimsical children’s stories. “You read it?”

“I used to read it to my daughter.” Flynn’s mouth goes grim. “It was one of her favorite books. So no, I won’t shoot you. But I think you should get on your way and forget you saw or heard anything.”

Dodgson hesitates, then stuffs his watch back into his waistcoat before Flynn can change his mind. He gathers up his dropped things, touches his hat very briefly at Lucy, and rushes out of sight up Cornmarket, as she feels as if she may have to send a bouquet of apology flowers. She still needs to work with him, after all, even after inadvertently making it clear that she is in some kind of cahoots with an enemy of the state. She glances nervously at the alley again, but the shadows have stopped moving. Then she says to Flynn, “You are not supposed to be out.”

“The housekeeper was sniffing around,” Flynn says. “She would have caught me. I climbed out the back window and waited until it was dark. Nobody saw me.”

“Until you just shot a – whatever that was – in the street.” Lucy can hear shutters opening along the way, and hisses at him to keep his head down. “Let’s go.”

Flynn pauses, then shrugs, taking her arm in the absence of Dodgson and starting to walk her briskly toward Woodstock Road. He glances over his shoulder again, and Lucy is tempted to ask
what that was, exactly, but also doesn’t think she entirely wants to know. It’s gone, if it was ever really there at all, and here he is instead. Just keeps turning up, for better or worse.

They make it almost all the way back to Somerville before Lucy thinks that they really shouldn’t go strolling in like this, and she stops short in the street and orders Flynn to sneak back in, carefully, whatever way he originally got out. He gives her a long look, but for once, doesn’t demur. Lucy feels uncomfortably exposed for the five minutes it takes her to enter by herself and hurry across the quad, thinking that it would be just her luck if some beady-eyed dorm mother is sitting at attention to catch anyone sneaking men in after hours. But she makes it up the stairs and into her room, which is – for the moment – still empty. Then the window knocks open, Flynn crunches himself through the frame with a muttered curse, and somersaults more or less elegantly onto the floor. At least he doesn’t break it.

Lucy raises an eyebrow; her room is on the third story, that is not necessarily an easy climb. She notices that there are a few extra blankets and what looks like stolen davenport cushions piled in the corner, as he clearly does not intend to subject himself to a repeat floorboard experience. She does, however, hope he’s not been pilfering too obviously from her neighbors. Probably in vain. Maybe they’ll chalk it up to Borrowers.

It’s not terribly late, but for certain unnamed reasons, Lucy didn’t get a lot of sleep last night, and she can feel a yawn itching behind her eyes. It’s also a little hard to relax in all your obnoxious amount of day clothes, and she sorely misses a good slouchy comfortable shirt and flannel pajama pants. Finally, when she has sat there pretending to read long enough for it to seem natural, she gets up and goes into the bathroom with her nightclothes and dressing gown. Wyatt has to be gone by tomorrow, right? Maybe the day after, if he’s being extra thorough? This is a very small room, and her unwanted roommate is very large.

Lucy peels off her dress and stockings easily enough, but runs into difficulty with the corset. She has mostly managed the knack of leaving it laced up enough to slip into and out of on her own accord, since nineteenth-century women’s clothing is not designed to be user-friendly and/or for you to actually be able to do yourself, but of course tonight is the night that the knots have gotten tangled and pulled too tight to easily extricate. She struggles to reach around her own back and fumble at them, which does not help at all, and finally closes her eyes and mutters several choice things under her breath. She considers just sleeping in the corset instead, but if he is here, the least he can do is make himself useful. She debates a moment more as to whether this is a good idea, then decides to hell with it, and pulls the door open. “Can you help me with this?”

Flynn, who has been looking at the books on her desk in a way that makes her want to remind him that it’s not polite to snoop (as if he cares), glances up with a start. “Help with what?”

“With... this.” Lucy tries to say it as matter-of-factly as she can, even as she can feel her cheeks starting to heat. “The corset.”

There is a long pause. Flynn could clearly say any number of things to that, some of which he seems to think better of. Then he shrugs, likewise matter-of-factly, crosses over to her as she turns around and holds her hair out of the way with one hand, and bends down to pluck delicately at the knotted laces. She can feel him behind her as if she is in the lee of a standing stone, the slight whisper of his breath against her ear, the surprisingly gentle way he works at the tangles, when she half-expected him to just tear it off (whatever he would do after that remains open to question). Her stomach is clenched, and her knees are watery. She keeps realizing that she doesn’t quite have enough air, and gulping down brief, insufficient flutters.

Flynn finally sorts out the knots, Lucy lets out the usual relieved post-corset-freedom breath, and isn’t sure if she quite dares to look around. “Thanks.”
“Of course.” It’s edged with less sarcasm than usual, though there’s still some, understated, in the too-polite tone. He does not presume to take the corset off her, stepping away once he has done the requested job, though his hands briefly brush her waist as he lets go. It’s so quick that it’s hard to tell if it was in any way deliberate, and frankly, Lucy is grateful of the excuse not to find out. She darts back into the bathroom, hopefully not too fast, and shuts the door as if she’s barricading the Uruk-hai at Helm’s Deep. Well. That was nearly a disaster.

She takes her time about shucking the rest of her undergarments, waiting until she can control her face, though the aching between her legs is less easily dealt with. That will go away too, though it may take longer, and she is assuredly not doing anything to encourage it or acknowledge it. Especially not here in the damn bathroom with him standing right outside. Yes, all right, she is clearly attracted to him. Fine. That happens. But nothing has changed about who he is, about who she is, about who they are, and that is her final word.

Lucy pulls on her nightrobe and dressing gown, ties it firmly around her waist, and undoes her hair from its pins. Takes her ivory-backed brush from the shelf and works at these tangles by herself, using the comforting rhythm to settle herself after everything. She is never fated to have an uneventful night at home, clearly. Whatever that thing was earlier tonight, it’s not here anymore. If Flynn just had to be ignoring her orders to stay put, she is duly grateful he turned up.

At last, Lucy finishes her brushing, does her hair in a loose braid, and ventures back out of the bathroom. Flynn is lying on his back in his makeshift nest of blankets, hands folded on his chest like a carved knight atop a tomb, gazing up at the ceiling. Lucy wonders if she should ask about his arm, but it didn’t seem to hold him up from shooting earlier. She can check tomorrow and then send him on his way, as she still entirely intends to do.

She gets into bed and glances at the window, which has been shut and locked again after Flynn’s ingress earlier. Needs to get around to asking him what the hell he actually learned about Rittenhouse, if anything, during the Buckingham Palace stunt, but again – tomorrow. One thing at a time. There are already far too many things at far too many times, literally.

Lucy closes her eyes. She thinks it might be raining softly, whispering on the roof and the glass, but she can’t be sure. Sometimes, in the wind, it sounds like the scratch of trees.

(Her bed still smells faintly of Flynn. He was sleeping in it earlier, after all.)

It takes her a long time to fall asleep.
In Which We Briefly Return To Reality

All things considered, Rufus Carlin thinks he is enjoying London. Sure, you pay nine pounds for a beer, you will probably die if you look the wrong way crossing the street, everywhere is always crowded, the default weather is fifty-five degrees and cloudy, and his best friend disappeared down a wormhole to a parallel universe months ago and there’s no guarantee he’ll ever see her again, but on the whole, mostly, somewhat enjoying. He and Jiya have taken a workmanlike flat in Ealing, which still costs twenty percent more than the national average and doesn’t have a living room (they’re using the spare bedroom for this purpose) and set up a makeshift base of operations. Conscious of London’s reputation as one of the most heavily surveilled cities in the world, they’re careful to wear hats, sunglasses (this being tricky with the aforementioned weather), hooded sweatshirts, or whatever when they go out. The names on their passports and other documents are not their real ones. It’s kind of James Bond, Rufus supposes. So long as you go with the “British” and “spy” parts, and forget everything else.

For that matter, he doesn’t know if “spy” is exactly what they’re doing, but close enough. They arrived here because this is where Connor Mason is, and Connor is now the de facto managing director of Rittenhouse after Emma went to Westworld. There used to be missions, plural; now there’s only the mission, and it no longer involves time travel, at least not for Rufus and Jiya. They worked as hard as they could, but they could only figure out how to send one person after her, sideways into an alternate dimension, and while the massive sci-fi nerd in Rufus was very disappointed at missing it, they agreed Lucy was the best choice. That was last October. They have no idea what, if anything, has happened since.

The only thing keeping them here is the fact that Emma and Company haven’t resurfaced either, so whatever’s going on over there, Rittenhouse hasn’t yet gotten what they wanted. Rufus has found it bizarre to live in the modern world again on a regular basis, more or less openly, after several years in the business of chasing an evil secret society through various pivotal events in American history (and some not so pivotal, but where they just felt like being dicks). He can have a phone again, though he has to be careful and never connect to public wifi hotspots and erase his data every night. Indoor plumbing, takeaway food, not coming face to face with the dark underbelly of racism and oppression in the land of the free every work day. Weird.

That is not to say that they have nothing to do here but kick back and find out what cheeky Nando’s are (chicken? Rufus is fairly confident that it’s chicken, though he doesn’t know why it’s cheeky). Connor works in a fancy office on Canary Wharf, he’s the one heading Rittenhouse’s apparent organizational transformation into a successful international philanthropy outfit (what are those board meetings like, Rufus wonders?) and they need to keep tabs on him. They’re fairly confident that Rittenhouse doesn’t have a second time machine either, but Connor has to keep the wheels greased until the boss gets home, and donating millions or billions of pounds/euros/dollars to various one-percent oligarchs is a way to control the world that doesn’t even require time travel.

So most of Rufus and Jiya’s job these days is hacking, trying to figure out how Rittenhouse makes a big donation to Save the Whales or whatever, it gets re-routed through various shell companies and third-party offshore bank accounts, and ends up actually funding some genocidal lunatic in the Congo or ruthless Gazprom oil mogul in Russia. They’re not sure what to do even if they do get enough solid evidence for a case. Take it to the authorities? Like that wouldn’t end up with them disappearing permanently on the spot.

You have to hand it to them, Rufus thinks. This “step out of the shadows and into your life” marketing strategy has in fact worked quite well. The name Rittenhouse isn’t a secret anymore, not the verboten word that you can’t whisper on fear of your whole family disappearing. It’s plastered over everything, it’s in the news headlines every day. It takes up ads on the sides of red double-
decker buses. It has offices in London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Sydney, and other alpha global cities. There is a god damn app for your smartphone. All you hear is a relentless avalanche of sunny, positive press about the good things Rittenhouse is doing in the world, how they’re a real ethical company facing the real ethical challenges. Not like those other multibillion-dollar conglomerates that have inserted themselves into every aspect of your lives and proceeded to yak it up (looking at you, Facebook). Honestly, if Rufus didn’t explicitly know better, he thinks he would be suckered in by it too. *Rittenhouse makes huge grant to end child poverty in Africa. Rittenhouse involved in efforts to improve girls’ education in India. Rittenhouse funds clean water for millions worldwide.* It all just looks so… good.

There are times when Rufus finds himself genuinely wondering if they’re actually doing some of this, if yes, they may be funding bad people on the side and building an inner circle to effectively rule the world for generations, but they might really be throwing some pennies at worthwhile causes, even if only for appearances. This is what you keep wishing the mega-rich would actually do with their unlimited capitalist power. Of course, Rittenhouse isn’t, but that almost makes it worse. They’re close, but instead, they just, you know. Are supervillains.

Tonight, there’s another delay on the District Line for reasons best known to the District Line, and Rufus spends forty minutes crammed in with a bunch of tired, grumpy commuters until they finally start moving again. They reach Ealing Common and he gets off, tapping out with his Oyster card like a pro and remembering he has to swing by Tesco before he goes home. He could text Jiya, as obviously there are reasons to worry when the other is notably late, but she doesn’t seem to have sent him a message blitz, yet. Nonetheless, Rufus is a conscientious boyfriend, and taps out, *Tube late, b home soon, xoxo* before going on the grocery run. Then he swings the bags over his shoulder and heads up to Creffield Road.

He reaches their front door, performs the usual shoulder-shoulder check, and unlocks it, pushing it where it sticks and heading up the narrow stairs to their first-floor flat. He can hear the sound of a video game from behind it, and opens the flat door with his shoulder. “What, *Black Flag* without me? I’m wounded.”

“You weren’t here.” Jiya pauses *Assassin’s Creed* (historical video games where the objective is to kill people have become an odd object of nostalgia for them) and gets to her feet, coming to kiss Rufus and take the bags. “What took so long?”

“The train was late, I texted.” Rufus frowns. “Did you not get it?”

“Maybe I did, I haven’t looked at my phone.” Jiya goes over, then frowns. “Nope, I guess O2 ate it. Well, you’re here now, that’s more important. Did you retrieve the plant?”

“Yeah.” Rufus goes into the kitchen to start putting things away. They finally managed to get close enough to Rittenhouse HQ to leave a very, very cleverly disguised recording device in the foyer near the coffee shop, and since like any major London office, a lot of conversations are going to happen in the coffee shop, they’re hopeful it might have picked something up. There are plenty of people who work for Rittenhouse – in fact, probably 99% of them – who don’t know what it actually does, so it’s not like they’re likely to get someone reciting from the evil employee handbook in detail. But you never know.

Rufus puts the milk, toilet paper (*loo roll*) and frozen pizza away, while Jiya boots up her computer, activates the various firewalls and security protocols and everything else they use when reviewing or accessing data, and takes the thumb drive from Rufus’s bag. It’s configured to wirelessly download from the bug on a secure channel, so the bug itself is still in place, and there’s a remote kill switch if they need to shut it off instantaneously from afar. Jiya plugs it in and puts on her headphones, sifting through who knows how much ambient noise and groggy Rittenhouse office drones ordering lattes, until her dark brows suddenly and sharply furrow. “Rufus? Rufus,
“What?” Rufus shoves the bag of salad mix into the crisper (see, those are vegetables, they count) and hurries over. “What is it?”

Jiya lifts up her headphones for him to put on, then hits a few keys, rewinding whatever segment she just played. There’s a brief hiss and static of white noise, then something that is distinctly Connor Mason’s voice, giving Rufus a momentary and unpleasant swoop of missing him. It’s not entirely clear, sounds as if he’s standing near the bug but not directly, as he says, “Oh, and I do know that’s you. We really must talk. A meeting, say, Saturday, Bankside? There’s a festival, it will be quite crowded. More or less at noon.”

“What?” Rufus hits the replay button himself, as if wanting to make sure it’s not a clever audio forgery, but it definitely is Connor. “What – he’s not talking to us, is he? You don’t think that, there’s no way to tell. He could have been talking to anyone.”

Jiya holds up a finger and presses the next key.


Rufus’s heart picks up several notches, and he listens to the next ten minutes, but it’s the usual indistinct hum of people coming and going. He re-listens to the message again, and has to conclude that there’s a decent chance – indeed, more than decent – that Connor does in fact mean him. That his bug-planting or retrieving was nowhere near as subtle as he thought, and Connor wants to see him for old time’s sake, before really bringing the hammer down. If Rufus understood his message correctly, Connor is suggesting they meet Saturday at noon, by the south side of the Millennium Bridge, during the food festival that will mean Southwark is busy and crowded and nobody is likely to notice them together. But that’s ridiculous. Connor is the CEO of frigging Rittenhouse. He chose his allegiances a long time ago. If Rufus walks up to him for any reason, there are just as likely to be half a dozen agents waiting to jump him. No matter how much Connor did for him before, they are now on diametrically opposite sides of this shadow war.

Rufus runs both hands over his face, takes off the headphones, and glances at Jiya, who is wearing a very troubled expression. “We could – ” she starts. “We could go together?”

“No, no. That’s way too dangerous. If it’s a trap, one of us has to stay away and keep holding down the fort until when Lucy gets back.” That when has started to feel an awful lot like an if, and maybe not even that, but Rufus is too loyal to admit the possibility. “Besides, both of us can’t be spotted with Connor, if someone is looking.”

“So what? I’m supposed to let you go to a meeting that our ex-boss may have asked you to come to at a time and place of his choosing, when he’s been working for our enemies for several years? To hope I get to write a letter to you every once in a while in some black-site prison?” Jiya’s eyes flash. “We’re a team, Rufus!”

“I know. I know we are. But I really just want to keep you safe, and we can’t both be taken, if that’s what is going on. We could just ignore it and think it didn’t have anything to do with us at all, and go back to trying to plant bugs and trawl the Deep Web and hack financial records and whatever else. But we’ve kind of been going in circles.” Rufus chews his lip. “Honestly, how much more do we know about what Rittenhouse is really doing than when we got here?”

“We have some proof they’re funding that guy in the Philippines,” Jiya says. “But if you mean what they’re doing in Westworld, what they’re really doing, that Connor is expertly spinning the PR machine to cover and buy time for, we… we don’t. We can’t talk to Lucy, or even know where she is. But do you think there’s any chance that Connor is going to let us in on that?”
“I don’t know.” Rufus blows out another breath. “Maybe it’s too optimistic of me to think that I could get through to him, or that he wants to talk for some other reason than just to nab me and throw me into British spy jail. But you know that we used to be close.”

“That doesn’t mean you still are,” Jiya points out. “He built a time machine for Rittenhouse, and he’s pulling a fat paycheck and a nice life from helping them do terrible things. You’re a good person, Rufus. You want to believe the best of people. But Connor may be a lost cause.”

“No,” Rufus says. “No, I want to see. If it smells fishy, I’ll bail out of there right away and I’ll come home and tell you that you were right, as usual, and I’ll never doubt you again. Then we’ll probably have to run to, like, France and wear berets and eat smelly cheese, since they’ll be onto us in London and that will be a problem, but… I just. I want to see, all right?”

Jiya gazes back at him with dark, unhappy eyes. He puts his hand on her cheek, and she does the same, as they lean their foreheads together and sigh. This is a strange, lonely, uncanny life that they lead, perhaps easier than their old one as the Time Police but still plenty difficult, and they only have each other. Jiya’s mom lives in Lebanon, her dad is dead, and Rufus hasn’t been able to contact his mom and brother except for brief, highly scrambled messages that basically tell them he’s not dead, but he can’t say anything more and he loves them. Maybe one day, he’ll be able to actually walk through his own front door and sleep in his own bed, have his mom make pancakes and play a round of hoops with Kevin, be called by his own name and forget that this was ever his life. But that day is a long way off, and seems to be getting less likely all the time. Maybe he’s wrong. Maybe Connor really is all in. But what do they have left to lose?

(Technically, Rufus thinks, the answer to that question is everything, but it hasn’t been different for a while now. And maybe he wants a chance to shout at Connor too, for all the good it’s going to do. Ask him how he could do this. How he could let it happen. It could be too much to think that shame is going to do anything, but what the hell.)

He can tell, however, that Jiya is still not happy with the idea, and they go to bed that night without discussing it again. They don’t have much time to make a decision, since tomorrow is Friday, and they know it’s this Saturday because that’s when the food festival is. Rufus half expects Rittenhouse agents to break their door down all day on Friday, but nothing out of the ordinary happens at all. Either Rittenhouse doesn’t know where they live, or are hoping they show up and tell them, or… Rufus keeps going over the possibilities. Maybe he is being naïve to the point of literal suicide by thinking there’s a chance that Connor is sincere. And yet.

Dinner on Friday night is tense, and they don’t speak even while playing The Witcher 3. Rufus briefly wonders if it’s anything like what Lucy is facing in Westworld, that it is entertainment for them but reality for her, and when they’ve reached a break, puts down his controller. “I want to meet Connor tomorrow,” he says. “I’ll be careful, but I want to go. If I don’t text you by, like three o’clock, then you can assume we’re blown and pull the kill switches. But I’m going.”

Jiya doesn’t answer at once, but he sees her shudder with a long sigh. She seems to sense that his mind is made up, and leans over to put her head on his shoulder. Rufus kisses her hair, wondering if this is the last night he is ever going to have with her. Doesn’t know whether to cling closer or pull away, as if either way would make it hurt less. But he keeps thinking of Connor flying sixteen hours from Seoul to turn up at his door during his senior year meltdown at MIT, of giving him the job at Mason Industries, everything else. Something of that has to remain. He’s staking his life, and a lot more, on the chance that it does.

Rufus doesn’t sleep much that night, gets up early on Saturday, and decides he might as well take the Tube in before it gets too crowded. He kisses Jiya goodbye as noncommittally as he can, though he can feel her worry vibrating in her fingers where they clutch at his, and promises he will
be back later without any idea whether he will. He heads into the city, tries not to think too much about this, and in the immortal words of Han Solo, flies casual. Sort of.

Around midmorning, he wanders over to Southwark as the vendors are setting up their stands, ambles along the river walk, eats some delicious things, and otherwise kills time until Big Ben is distantly bonging noon. Then he shoves his hands into his pockets, pulls up his sunglasses (it’s June, and actually... thirty percent summer) and heads for the Millennium Bridge.

He has no idea if Connor is going to be there, run fashionably late, or not turn up at all, but he subsides anonymously into the pedestrian throngs and reaches the southside terminus, glancing around. It takes a few very jittery minutes, but then, with an almost shocking matter-of-factness, he sees Connor Mason himself walking toward him, casually dressed in a short-sleeved shirt and Panama hat, expensive shades, shorts, and mandals. He drifts toward Rufus as if not looking for him particularly, then, as if this isn’t the first time they have seen each other in almost three years, says, “I wasn’t sure you were going to come.”

“Yeah, I wasn’t sure either.” Rufus checks over Connor’s shoulder for any lurking suited security thugs, but he seems to be alone. Or his entourage has just dressed to blend in. Either way, he has about a hundred questions, and he needs to prioritize and be careful with which ones he parcels out. He can’t say anything about Jiya or Lucy or any broader plan. Connor is still an enemy until further notice. “I got your... message.”

“Evidently.” Connor has a large paper-wrapped cone of churros in hand, and offers one to Rufus, which he declines. Mason is not buying him back with cinnamon and chocolate deep-fried deliciousness, no sir. “I apologize for the necessary subterfuge, and... well, quite a number of other things. How long have you been in London?”

“Nice try.” Rufus leans on the railing, both of them looking out at the Thames and not at each other. “With what you’re doing, you think I’m going to tell you anything about what – ”

“Look.” Connor’s grip tightens on his churro cone. “Quite self-evidently, someone was going to have to run Rittenhouse while Emma was... elsewhere. That could be me, or it could be someone else. I have tried to mitigate the damage as much as I can, to convince everyone it was a good idea to go public and to actually do useful things and use my technology as much as they could. I may even succeed in decrypting some of the major databases at some point, or release more information to the public domain, and then, well... you might be able to finally find what you’re looking for, mightn’t you?”

“Wh – ” Rufus is thrown. If this is true, which it may or may not be, it sounds as if Connor has been working as a deep-cover mole in Rittenhouse, posing as their fearless leader and slick marketing guru, while getting them to shed their trademark secrecy and operate in a more traceable and trackable sphere. Drawing them out of cover, forcing them to do something good, even if by accident, and at least making sure that everyone knows who they are. “Wait,” he says at last. “Are you planning to tell me you’ve also been trying to take them down the whole time?”

“There are several ways to play this game, Rufus.” Connor’s fingers drum on the railing. “One has been that of yours and your friends, which – let us be frank – hasn’t gotten terribly good results. The other... well. You don’t need to tell me that I’ve made a deal with the devil, as I am quite aware. But we all use the tools given to us, don’t we? As long as Emma is in 221B – ”

“What?” Rufus blurs out. “You mean Westworld?”

At that, they inadvertently glance at each other, as if determined not to appreciate the nerdy names that the other has respectively come up with to describe the alternate reality in question. Rufus wonders if that was a mistake – if he lets on that he knows about it, he could end up telling
Connor that Lucy is there too, and that would be bad. Then Connor says, “I suppose either epithet is fitting, yes.”

Rufus debates how to answer that. He obviously wants to ask flat-out why Rittenhouse made the jump from global to galactic villainy, if they’re building the real Death Star, and any number of things, but he doesn’t think that would actually work. Connor could be duping him too, trying to appear as if he’s a sympathetic fellow soldier, and then actually go back and tell Rittenhouse everything. At last Rufus says, “So Emma’s still there, then?”

“Yes.” Connor pauses to eat a churro. They are just a few steps from the reconstructed Globe Theatre, and he, the melodramatic Shakespeare nerd, is definitely taking the opportunity to milk this. ”And she won’t be coming back until she properly gets the aether.”

“The – I’m sorry, did you just say something helpful?”

“Aether, Rufus,” Connor repeats, sounding aggravated. “It’s – well, the shortest way to explain it is that it is the substance which gives Westworld, as you call it, its . . . interesting physical and paranormal qualities. Magic, if you will. It exists here as well, but only in very low trace quantities. It’s the reason we sometimes have unexplainable things happen, the weird and wild and all the spooky stories that never quite get accounted for. Anyway, there’s much more of it in Westworld, and Emma wants it. If she figures out how to move it here, that would be very bad.”

Rufus opens his mouth, then shuts it. Once more, if this is true, it is admittedly a critical and high-level piece of intelligence for Connor to pass, and ups the odds that he is in fact working to sabotage Rittenhouse from the inside. Rufus considers for a moment. Then he says, “So did Emma know that before she went, or is that something she’s told you since she’s gotten there?”

“She had an idea before she left, yes,” Connor says lightly. “But she’s told me more since she arrived.”

“Wait, so you – you have a way to communicate with Westworld?”

“Rudimentarily, but yes. Why, would this be of interest personally?”

“Nope,” Rufus says. “Just wondering how that whole calling up an alternate universe on the telephone thing works, science-wise.”

Connor shrugs. “You are brilliant, Rufus. I’m sure you can figure it out. In any event, Rittenhouse has recently run into a spot of trouble in Westworld with some colorful local miscreant, man by the name of Flynn, who has been causing more headaches for them than they appreciate. By the sounds of things, they were clumsy enough to let him discover their true name and sensitive details of their operations, and he’s devoted himself to taking them down.”

“Wow,” Rufus says. “Never met this Flynn guy, but I kind of like him.”

“I daresay you wouldn’t if you met him.” Connor finishes his churros andlobsthe empty cone into a nearby bin. “Anyway, I sent some . . . help in their direction, though he’s supposed to acquire a sample of the aether and bring it back for my study. If I can work out what it is and how they plan to weaponize it, I can possibly stop them in time. Like any natural force, you can’t just use it in a pure form. You have to shape it and direct it and build conduits to channel it. It can exist here, since it already does, but this world has never had as much of it, over centuries, as exists on any given day in Westworld. Bringing it here would be, as I said, chaotic.”

“Erase the known laws of physics bad? Yeah, sounds like Rittenhouse.” Rufus hesitates. Connor seems unexpectedly talkative, which could mean that this is something that he too is genuinely
afraid of and is working hard trying to derail. Still, there’s something else about that that caught his attention. “Who did you send to Westworld? How? Do you have another machine?”

“No, still just the Mothership.” Connor glances around shifty. “It made a second trip to pick him up and return there. As for who. . .” He digs in his pocket, then pulls out a business card, handing it to Rufus. “I suggest following that up. Tell them Mr. Sancho sent you.”

Frowning, Rufus looks down at it. This does not make him feel any better. It’s a card for Bethlem Royal Hospital – yes, the same one that used to be known as “Bedlam” and is basically the byword for the excesses and terrors of lunatic asylums in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These days, it’s a respectable, sedate institution run by the NHS, but there are still dark rumors about patients dying in custody and other hints that the past has not been entirely forgotten. If Connor wanted to be ominous and mysterious, he has definitely succeeded at that. “Bethlem?” Rufus repeats. “Really? You want me to go there and – what, ask if I can have a look through the padded cells?”

There’s no answer, and when he glances up, he sees that Connor has disappeared in the crowd. Rufus swears under his breath, thinking it was apparently too much to ask for him to stick around for one last question, and still not sure if he trusts anything he just heard. Yes, it’s more than he and Jiya have managed to learn in almost six months in London, but how much of that was given in good faith? Connor does seem scared. If Rittenhouse has this in the pipeline, even he might be genuinely motivated to stop them, no matter if he was in fact working with them before or not. This is another clue, but. . . what (or, Rufus thinks, probably who) is at Bethlem? And why?

Confused and unsettled, Rufus wanders among the booths for a little while longer, eats some more, and then remembers he definitely has to text Jiya and let her know he’s not detained and/or dead. He does so, hoping it arrives this time and wondering if that last one disappeared because someone is tapping their texts, which seems paranoid but not impossible. But she answers with evident relief, so apparently that one made it through. Whatever.

Rufus leaves the festival, rides a different line to Ealing Broadway rather than Ealing Common, and takes a different route home, just in case. When he opens the door, a pale-faced Jiya jumps up at once to kiss him, and Rufus doesn’t blame her. Once she’s satisfied herself that she’s all right, they sit on the couch with tea and cookies and he tells her what Mason said. About the aether, about Rittenhouse wanting it, and the fact that Connor has sent someone else to Westworld to collect it first, as well as to stop this random Flynn person causing issues for Emma – that part is presumably to keep his cover as a loyal right-hand man. When Jiya asks who that was, Rufus pulls out the card and relates Connor’s cryptic closing salvo. That is all he knows. Still hasn’t decided if Connor was lying, but he doesn’t think so. Entirely.

“Bethlem?” Jiya looks faintly ill. She doesn’t like doctors or hospitals, and she definitely doesn’t like mental asylums, given that after a jump went wrong a few years ago, she started to have visions. Past or present or future, or something else entirely, it’s hard to tell. She mostly tried to repress them, which worked about as well as you’d expect, but shit went down with that, and anyway. She hasn’t had any for months, for which Rufus is grateful, but there’s the obvious possibility that going to Bethlem might trigger some. Rufus opens his mouth to volunteer to once more go alone, but she holds up a hand. “No. We definitely go together.”

“Are you sure? I mean, I don’t want to go to the spooky psych hospital by myself, but – ”

“I’m not fragile, Rufus. And I already let you go to the rendezvous with Mason by yourself. If we’ve gone this far with it, we should keep going. Tomorrow? It might be quieter if it’s Sunday.”

Rufus wonders if that’s a good thing or not, and then, honestly, if there’s any good time to visit frigging Bedlam. He can’t see that it will get any better with waiting, and time (in any sense of the
word) is probably not on their side. “Okay.”

They stick close to each other for the rest of the day, eat dinner, and crawl into bed later to celebrate the fact that Rufus isn’t dead, if you know what they mean. What with everything, Rufus is exhausted, and he falls asleep quickly afterward, much as he would like to stay awake and cuddle. This getting old business blows.

They wake up on Sunday morning, make pancakes, then get dressed and head out to Bromley. It’s still early on a weekend, so the car park is mostly empty; they drove, since they own a beater of a Peugeot, but they take public transit as much as possible for obvious only-actual-crazy-people-want-to-drive-in-London reasons. They exchange a glance, with no idea what they might be getting themselves into. Jiya has pepper spray in her purse, and Rufus bought some brass knuckles with the idea that he might have to properly punch someone, but he can’t start taking a swing at orderlies, no matter how Nurse Ratchet they may look. Here goes nothing.

They stroll up to the visitor entrance and address themselves to reception. There’s a big glossy poster in the front foyer, thanking Rittenhouse for their recent generous contributions to the hospital’s renovation and modern redevelopment plan, and they manage not to stare at it too much and/or wince. As instructed, Rufus leans over the desk and says that Mr. Sancho sent them. The receptionist pauses, then blinks. “Mr. . . Sancho?”

Just his luck if they got the backup who’s not up to speed on the evil code words. Rufus tries again. “From Canary Wharf?”

“Oh. Yes. Mr. Sancho.” The receptionist eyes them up and down. “Are you here to see her?”

“Yes,” Rufus says, as authoritatively as possible. “We’re here to see her.”

After another pause, the receptionist shrugs and seems to decide that they’re legit. They sign in with their fake names, are given visitor passes, and then a pleasant young clinician appears to escort them into the lift, up two floors, and down to a private room at the end. “You have fifteen minutes. She doesn’t get visitors often, we don’t want to distress her.”

Rufus and Jiya exchange a look as the clinician scans a badge, the door opens, and they step inside to a room that is obviously a long-term home for its resident. This is a blonde woman in her mid-thirties, if they had to guess, though it’s hard to be sure. She doesn’t measurably react or glance around as they enter, staring vaguely at the wall, and Rufus wonders if this is going to get them anywhere at all. The clinician greets her in a cheery voice, tells her that a Mr. Hamill and a Ms. Kirk are here to see her, gives Rufus and Jiya a well-you-asked-for-it look, and withdraws.

Once he’s reasonably certain they’re alone – aside from whatever CCTV and other monitoring facilities are installed – Rufus tentatively starts forward. “Uh, ma’am? Hi. We’re sorry for disturbing you. We’re – we were told to visit by – well. By Connor Mason.”

There’s a long pause. The woman’s head turns toward him, something in her eyes changes, and she sits up. In a perfectly ordinary voice, she says, “Hi. I’ve never seen you before.”

“Uh.” Rufus shoots a look at Jiya, asking for help. Is this a lucid episode in an otherwise prolonged psychosis, has she been faking it for reasons unknown, or – or what? It would take some serious commitment to a con to get yourself stuck in here, and he has no idea what tree Connor thought he was sending them to bark up. “My name’s – Jake. Jake Hamill.”

The woman regards him inscrutably. Then she says, “Jessica Logan.”

“Uh, okay.” Rufus sits down on the chair across from her, as Jiya cautiously edges nearer. “How
long have you been here? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“A while,” Jessica says. “It’s complicated. You said Connor Mason sent you. Did something happen to Wyatt?”

“Wh – who’s Wyatt?”

She cocks her head, as if smelling the fairly obvious rat. After a pause, however, she says, “Wyatt’s my husband. He was sent on . . . an unusual assignment. Is he all right?”

“Was he by chance sent to a place called 221B?”

Jessica’s eyes flicker in surprise. It’s hard to tell how much she knows about what exactly 221B/Westworld is, what Wyatt is doing there, or anything else, but she nods. “That’s what Connor said, when he told me anything. I’m not sure what it means, but . . . anyway. If you two are here to kill me, you should probably just do that.”

“K – ” That, to say the least, was a segue. “Why would we be here to kill you?”

“Any number of reasons.” Jessica considers them closely. “Wyatt failed, or didn’t fail, or the brass got tired of paying for me, or – ” She shrugs, with apparent nonchalance. “Everyone else thinks Rittenhouse is wonderful, but I’m not one of them. I used to be.”

Rufus and Jiya glance at each other, startled and off their footing. This has at least helpfully pointed out that the person that Connor sent to Westworld was Jessica’s husband, that his name is apparently Wyatt, and that he probably didn’t go entirely willingly, that there was some kind of duress or blackmail involved. Finally Rufus says, “What do you mean, you used to be?”

Jessica utters a low, dry laugh. “I mean I was one of them. Ever since they saved my little brother Kevin’s life, when we were kids. I thought they were everything they say they are now. Worked for them, gave them everything. But I found out the hard way that they’re . . .” She considers. “They’re not.”

A faint chill goes down Rufus’s spine. He has a little brother named Kevin too, after all, and he likewise also used to work for Rittenhouse, had to learn in painful and disillusioning ways about the magnitude of the lie. His participation may have been less willing, but it still happened, and if Jessica has been purposefully shut up in a mental hospital to get her out of the way (or decided to fake insanity to escape their notice after she turned on them), they could have put her in danger by coming here. Connor told them to do it, but Connor’s motives still aren’t clear, as well as what side he’s actually working for. There’s a long pause. Then Jessica shrugs again. “Like I said. Kill me if you’re going to.”

“We’re not here to kill you.” Jiya speaks for the first time, regarding Jessica with troubled sympathy. She doesn’t like to see people suffer, she certainly doesn’t like to see them trapped in hospitals and/or labeled insane, and it’s clear that she wants to help Jessica if they can. “Is there any way we could get you out?”

“I don’t think so,” Jessica says. “They’re not going to take that chance. Besides, if you’re from Rittenhouse, why would you want to do that?”

“We’re not Rittenhouse,” Rufus admits. “And I don’t know what Connor is, it’s recently gotten very confusing. Is he the one responsible for putting you in here?”

“No.” Jessica laughs again, without any mirth at all. “That was Emma.”

“Yeah, we know her.” Rufus shudders reflexively. “Do you know how long it’s been since you
saw your husband?”

Jessica hesitates, then shakes her head. “I honestly can’t be sure. They’ve had me on some pretty strong drugs, my sense of time is pretty much totally fucked. I’m not sure if Wyatt even knows I’m in here. Connor was the one who told me he’d been sent on an assignment somewhere and there was a lot riding on whether or not he succeeded. I can’t tell you anymore.”

Rufus wonders if that is can’t or won’t, but honestly, this poor woman has no obligation to spill her life story to a pair of random newcomers of unclear motives. He exchanges a glance with Jiya, trying to judge if they should call this a win and head out of here before anyone realizes that they’re not the usual breed of Rittenhouse crony who must pop by to check on Jessica every so often. But this is the closest they’ve been to a breakthrough on Westworld and Rittenhouse and the possibility of finding out if Lucy is even still alive than since the modified Lifeboat vanished last October, and he feels inclined to take some risks. “Do you know what aether is?”

“Aether?” Jessica echoes, sounding genuinely stumped. “Isn’t that like – some gimmicky steampunk thing?”

Strictly speaking, Rufus supposes, this is not wrong. “You said Emma got you thrown in here, so before that, were you two. . . friends? Does Emma even have friends?”

“We knew each other, obviously.” Jessica seems to be getting tired, and tired of talking. If she’s mostly kept drugged, this is probably the most sustained interaction she’s had in a while, and they should call it and go. “If you know her too, you know what she’s like.”

“Yeah. Terrifying.” Rufus pauses, then gets to his feet. “Well, thank you for your help, really. We’ll be on our way. If I see Connor again, I’ll try to insist he gets you out of here.”

Jessica has an expression on her face as if she either doesn’t know what good that would do, or doesn’t think it’s a good idea, but just then, the door clicks behind them, and the clinician returns. She’s holding a small gift-wrapped package, which she sets in Jessica’s lap. “Look at that, Mrs. Logan. You’ve got a present, isn’t that nice?” Turning to Rufus and Jiya, she adds, “That’s time. If you’d come with me?”

“Just – one more minute, all right?” Something has struck Rufus as decidedly weird about Jessica just happening to get a package while they’re there, and he wonders suddenly if a carload of agents have arrived. “Then we’ll go.”

The clinician eyes them, glances at Jessica, and then nods and steps out. Rufus looks at Jessica. “Do you really think you should open that?”

Jessica pauses, then apparently decides that she is a prisoner in a goddamn mental asylum and little joys are few and far between, so she’s opening the fucking present. She slits the paper to reveal a white box, removes the lid, and pulls out something small and golden. It doesn’t seem like a bomb or an anthrax letter, at any rate, but Rufus doesn’t get a good look. That is because just then, Jiya utters a small, choked noise, her eyes roll back in her head, and she collapses.

“Jiya? JIYA!” Rufus lunges to catch her. This looks like one of the visions again, the kind that they were exactly worried about this visit triggering, but stronger than he can ever remember. She convulses madly in his arms, as he tries to lie her down without hurting her – they are in a psychiatric hospital, but damned if he’s asking any of these people to lay a finger on her. He has to set her on the floor, searching for something to put under her head. “JIYA!”

He’s aware of the clinician banging on the door, and voices shouting outside. Then a hot white glow fills the room, like standing at point-blank range next to a lighthouse beam, and Rufus
screws up his eyes, raising his hands against the glare, which does nothing. There’s an eerie hummin
singing sound, like a wet finger run around the rim of a wine glass over and over, and it pierces stra
through his head. The glow seems to emanate from the object in Jessica’s hand, but he can’t be sure, b
he can’t see anything. He goes to all fours, desperate to make it stop, fumbling out with both hands a
finding nothing. “Jiya!”

After a few blinding, bedazzled moments, the noise and light show subsides, and Rufus blinks dan
purple spots out of his burned retinas. He can smell ozone, for some reason, and coughs and strug
to get his breath and bearings back. Whatever the hell just happened, he doesn’t have any interest i
repeat, and –

“Jiya? Jiya?”

No answer. No movement. The door is still locked, but there is no one in the room but him.

Jessica and Jiya are gone.
Lucy is somewhere between sleeping and waking when she thinks—no, she does—hear scratching at the door. It’s faint at first, stealthy, then slightly louder. It sounds like it’s working at the wood, rasping like a bone saw, inch by inch, and it reminds her at once of the claws clicking on the cobblestones, following her home. Is it— is that thing back? Flynn shot it, but it disappeared, it didn’t die. Her imagination conjures a picture of those snaky thin limbs dragging across the floorboards of the corridor, crouching to pick at the lock. The latch slips ajar, and—

Lucy’s head jerks up, she looks over at the door, and sees and hears nothing there at all. The light is an indeterminate predawn grey, the room is quiet, and Flynn is snoring softly on the floor, with no hint of spooky shadow creatures anywhere. However, it’s not quite accurate to say that he’s sleeping peacefully. There is a sharp furrow between his brows, his eyes move back and forth beneath closed lids, and he utters a muffled sound in his throat, one hand emerging from the blankets as if to snatch at something. Whatever he’s dreaming about, and Lucy has an unfortunate feeling that she knows what—Tata, Tata—it does not look pleasant. She hesitates for a moment more, then reaches down, seizes him by the shoulder, and shakes him firmly.

Flynn wakes up like a gunshot, sitting halfway upright with a wild expression, before Lucy realizes it’s probably a bad idea to abruptly startle awake a man who has spent the last few days, and last few years more generally, running from the law. He grabs hold of her wrist, takes several moments to recognize that it’s her, and then lets go, lying back down with as much of an unruffled expression as he can manage on short notice. “Don’t do that next time.”

“You were having a nightmare.” Lucy rolls back into bed. She wasn’t exactly expecting boundless gratitude, but still. “I was just trying to help.”

Flynn grunts. “I have plenty of nightmares. Managed fine without you.”

“I’m sorry.” Grouchy as he seems determined to be, Lucy keeps her voice level. You never know what might happen if you’re kind to people, after all, and it certainly doesn’t seem in boundless supply in Flynn’s life right now. Mostly by his own doing, but never mind that. “If it—it has anything to do with what happened with Priscilla, I’m sorry. As I said, it was an accident, but—”

“So it was an accident.” Flynn turns his head away from her. “Leave it.”

“I’m sorry,” Lucy says, for the third time, quietly. “About your family. You must miss them very much.”

“Don’t talk about my family like you know them.”

Lucy can’t help but feel slightly slapped. Perhaps she was completely mistaken, but last night, with the corset (she still doesn’t know if she should have asked or not, but it’s done now) she had half a sense that they might be something besides outright enemies-turned-grudging-allies. What, she has no idea. Maybe just a small, vulnerable moment of human connection, over and outside anything else whatsoever. If he’s now going to be as pleasant as a bear suddenly woken from hibernation, she’s disappointed but not surprised. “I just thought—”

“Did you?” Flynn still doesn’t look at her. “Don’t bother. You’d rather I was gone and out of your life anyway, so I don’t need your pity. Go back to sleep, Lucy. Or get up. But don’t think you need to hold my hand.”

Lucy pauses, then lies back down smartly. His breathing quickly sounds a little too deliberately
slow to be real, but if he wants to pretend he’s gone back to sleep to avoid the horrifying prospect of more conversation with her, that is his lookout. She got the message, she isn’t going to push. Maybe he’s just a sad, broken, lonely person who prefers to live that way, who has convinced himself that it’s better and safer, and while that hurts Lucy to think about, it’s also not her responsibility to fix. She has offered a tentative olive branch, but if he’s swatted it out of her hand, fine. She doesn’t care.

(She just… she misses Rufus and Jiya, and she’s clearly the first person who has taken care of Flynn in any sense of the word for years, and yet. She should not assume that just because she’s so lonely and longing so desperately to have a partner again, to have a team, that he is.)

Lucy snatches an hour or two of restless sleep until she wakes up around eight, as usual, and sees that Flynn’s spot on the floor has been vacated, the blankets folded and the cushions piled up. For a moment she thinks he’s actually cleared out for good, until she hears the water running in the bathroom; it sounds like he’s washing several days of grime and misadventure down her drain. He probably hasn’t eaten since those hot rolls yesterday morning, unless he also stole food from her neighbors while he was at it. Not like that would help anyone’s temper.

Lucy considers, sighs, then gets up, shrugs on her dressing gown, and goes downstairs, knowing that it is scandalous to appear in semi-public as anything less than fully clad, but at least this is an all-women’s college and it can’t be the first time. She goes into Hall where breakfast is being served, gets a napkin, and hides sausage, toast, bacon, and a small cupful of baked beans in it, then carefully returns upstairs with her smuggled victuals. Sets it on the desk and waits until Flynn emerges from the bathroom, dark hair still damp and sharply parted on the side, using her towel to wipe his freshly shaved face. At the sight of the food, he raises both eyebrows. “And?”

“I thought you might be hungry,” Lucy says neutrally. “If you aren’t, I’ll eat it.”

Flynn eyes her suspiciously, as if he will figure out her angle yet, just wait. He is still wearing the white shirt from his stolen suit, sleeves rolled up and collar open, with suspenders and pinstriped trousers, and Lucy is once more aware of only being in her insubstantial nightclothes in front of him. She should definitely get dressed, though she is not asking him to do up the corset. They stare at each other for a slightly tense moment, until she gets up and moves to the wardrobe to collect her clothes. Her shoulder brushes his chest as she walks past him into the bathroom, and she can feel him briefly flinch.

Lucy shuts the door, discovers that her own heart is once more beating slightly too fast, and figures there will not be any hot water left after he used it all. So she washes quickly and makes do with getting dressed herself, as usual. Ruffled green velvet skirt and matching fitted jacket, brown silk blouse, lace jabot, and combing and pinning her hair up into a high bun with a few loose curls. Before she slips on her stockings and boots, she checks her ankle, which is still puffy and tender but better than it was, and wraps it up with a new ace bandage from the first-aid kit. Pops a few of her precious ibuprofen, since she seems destined to have a headache today one way or the other, and steps back out.

Flynn has made short work of the breakfast, and glances at her as if to say that he appreciates it, but doesn’t want to go so far as actually thanking her. Heaven forbid, apparently. Then he wipes his mouth, gets to his feet, and says, “I’m going to find Wyatt Logan.”

“And is find shorthand for – I don’t know, beat him up?”

“I want answers,” Flynn says. “That requires leaving him in a state to provide them. But either you can help me do that, or I’ll lock you in the room here. Your choice.”

It says something about what Lucy has learned about this man that she’s unsurprised that he
throws that out there as the options. She can’t climb in and out of a third-floor window the way he can; she’s not that coordinated to start with, especially with a long skirt and bustle. She’d catch it on something, fall, and break her neck, and if it comes to a physical struggle for the key, he can clearly win that handily. She’s also not surprised that after a day of lying low, having now been adequately rested, fed, and washed, he’s more than ready to return to his regularly scheduled mayhem, and standing in the way of this particular freight train is a risky proposition. Frankly, just threatening to lock her up for the day is mild by Flynn’s standards, since it wasn’t long ago that he was on the “get out of my way or I’ll kill you” bluster express. She is well settled in her conviction that he’s not going to actually hurt her, but it’s still annoying.

There is a long pause as both of them stare at each other, trying to size up what the other is going to do. Lucy half-expects Flynn to whip out a pair of handcuffs and chain her to the desk (if he is going to be this exasperating about it, at least put her somewhere she can work for the day). Just then, however, the standoff is interrupted by the one thing that Lucy has been dreading in any circumstances: a crisp knock on the door.

She beckons Flynn frantically to crouch behind the bed, which even he, sensible to the risk of discovery, smartly does. Lucy hitches an everything’s-fine smile onto her face and goes over to open the door a crack. “Yes? What is it?”

“Dr. Preston?” It’s Dr. Sophia Jex-Blake, the eminent physician and pioneer of women’s medical education – they talked at dinner the other night, before Flynn performed his little Escape from Alcatraz. “I was hoping you had a moment, or might be inclined to join me for an outing. You said some rather interesting things about the history and development of medicine during our conversation, and I was hoping to discuss with you more thoroughly.”

Lucy regards her with the same internally-wheels-spinning smile. Normally, of course, she would be absolutely thrilled for the opportunity to speak more in depth with an amazing historical lady, even if she has the sense that she might have to dodge some difficult questions. She has learned enough about the history of this universe to realize that it’s followed more or less the same course as home, that it has accumulated from the same possibilities and same people into more or less the same situations, where some of the choices have been made in the same way and some haven’t. It’s still led them to more or less the same historical point, albeit with the obvious differences, but the details of how they’ve gotten there have been knocked that just bit askew, like a panicking student did a bad crib job from the textbook and moved around dates and events and the outcomes of people’s lives, important and minor, in large ways and small. She is realizing that it’s going to be very hard to teach it, when you can’t even be sure of the same basic dates and data, and she definitely can’t tell Sophia as much as she wants to know. Even assuming that Flynn is just going to let her stroll off, which seems unlikely. “I… ah…”

“Are you otherwise engaged?” Sophia has a shrewd look on her face. “I thought I heard voices, just before I knocked. It did rather, if I may, sound like a gentleman’s voice. Have I interrupted you with a certain sort of company, Dr. Preston?”

Lucy thinks this is a pretty bold way to ask if she’s a loose woman or not – maybe that’s part of why Sophia later gets sued by her students. As noted, Sophia is a lesbian, so she is happily unencumbered with the idiocies of gentlemen (honestly, Lucy thinks, she also really should go back to dating women, not that she and Flynn are dating) and while she likewise may thumb her nose at Victorian morality, she doesn’t have much patience for men in general. (Again: really difficult to blame her for that.) She seems to be trying to glance past Lucy into the room, and Lucy shifts quickly to block her view. “No, it’s just me, Dr. Jex-Blake.”

“This is a place for the education and furtherance of young women, Dr. Preston. Surely you are not departing so swiftly from the need to maintain their propriety, so soon after receiving this
post?” Sophia eyes her like a disapproving schoolmarm. “If you are… so engaged, I can of course return later, but it is my own opinion that you should – and who is that? Exactly?”

Lucy winces, glances over her shoulder, and sees that Flynn, in the course of trying to move toward the window, has inadvertently left himself able to be spotted from the door. There’s no doubt that yes, that is in fact very much an illicitly lurking gentleman, no matter what Lucy was just saying, and there is only one reason for one such creature to be present in her bedroom without total scandal. “That’s… that’s my husband,” Lucy says. “Mr. Preston. He recently arrived from London, I haven’t been able to settle him lodging yet, so I’ve brought him here. I – well, I haven’t informed Madeleine yet, that’s all. Darling, won’t you come over here and say hello? I do believe you’ve no manners in the least.”

Flynn raises both eyebrows at her as high as they will go, as if to say that if Sophia has consulted any newspaper anywhere in the last few days, letting her get a better look at his face is the last thing they need. But not doing it now would be even weirder, so he gets to his feet and saunters over. “Dr. Jex-Blake, is it? From Surgeons’ Hall?”

“That, despite herself, catches Sophia off-guard (to say nothing of totally gobsmacking Lucy). The gruff nearly-fifty matron actually pinks a bit with pleasure, and shakes Flynn’s hand when he offers it. “Well, Mr. Preston, that is kind of you to say. Your wife is quite talented as well, from the sound of things. Do I – ” She frowns. “Do I know you from somewhere?”

“Do you read newspapers?”

“No, you don’t. I’m sure that Lucy would be happy to speak to you later, but we do have plans for the day. Thus – ”

“We could re-arrange them,” Lucy interrupts. “Couldn’t we, darling?”

Flynn gives her a teeth-gritted smile. “I don’t see that we could. Unless – ”

“Unless you wish to have more… privacy… to prosecute your own?” Lucy can sense Sophia’s eyes whizzing back and forth between them like she’s watching a tennis match, and even if she personally doesn’t look at newspapers, it will get out if she mentions “Mr. Preston” shacked up in his wife’s room. “So if I step out with Dr. Jex-Blake, it will distance me from your – ”

“You are staying here, or – ”

“For a man who purports to respect the rights of women in education, Mr. Preston, you seem to have rather scant regard for their rights in daily life.” Sophia gives him the fish-eye, as if to say
that the brief moment of flattery earlier will not make her overlook his other character defects. “Can your wife make her own choices, or can she not?”

Flynn looks once more insulted at the idea that he is your bog-standard Victorian misogynist, which is oddly to his credit, even if nothing else he’s doing or saying is. He is going to have a hard time refusing outright and maintaining the cover, and while Sophia might not be beating him with a fan, it’s clear that she is going to take Lucy’s side on this and once more outnumber him. For her part, while Lucy does want to go with Sophia and thus acquire a plausible alibi for whatever might be about to happen, she also doesn’t want to let Flynn out of sight. With a sharp dig of her elbows into his ribs, conveniently depriving him of the power of speech for a few seconds, she says, “In fact, darling. I’m going with you, aren’t I? Just as we were discussing earlier? Dr. Jex-Blake, I am terribly sorry, but I hope we can reschedule. Oh, and as I said, I haven’t yet been able to inform Madeleine about Mr. Preston’s presence, and I am hoping to pack him off to a boarding house as soon as possible. So if you would… not mention it?”

Sophia looks suspicious for a long moment, before she finally nods. “As you wish, Dr. Preston. I will call by later at a more… agreeable date. Oh, and good luck, you seem to need it. Good day.”

With that, she strides off down the hall, as Lucy looks triumphantly at Flynn. He did say that she could come with him or be locked in, and if she just chose to come with him (and it will now be odd if Sophia comes back and finds her here) then he can’t wriggle his way out of it. He looks momentarily furious at being outwitted, but also rather pleased, biting down a grin, which makes no sense at all. Then he shrugs, with his usual sarcastic grace. “Fine. Let’s go visiting, dear.”

He gives it the same sort of mocking bite that she did with darling, even as he is heading back to the window for his usual eventful exit. Lucy prays that Sophia isn’t hanging around the front quad and thus able to observe her leaving unaccompanied as she hurries downstairs and out the gate, wondering if she just volunteered herself to be accomplice to a kidnapping. Maybe she can stay out of sight. She still would really prefer it if Wyatt was not immediately vindicated in his obvious belief that she’s covering for Flynn, even if she is. She likewise feels relatively confident that he would prefer to avoid hurting her, but desperate men can do desperate things.

Lucy reconnoiters with Flynn in Little Clarendon Street, glancing edgily at the passerby and wondering if he should be strolling around in broad daylight. He has on a hat with a brim, and most people aren’t really looking for the fiend of Buckingham Palace to be passing them on the sedate streets of Oxford – besides, the picture isn’t perfect, it’s one black-and-white daguerreotype and there have to be other similar-looking Eastern European men. This is still not safety or an assurance of anything, but there you have it. Where the hell is Wyatt, anyway?

Asking a few questions gets them informed that the American bounty hunter has been spotted by Oxford Castle, which at this point in its history is Oxford Prison. Clearly, Wyatt thinks that some of the inmates might have the goods on Flynn, which is as likely a strategy as any if he can get them to talk, and Lucy and Flynn head in that direction. Flynn stops several times to help her over puddles with excessively feigned chivalry, and Lucy glares at him. “Will you knock it off?”

“Just doing my husbandly duty, eh?” Another flash of teeth. “Can’t have Dr. Jex-Blake thinking that I’m failing in my responsibilities.”

“That was a lie to get us out of trouble, and you know it.” Ignoring his offered hand, Lucy picks up her skirts and edges warily around the puddle, since they can form in the breaks in the cobbles and be several feet deep. “We’re also extremely lucky that she’s apparently the one person in the South of England who hasn’t read a newspaper in the last fortnight. So you can quit trying to make whatever point you think you’re making by this.”

“Being polite is a crime now too?” Flynn takes her arm firmly on the far side of the puddle, before
Lucy wants to tell him that literally nothing about his behavior toward her to date would make her or any sane woman react to him with anything more than disdain, bemusement, pity, anger, annoyance, and the world’s most unwanted hint of lust (she is definitely not mentioning that part, and she’s still in disbelief at herself for feeling it at all). He’s not being polite, he’s being an ass, especially after he blew her off this morning when she tried to connect with him over the nightmare. If he does want to get closer in any way, he’s doing a damn fine job of not showing it.

They don’t talk until they reach Oxford Prison and set off on a perambulation around the grounds. Well-to-do couples sometimes come to visit the prisoners or provide them with Biblical literature or other super-comforting items, as well as push for reform or tour the cells or whatever else, so they can pass as one such. They split up, Flynn heading for the medieval Norman motte on which the castle was originally built, and Lucy making for St. George’s Tower. She doesn’t know if Wyatt is still here, if the information was from yesterday, or if he might be down below trying to get someone to talk. Thus, it is a shock to round the tower and almost run into him, as they stop, squint, stare at each other, and look surprised. “Lucy,” he says, just as she says, “Wyatt,” they remember it’s too informal to use each other’s first names in public, and try to start over. In unison, they chorus, “What are you doing here?”

Lucy knows exactly why she’s here, of course, so it’s a bit misleading to ask him, but she has to play at least somewhat innocent. Wyatt politely removes his hat. “Morning, ma’am. I’m – I wouldn’t expect to see a woman alone around here.”

“I was looking for you,” Lucy says, which is the truth. “I think I might know where Flynn is.”

“Do you?” Wyatt looks surprised. “And you’re willing to give him up?”

“Well, he is dangerous, isn’t he? And if I can be sure that he’s in Oxford, then perhaps it would be worthwhile for you to… talk.”

“I don’t want to talk to Flynn.” Wyatt looks at her oddly. “I want to put him down. They said local criminal, I was thinking some damn small-time pickpocket, not large-scale terrorizing psychopath. So since that’s the case, I’m not really sure that it’s worth it to – ”

Just as Lucy is opening her mouth – to say what, she isn’t sure – there’s a brief crunch of footsteps, and Flynn materializes from behind one of the outbuildings, having apparently either started in this direction already or heard them speaking. Just as Wyatt senses someone at his back and starts to turn around, Flynn reaches him, throws his arm tightly around Wyatt’s neck in a chokehold, and pulls a handkerchief out of his overcoat pocket with the other, clapping it to his face. Lucy can get a strong, sickly-sweet whiff of chloroform that makes her momentarily light-headed even from several paces away, and has to step back. Chloroform is not the easiest or most straightforward way to knock someone out in her world, since it takes several minutes and a precise application of the dose, but between the chokehold and whatever super-strength varieties might be available here, it is just the ticket. Wyatt slumps, unconscious, in Flynn’s grasp.

“Wh – ” Lucy supposes that it’s preferable to an all-out fistfight or shootout, but she still gapes at him. “Why did you – ”

“What did you think I was going to do?” Flynn snaps. “Set a trap with a piece of cheese and hope he crawled in? Come on, help me get him into that shed over there.”

Lucy is thus left with no choice but to unwillingly assist Flynn with bundling the dead weight of a
knocked-out Texan mercenary into the disused shed that he indicated. There’s a chair inside, which Flynn slings Wyatt into as negligently as a side of beef, and goes to retrieve the rusty manacles from the wall. He efficiently chains Wyatt to it just as he is starting to groan, eyelashes fluttering, and then jerks them open. He gags on the leftover taint of chloroform, looks around, sees Lucy, and fixes an expression of the utmost betrayal upon her.

“I’m sorry,” Lucy says, since the cat is now well and truly out of the bag and she can’t exactly get away with claiming this once more as an accident. “He made me help him. I’m sorry.”

“You.” Wyatt lifts his head, blue eyes burning, and stares at Flynn, who is leaning against the wall with his usual smirk. “I’m guessing you’re the asshole I’ve been after the whole time.”

“You’ve been doing a piss-poor job of it.” Flynn raises an eyebrow. “I can give you a few tips.”

“Are you insane?” Wyatt rattles at the chains, discovers that Flynn has not fucked around with them, and glances at the door as if judging the prospects of shouting for help. “Walking into the middle of Oxford Prison and abducting me? What the hell are you even getting out of this?”

“Information, I hope.” Flynn pulls out the other chair, turns it around, and sits down to face Wyatt, seemingly pleasant and affable, but with an obvious menacing edge. “Do you feel like talking, or do we do this the hard way?”

“Just don’t – ” Wyatt glances at Lucy, with a concern that she doesn’t feel she merits for helping lead him into the trap in the first place. “Look, just don’t hurt her, all right?”

“Depends.” Flynn cracks his knuckles. “What are you willing to tell me so I don’t?”

Lucy is fairly sure that this is just a bluff to induce Wyatt to talk, but she also doesn’t feel like taking her chances right now, and moves a few wary steps away from Flynn. Wyatt swears for a bit, which he is altogether entitled to do, but can see that this isn’t getting him anywhere. “Look, you son of a bitch. I’m trying to do a job and it’s important that I do, so – ”

“Do you work for the Metropolitan?” Flynn says. “I don’t think you do, but – ”

Wyatt’s gaze flicks to Lucy. She remembers that he said that he did, or at least implied it, at their first meeting in London when he shot the tocker, but Flynn said yesterday that Gladstone and Victoria hadn’t heard of him. So unless the commissioner hired Wyatt with no reference to his higher-ups whatsoever, which seems risky, it appears that that’s a convenient lie, and Wyatt admittedly isn’t rushing to confirm it. Finally he says, “I was hired by people who are worried about your bull in a china shop routine. Leave it at that.”

“I’ll say if we leave it at that.” Flynn is staring at him with the intent, unswerving gaze of a predator in the bush. “How long have you been in Europe?”

Once again, Wyatt looks at Lucy, which is kind of a giveaway that he’s already told her one thing and she might be able to speak up and contradict it if he lies. He doesn’t know if she will or not, but he should probably stop doing that, and he chews mulishly over his words. “If you mean how long have I been in London, you probably know that already, don’t you?”

Flynn tips one shoulder in half a shrug, as if to say that yes, he does. “You arrived quite soon after the Regent’s Park airship crash.”

“Which you caused,” Wyatt points out acidly. “So yes, people have noticed you.”

“Rittenhouse?” Flynn presses. “Lucy here told me already that you hadn’t heard of Emma Whitmore or Rittenhouse when she mentioned them. But just because you don’t know who they
are doesn’t mean you don’t work for them. They’re good at covering their tracks.”

“She told you, huh?” Wyatt tilts his chin back, staring balefully at his adversary. “Was that another easy-way-or-hard-way situation?”

“She told me entirely of her own free will, I’ll have you know.” Flynn leans forward on the chair. Lucy gets the feeling that she is decidedly secondary to whatever clash they’re playing out, whatever clash of wills, testing and taunting, waiting to see who cracks first. “There is a lot that clearly you don’t know, Wyatt. Now. When did you get to Europe? Not London. Europe.”

A muscle works in Wyatt’s cheek, as if he never allowed Flynn to address him so chummily, but can’t let on about whatever has managed to get under his skin. At last he says, “I arrived in 1885. I’ve been here for a couple years.”

“And have you been looking for me that whole time?”

“You were one of the reasons I came, yes. But since you’re apparently so well-informed from Lucy, didn’t she tell you what else I wanted?”

“I’m asking you. Not her.”

“I wanted a specimen of the stuff called aether. And a cure.”

“A cure for what?”

“You really wouldn’t ask that question if you know what’s good for you.” A mirthless smile cracks Wyatt’s mouth. “Not a threat, by the way. Just a statement of fact.”

“Is it to do with your wife?”

By the expression on Wyatt’s face, hurt and stunned as if Flynn has hit him with a brick, it’s clear that he didn’t realize Flynn knew about her too. He shoots another betrayed look at Lucy, who winces. Then he growls, “Indirectly, yes, it’s about my wife.”

“Did Rittenhouse take her away from you too?” Flynn leans forward still further, eyes hot as burning coals, as if no matter how wrong-headedly he is going about this, he desperately wants Wyatt to understand that they have that in common. “They took mine, and my daughter. If Rittenhouse is our shared enemy – ”

“I have no idea what Rittenhouse is!” Wyatt spits. “Aside from your paranoid delusion! Jessica, she – she disappeared, it’s a mess, but it’s not whatever you think it is. Unless – ”

“Rittenhouse isn’t a paranoid delusion.” Lucy speaks up at last, her voice feeling rusty in her throat. “They’re real. I – I grew up with them. But I’ve been fighting them for several years.”

Wyatt looks at her awkwardly, as he is instinctively inclined to trust her more than Flynn – why, Lucy doesn’t know. Maybe because she just seems like more of a well-balanced person, and they’ve had a civil conversation. (Also because she didn’t chokehold, chloroform, and chain him up, which seems to be what Flynn actually thinks is the prelude to someone wanting to share sensitive information with him.) There’s a long pause. Then Wyatt says, somewhat less certainly, “Whatever the hell Rittenhouse is, it has nothing to do with Jess.”

“All right,” Lucy says. “I believe you don’t know who they are, but they are real, and they’re dangerous. Flynn’s a little – Flynn, but he’s not lying about that. But before you got here in 1885, where were you?” She almost says when, but she still can’t be quite sure.
There’s another pause while Wyatt apparently considers what exactly he has to lose. Then he utters a short, scoffing laugh. “Fine, what the hell, it doesn’t mean anything to you anyway. I was hired by Connor Mason, in San Francisco. Happy?”

“C – ” Lucy feels white-hot shock coursing through her from head to toe. She manages not to do a stereotypical jaw-dropped, eyes-bugging-out face, but it’s hard. Of course, she did have an inkling that Wyatt might be from normal Earth as well, but that’s a long way from hearing that he was recruited by Rufus and Jiya’s former boss, the inventor of the time machines, and the current CEO (at least as far as she knows) of Rittenhouse. As well, Wyatt can clearly see that the name does in fact mean something to her, and they stare at each other for a thunderstruck moment, the realization forming on both their faces. Then Lucy repeats, in as ordinary a voice as she can currently muster, “Connor Mason? The – entrepreneur Connor Mason?”

“No!” Lucy grabs his arm, forcing it back down. “No, I already said you can’t kill him, and – it’s important. Please, Flynn, it’s important. I think we know the same person.”

“Connor Mason? In San Francisco?” Flynn irritably shakes himself loose from her grip. “You just said he’s in Rittenhouse. Why is that a good thing?”

“It’s complicated.” Lucy desperately needs to talk to Wyatt without Flynn glowering and looming and feeling trigger-happy in the background, but she can’t currently conceive of how that could possibly happen. “Can you listen to me for one second? One!”

Flynn pauses very deliberately, then huffs out another annoyed breath and lets go of his gun. Wyatt is watching them almost as avidly as Sophia did, clearly trying to figure out how in the heck that works, but it’s hard to say what, if anything, he’s concluded. Then Flynn says to Wyatt, with an air of vindictive triumph, “She said Connor Mason’s in Rittenhouse. So you do work for them.”

Wyatt looks like he can’t decide whether to laugh or cry, which is basically how it goes when dealing with Flynn. “You know what, I’m starting to think you’re both crazy.”

“I know it sounds like a lot,” Lucy says. “But if you’re from the same place as me – ” she makes very meaningful eye contact – “you know there’s a reason we’re here. It wasn’t by accident. People sent us. Can you at least hear me out?”

Wyatt rattles his chains sarcastically. “Does it look like I’m going somewhere?”

“This isn’t the place for this conversation.” Lucy glances back at Flynn. “We can’t stay here, we’ll
probably get caught, and this is important. He knows things about Rittenhouse that we don’t, even if he doesn’t know that he does. If I can’t convince you not to kill him because killing people is wrong, can I at least convince you not to kill him for that?"

Flynn considers, then jerks his head once, as if to say he still thinks murder is the better choice here, but she makes a vaguely compelling point. “Fight me, Logan, and I will do much worse,” he warns, moving toward the handcuffs. “Then you’d never see that wife of yours again.”

Wyatt looks at him bleakly, as if to say he doesn’t think he will anyway, so this isn’t much of a threat. Flynn unchains him from the chair, but puts the second cuff around his other wrist, as he is clearly taking no chances with Wyatt having his hands free. He hauls him to his feet, and Wyatt reels, still slightly woozy from the chloroform, as Lucy darts in to steady him. Wyatt looks at her as if he really isn’t sure whether to thank her or not, given the present situation, but nods stiffly nonetheless. Then Flynn takes him very firmly by the arm, and marches him out of the shed, Lucy trailing along behind.

Thanks to a lot of fast talking from Flynn when the guard at the gate stops them (claiming that this is a prisoner he’s escorting to the station for transport, and the guard is welcome to look down some byzantine bureaucratic hellhole for the proper papers if he pleases, which obviously the guard does not want to do), they manage to get out into the streets of Oxford. Someone glances at them funny, and Flynn informs him that his useless friend has already had too much, even though it isn’t yet noon. It’s hard to tell if Wyatt is more insulted at the implication that he’s a drunk or that he’s Flynn’s friend, but he must be curious enough about Lucy as well that he holds his tongue. By this haphazard method, they make it to Christ Church Meadow, which is filled with the usual punters, students reading under trees, and games of pick-up rugby. Lucy glances up at the college, wondering if she dares to leave Wyatt and Flynn alone long enough to go apologize to Dodgson. Or if he has thought better of their acquaintance and is hoping she doesn’t come back. She still needs to call home, she’ll have to smooth that over.

In the meantime, however, there is someone here who might be from home, and while it’s still going to be a pain to ask Wyatt everything she needs to with Flynn there, she’ll think of something. They sit down under one of the larger trees, and Wyatt says grumpily, “If I promise I won’t do a bunk, any chance you take these damn things off me?”

“No.” Flynn undoes one of the cuffs and locks it onto a large and sturdy root. “Where are you from, exactly?”

Wyatt glances sidelong at Lucy. “America.”

“I’m going to need you to be a little more specific than that.”

“Or what? You’ll whale on me? I bet it would go really well if I shouted for that policeman over there.” Wyatt uses his chin to indicate a local constable, sitting on a rock to enjoy his lunch and blissfully unaware that the most wanted fugitive in London is presently adding to his rap sheet just a tender few yards away. “Want to take that risk now that we’re in the open?”

Flynn’s expression briefly becomes rather alarming, at which Lucy senses her chance. “How about you go somewhere . . . not here? At least until he leaves. I’ll question Wyatt.”

“You will, will you?”

“Yes.” Lucy gives him her sweetest smile. “And I’m also not opposed to shouting for the policeman, if you don’t let us have five minutes alone. What do you say?”

Flynn grinds his teeth, but gives her a loathing stare and gets to his feet. Once he has casually
strolled off in the opposite direction, along the Dead Man’s Walk toward Merton, Lucy glances at
Wyatt. “Did Connor Mason really hire you? And if so, when exactly did you leave Earth?”

“Yes. Mason hired me.” Wyatt apparently can’t see the value in further dissemblance, now that
it’s just the two of them. “I left in . . . in 2016.”

“I left in 2017.” Lucy finds herself briefly choked up by this confirmation that she finally isn’t
alone, that she’s not the only person ever who has made this very strange journey into this very
strange land. “But how did you get here? It took me and my colleagues months to figure it out.”

“I came in something called the Mothership. Connor arranged it. At first it was only to get some
aether, but as Dickhead over there became more of a problem, I was told I either took him down
too, or I didn’t get a ride back. So yeah. You can see how well that’s going.”

“The Mothership belongs to Rittenhouse,” Lucy says carefully. “Connor works for them now. If
you came here that way, you are working for them too. And Flynn is their number-one enemy in
this reality. Of course your orders would expand to killing him.”

“Even if that was true.” Wyatt looks frustrated. “What the hell is Rittenhouse?”

“They’re a secret society,” Lucy says, well aware of how paranoid-delusion this does in fact
sound. “They’ve been influencing events in American history for a long time, and as you can
obviously see, they’re capable of time travel and other extraordinary things in pursuit of that
ability. They want – well, it sounds cliché, but it’s true. They want ultimate power and to take
over the world, and Flynn and I are both trying to stop that from happening. That’s why, as much
as we don’t have in common otherwise, we’re on the same side right now.”

“But I – ” Wyatt starts. “If I don’t kill him, I’m never getting out of here. And I don’t know about
you, but I don’t want to live in this place for the rest of my life. Although, true, it doesn’t even
matter if I don’t get the cure.”


Wyatt hesitates. “Never mind.”

“Is it for your wife?”

“It’s so I can go back and try to find her, yes. So I guess you can say it’s for her. I’ll need it when
I find her, or if she’s dead, when I save her. This aether stuff, it’s magic, it bends space and time, it
fixes all kinds of things that we’d just be stuck with back on Earth, so – so I will rescue Jess, one
way or the other. I swear.”

“I’m sure you will,” Lucy says softly. Thinks that this unknown Jessica Logan is fortunate to have
a husband who is still so devoted to her, is willing to take on everything in any universe to see her
again, to pursue it to the uttermost end. It gives her an odd kind of ache, of desolation and
loneliness. Of wishing, however impossibly, that she had someone, anyone, who felt that way
about her, who wanted to put her first and fight that hard and sacrifice whatever was needed.
Maybe it’s selfish, but she’s spent several years now giving up everything to save the world, over
and over, and she still doesn’t know if she actually has, or it’s just prolonging the inevitable. She
doesn’t regret that she has, and she has every intention to keep doing it. But it is a hard and terrible
and soul-sucking job, and by now, she is fairly sure she has missed her shot. She lives with it,
most days. She gets on. Rufus and Jiya have each other, at least, and she would never begrudge
them that. But God, she would give anything to see her world in someone else’s eyes.

“Hey,” Wyatt says, sensing that he has accidentally stumbled on a sore subject. “You okay?”
“I’m fine.” Lucy leans back against the scaly old trunk. “But I – I don’t know what to tell you. I can’t let you hand Flynn in to Rittenhouse right now. I just can’t. And if you don’t have the cure for Jessica, maybe you can’t go home anyway, so…” She hesitates, trying to figure out what exactly she’s trying to propose. “So if you go back to London and say you didn’t find Flynn here, or whatever else, it’ll buy us both a little more time. You to look for whatever you need, and for us to try to stop Rittenhouse. Or you could stay and help us. I promise he’s not that bad.” She pauses, thinks it over, and amends, “All right, yes, he is bad, but against the right people.”

Wyatt snorts. “Buddy cops with Flynn? Yeah, no thanks. Besides, I still don’t know if any of what you’ve just told me is true. I want to think it is, but I can’t just take your word for it. So listen, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll go back to London and I won’t tell anyone that he’s here, but if I can find the rest of his gang or anything else he’s done back there, I’m not going to promise that I’m letting them go too. This guy’s bad, you just said so yourself. If I go, I can’t run interference. So I hope you know what you’re doing, hanging around with him.”

“Me too,” Lucy murmurs, just as she can see Flynn approaching them again, apparently having decided that they have had enough private chit-chat time. He arrives, is told of the arrangement, and clearly thinks that Wyatt is fixing to double-cross them somehow, but is also aware that his other option is to be arrested right here, and that is definitely out. So, with a truly spectacular level of stink-eye, Flynn unchains Wyatt from the tree, wishes him a pleasant journey back to London with enough sarcasm to kill an ox, and stares malevolently after him as he leaves.

“What did you say to him?” Flynn asks, when they are sure Wyatt is out of earshot. “What did he tell you about Rittenhouse?”

“Not that much. I told him more about it.” Lucy is really at her Flynn tolerance limit for the day, let alone however much longer he too is planning to loiter in Oxford, expecting her to put him up at her risk and expense as some sort of twisted personal favor. “And no, I didn’t go behind your back or sell you out or anything like that, but you would have absolutely deserved it if I did!”

For once, Flynn has the grace to look chagrined. He offers her his arm with somewhat less sass than usual, and even holds his tongue as they start back toward High Street. That makes Lucy think of what else she encountered in the shadows of the High last night, what she half-dreamed about this morning, and while she really doesn’t want any more conversation with Flynn, it might make sense to know. “What was that thing you shot yesterday night?”

“Can’t be sure.” Flynn doesn’t break stride. “It might have been a revenant, though.”

“A what?”

“A revenant.” He looks at her oddly, as if she’s asked what a zombie or a boogeyman or some other obvious monster is, the sort of thing that everyone has grown up hearing spooky stories about. “Don’t you even know what that is?”

“I was raised with. . . different stories. So no.”

He searches her face, but seems to decide that there’s no reason for her to be lying about that. He shrugs. “It’s a kind of. . . creature, I suppose you could say. A collection of dark energy, more or less sentient, drawn toward people who are in emotional unsettlement or distress. They can take different shapes, look like different things, though they get stronger the more they’re fed. A full-fledged revenant is a nasty bit of business.”

“So – what? Like a shadow monster that feeds on negative energy, or people’s pain? A – what, a dementor?”
“What’s a dementor?”

“Never mind.” Lucy reminds herself that reference would definitely go over his head. “But whatever it was last night, you killed it.”

“Maybe.” Flynn glances at her again. “Revenants are notoriously hard to kill. You can’t just stop a bad thought once, or be in pain once, and then get over it and never feel it again. As long as that’s there, they can take strength from it. Why? Have you seen it again?”

“No,” Lucy says. This morning was just a dream, it doesn’t count. Nonetheless, she can’t help but wonder who something like this would be more drawn to – her, or Flynn, or even Wyatt. There are plenty of people in pain here, plenty of fertile darkness for it to feed on, and she can’t quite suppress a chill. But when she glances edgily behind her, High Street looks entirely ordinary. There are no monsters there. None whatsoever.

None whatsoever.
In Which Complications Are Encountered

Wyatt Logan is extremely out of sorts for the entirety of the train ride back to London. For one, this is really not the way he pictured any of it going, at all, and two, he is well aware that he was essentially handed a patronizing pat on the head and a lollipop, ordered to go away and play with his toys while the adults continue… whatever it is they’re doing, exactly. Wyatt still isn’t sure. Being briefly assaulted, abducted, shaken down for details on his cover story, informed of the existence of a nefarious time-traveling cult named Rittenhouse, and the rest of his damn day tend to have that effect. And having to agree to let the guy he’s been chasing walk, can’t forget that part. Wyatt honestly thought his life had gotten as weird as it was going to get when he took the job to travel into an alternate magical dimension circa the end of the nineteenth century, pose as a steampunk cowboy, and try to smuggle some of it back, but clearly, he was very wrong.

He leans against the stiff, high-backed bench, trying to avoid eye contact with his fellow passengers. After just over two years living here, Wyatt mostly knows the drill, but he would kill for a phone or an iPod or whatever, just to have something mindless and technological to absorb himself in and thus duck the requirements of socializing (these people really do talk about the weather to a ridiculous degree). Especially since his alternative choice of entertainment is to keep brooding about Lucy Preston and her grand felon… honestly, Wyatt’s not sure what in the hell is going on there. At first he thought they were strangers, then thought Flynn was holding her hostage, then went right to thinking they were sleeping together, and he’s still not entirely convinced they aren’t. Lucy seemed a little too confident of her control over Flynn for someone who presumably just met him, and Wyatt is a dude, he can see the way Flynn was looking at her. That… is not the way a man looks at a woman he intends on shooting later. Or intends anything except, you know. Judging by the way Flynn acts, however, he himself may not have noticed.

The rest of the journey passes in a blur, and it’s just past dusk when they pull into Paddington, belching smoke and spitting soot and coal embers that drift down to settle on the shoulders of Wyatt’s greatcoat as he steps off the train. He claps on his Homburg and strides through the thinning crowds, the last light slanting through the intricate iron-filigreed arches above. This world is definitely pretty, in its way. Suppose it has that going for it. If he can’t figure something out fast, on any number of fronts, he’ll be a permanent resident.

Wyatt emerges from the station and up to the cab rank, which is a line of hansoms and hackneys, lanterns burning on their hooks and horses snorting and tossing their manes, as they wait to convey passengers to various houses of evening entertainment across London. There are a few vaucansons as well, the clockwork carriages named after the French guy who invented them. Wyatt steps into the nearest one and orders tersely, “Pall Mall.”

There’s a whir as the winding starts up, the automaton starts to run, and they roll off into the labyrinthine streets. Wyatt has not been in this London long enough to know his way around at all, and his printout Google Maps of the modern one has been of only very incidental use. He took it along, as well as those for some of the other cities he thought he might be visiting – Paris, Berlin, Rome, Prague – but while the major thoroughfares and ancient landmarks are in the same place, everything else is a jumble. Too bad Jess isn’t here, he kept thinking. We could make it a real European honeymoon. Victorian-themed and everything.

Wyatt’s mouth tightens again, and he stares out the window as the vaucanson clicks its way into the ritzy gentlemen’s-club district of Pall Mall, full of neo-Grecian columns, old money, and the dinner-and-cigars business of half the British Empire. They pull to a halt, Wyatt puts a shilling into the tollbox, and the door swings open. In its flat, metallic voice, the driver automaton says, “Have a pleasant evening, sir.”
“Yeah, you too, buddy.” Wyatt kind of wishes they didn’t talk, as he admits the things are mildly creepy, and the giant one that he shot to save Lucy definitely won’t give you nightmares about the robot uprising or anything. He brushes off his grubby suit, as he is conscious that he’s not really dressed properly for an evening out, and will absolutely be given the side-eye by the patrons in their white silk waistcoats and bowties. Well, he’ll lean on the gauche American card. He’s done that a lot already.

Wyatt heads up the steps of the Aetherium Club, its smoked-glass dome glistening with the lights of the small glowing model of the galaxy that whirls inside it, and rings the bell. An appropriately supercilious butler opens it, judges his fashion choices, and is only incidentally mollified when Wyatt presents a member’s card. This is the first time he’s gotten to use it, though, so the butler clearly thinks he stole it off someone else. “Are you here to see someone in particular, s… sir?”


“He arrived earlier. Is he expecting you?”

“Just tell him it’s Sergeant Logan. He’ll understand what that means.”

The butler looks as if he isn’t sure, but duly withdraws to inform Bruhl of his unexpected supper companion, and Wyatt looks in the hallway mirror to see if there’s anything to be done about his appearance. Not really. He can mostly only try to brush the soot and dust off, leaving dark flecks on the carpet, and he desists quickly when the butler reappears. He tips his head at Wyatt, beckoning him to follow, and leads him through the gathered tables of the dining room to the more secluded one at the back, where a gentleman is currently seated alone, sipping absently at a glass of wine and scribbling complicated equations on a notepad. “Mr. Bruhl? This is the… individual who was asking for you.”

Anthony jumps, looks up, recognizes Wyatt, and obviously realizes that it is serious. He nods his approval to the butler, asks him to bring his companion a drink, and Wyatt – who really just wants a damn Budweiser – asks for whatever beer they have. This is a horribly common drink, but he might as well give the butler more chances to despair of his upbringing. Once he’s gone, Anthony puts the notepad away and looks at Wyatt with a worried frown. “You know that I’d rather we weren’t seen together in public.”

“Sorry, but this is the only place I knew to look for you.” Besides, Wyatt’s feeling as if, given what appears to have been kept from him, he isn’t too worried about Anthony’s tender sensibilities right now. “Besides, now that I’m in London, time to talk, right?”

Anthony can’t think of a way to deny that, much as he would clearly like to. His fingers fiddle with the tablecloth, trying to collect his thoughts. As a nerdy white guy of late middle age and scientific education, he’s probably been as happy as the proverbial pig in shit on this little adventure. Anthony is Wyatt’s contact and handler, who deals with the sporadic communication from home and updates Wyatt on any changes to their mission – such as the orders to take out Flynn, incidentally. He works for Connor Mason too, was one of the major leads in the time machine project, piloted the Mothership on the trip to pick up Wyatt and bring him to 1885, and as far as Wyatt knows, is the only one who can pilot it back. He thus has a vested interest in keeping Anthony alive, but he hasn’t seen him since they landed. Anthony’s been here, weaseling into whatever royal scientific societies, and Wyatt’s been running around Europe, doing, well… not that.

“Fine,” Anthony says at last. “What did you want to talk about?”

A lot, Wyatt thinks. A lot. He searches for somewhere to start that won’t be completely obvious.
At last, he says, “You’re the science geek. How come you haven’t been able to get your hands on some aether for us? That was supposed to be our prime directive, right? It seems like you, who know what you’re looking for and how to take samples, would be way better fitted for that than some redneck from Texas. Or am I just the distraction while you’re actually looking for it?”

Anthony blinks, glancing around nervously to see if any of their fellow diners are leaning in.

“Wyatt – where did this come from? Didn’t you just go up to Oxford to – ”

“Yeah, I went to Oxford.” Wyatt puts his elbows on the table. “Now I’m back.”

Anthony lets out a long breath. “And you didn’t catch Garcia Flynn?”

“I didn’t… catch him, no. But I’ve already spent two years on this damn job, and I’ve never said a word until now. So? Why?”

They stare at each other for a long moment. The waiter comes by with Wyatt’s beer and puts it down, and Wyatt takes a sip, maintaining eye contact throughout. Then Anthony says, “Wyatt, you have to trust me.”

“Do I? Because I’m not so sure I do anymore.” That is difficult for Wyatt to say, because the soldier thing – do what your commander says, even if it’s dumb and destined to go FUBAR, because that is what is drilled into you from day one of boot camp. Follow orders, follow orders, follow orders. As the poem goes – theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die – and which Wyatt has seen played out in a lot more theaters than 1887 London, and which is why he’s stuck it out this long. But something about the encounter with Lucy and Flynn has rattled him, thrown his justifications and his excuses awry, and he feels like he’s awake for the first time since losing Jess, since the haze he’s been blundering in and taking any job that would get him away from the pain.

“So why are we still here? Just because of Flynn? Who’s Rittenhouse?”

“Shhh!” Anthony looks as if he’s about to have a heart attack, glancing around wildly, and Wyatt supposes they do at least need to take care not to be nabbed on the spot. Anthony is as pale as a sheet, trying to recollect himself, as they continue to stare at each other. Then he says, “Who’s been telling you all this?”

“Nuh-uh. You go first.” Wyatt takes a sip. “Or I quit, you find yourself a new bounty hunter, and we can see how well that goes.”

“All right. All right. Yes, there are certain mission specifics I haven’t told you, but you have to believe me, it’s for your own good. Connor and I – what we’re doing, it is very dangerous. We – that is, you and I – we’re embedded here because it’s impossible for us to leave. As of now.”

Well, Wyatt thinks grimly. You have no idea.

“The Mothership is – in someone else’s hands,” Anthony goes on, after a pause, even more quietly. Wyatt has to lean in to hear him. “We were only able to use it because it looked as if we were part of that organization too. Wyatt, you – you have to understand, it is more than my life’s worth, or yours, if you tell anyone about this. We can’t leave because we have to be here as long as they are. Unless you can steal a time machine from the middle of a literal fortress, single-handed, and I don’t know if – good a soldier as you are – you can do that.”

Wyatt decides they’ll put that problem on the back burner for now. “They? And is that they named Rittenhouse? By any chance?”

“Where did you hear that name?”

“I met someone in Oxford. It was enlightening. Still your turn to answer questions, remember?”
Anthony presses his lips together. Then he nods once, half an inch.

Shit. Apparently Lucy (and Flynn, maybe, but Wyatt only credits Lucy at this point) wasn’t lying, and that means that Wyatt has in fact had no clue who he’s really working for, who they are, and what they’re doing as a result. What she said about Rittenhouse didn’t sound good, and Anthony is clearly afraid of them, though Anthony can tend to be a skittish guy in general. “So you and Connor – you’ve pretended to be working for Rittenhouse too, this entire time? Which was how you and I managed to snag a ride here? And we can’t leave before they do, because otherwise there are no eyes on them at all? Am I getting warm here?”

“You… aren’t wrong, no.”

“So is the aether thing entirely a bluff?”

“No. Connor wants it before they do, he wants to study it and see what they’re planning to do with it. It might be our only chance to stop them.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong here, but doesn’t that rely on Connor having it before they do? Have you really not been able to get any at all?”

“I have been able to capture trace amounts,” Anthony says. “But to work with it in any substantial measure, you need years and years of training and education that I don’t have. Which is why, honestly, you might be more useful at getting it than I am. That is, ah, in bulk.”

“In bulk? So I’m supposed to steal a barrel of the unknown magical substance that even you’re not willing to mess around with in case it’s dangerous? So you and Mason really recruited me to be the disposable dumb muscle, huh?” Wyatt doesn’t know if he’s amused or angry. No, definitely angry. “Maybe I should be an airship pirate? Blackbeard of the Sky?”

“Wyatt, I understand you may feel some resentment at being – well – under-informed, but you still need to stick to the plan and do what you have to. We have no margin for error. As long as Rittenhouse thinks we’re loyal, they’ll take us home with us, but if they don’t – ”

It’s on the tip of Wyatt’s tongue that he can’t go for more reasons than Anthony thinks, but he has never said that to anyone and he’s not about to start now. “Unless we steal the Mothership first? And one soldier and an out-of-shape quantum physicist probably aren’t pulling that off?”

Anthony looks insulted at this slur on his fitness levels, but is well aware that he is not the guy for hard-hitting black-ops of a firearm-using-and-vehicle-hijacking-nature. Especially since Wyatt, as noted, cannot drive the damn thing himself; he needs Anthony to be there, can’t exactly run back to pick him up. “So what?” Wyatt says at last. “We’re just stuck here waiting for Rittenhouse to complete whatever they’re doing in this world, then try to smuggle the information about the aether back to Connor and hope he can figure it out before they launch theirs? I’m not really sure I like this. What’s Plan B?”

“There’s no Plan B,” Anthony says, looking miserable. “I told you this was dangerous.”

“Jesus.” Wyatt has to admit, he wasn’t really that fussed about whether he came back or not when he signed on for this – that was one of its attractions. But ever since he got here and realized that there might be a chance either that Jess is alive somewhere or that he could save her with the aether if she’s not, he’s started to realize that he doesn’t want to die. Not yet. He wants to find her, he wants to fix all his mistakes, give them a fresh start and a blank slate. He knows he was a shit husband to her before, he knows it in an ever-present, unshakeable way, but he can do better. If she’ll give him a second chance, once he does save her, he won’t waste a minute.
For a long moment, there is nothing but the distant clink of utensils and glasses and the hum of educated conversation from the other gentlemen dining at the Aetherium tonight. Then there’s a startled murmur, starting at the door and spreading outward across the tables, and Wyatt sees heads turning, staring at the interloper onto these sacred masculine grounds. The reason for the patrician horror is at once apparent: it’s a woman. Elegantly dressed in green silk and black fur and a gleaming diamond brooch, red curls tumbling beneath a broad-brimmed black hat, parasol clutched in a gloved hand. She looks exactly like the kind of woman who had five rich husbands who all died in mysterious circumstances, and while Wyatt doesn’t recognize her, it’s clear from the expression on Anthony’s face that he does. He looks petrified. Oh hell, now what?

“Ma’am – ” The butler is blowing in her wake like a torn kite on a string. “Ma’am, I really must insist – ladies are not permitted in the Aetherium as a matter of course, I say – ”

“Toddle off, Jeeves,” the woman says, in a bored, lazy voice. “Now.”

“But ma’am – ”

“Mr. Philbert,” Anthony says hastily, getting to his feet, kicking Wyatt under the table to make him do the same, and clasping his hands respectfully behind his back. “Miss Whitmore is my honored guest. I’m happy to receive her. Truly.”

The butler looks at Anthony as if between an American cowboy and now a woman, he is skating on very thin ice in regard to his own membership, but it’s clear that he would prefer to avoid a scene if possible. “Very well,” he says stiffly. “I shall take your word for it, Mr. Bruhl.”

The woman – Miss Whitmore – gives Mr. Philbert a murderous look as he leaves, and Wyatt honestly wonders if the butler will later turn up dead in a ditch. Whitmore – Emma Whitmore? Oh shit, is this the Rittenhouse head honcho (honchess?) Totally innocent and random that she turned up now here, is it? Emma sleekly beckons another waiter for a drink, he knows what is good for him and scurries off, and she slides into a chair. “You know, I think I like you kow-towing for me, Anthony. Time was, you were my boss.”

“Yes, well.” Anthony offers a patently uncomfortable smile. “Things have changed, haven’t they?”

“I suppose they have.” Emma removes her hat and gloves, setting them on the table and regarding the pair of them shrewdly, as Wyatt and Anthony strive not to look like naughty schoolboys caught whispering in the hall by the teacher. “On that note, you must be Wyatt Logan. I’ve heard things about you. Aren’t you the one that destroyed the tocker in Covent Garden a few nights ago? I don’t recall anyone telling you to do that.”

“Nobody’s told me jackshit.” Wyatt somewhat regrets it the instant it’s out of his mouth, as just one cock of Emma’s exquisite gingery eyebrow makes clear that this isn’t someone you should feel comfortable sassing. “That is, I was just told to go to London and catch Garcia Flynn. Letting huge robots grab random women wasn’t anywhere in the briefing.”

“That wasn’t a random woman,” Emma says coolly. “Her name is Lucy Preston. We recently became aware that she’s arrived in Britain and is actively trying to disrupt important operations here. We’ve known about her for a long time, she and I go back. So actually, you blew a crucial part of the strategy for us, and allowed a top target to get away. And I’m guessing you returned from Oxford without Flynn. What are we paying you for, again?”

Wyatt stares at her, and Emma shifts her weight, seemingly in case he leaps over the table and tries to tackle her. Then Wyatt says, “You know, if you don’t want me to do things like this, it might help to actually share information once in a while.”
“Fair point.” Emma takes her glass of bourbon without looking, as the waiter hurries up with it on a tray. “I’ll give you that, once. But we have a lot of important plans afoot that I have to manage. I can’t spend as much time as I want – and believe me, I want – on catching Flynn. He’s an irritating local jackass, I know, but he’s already caused real damage, and he can cause more. You stopping him was a condition of getting to go home, remember?”

“Trust me, I haven’t forgotten that.” Wyatt takes another swig of beer, trying to look cool and in command. It is reasonably apparent that Emma has not come here to mince words or beat around the bush, though it’s hard to tell if this qualifies as taking the gloves off or not. He definitely has a feeling that she could be much nastier, which isn’t promising. “So is the moment where you tell me who I’ve actually been working for this whole time, or…?”

“Oh,” Emma says innocently, glancing sideways at Anthony. “Hasn’t he told you?”

“No,” Wyatt says. “Nope, hasn’t told me anything.”

It’s not clear if Emma believes that, if she was fishing for a slip-up, if she might be starting to have her own doubts about Anthony’s loyalty, or anything else. After a tense moment, she shrugs. “Well then, I suppose I don’t need to muddy the waters too much. To make a long story short, I need you to catch – if that’s actually something you can do – both Lucy Preston and Garcia Flynn. They’re the major obstacles to finishing what we need to get done.”

“Oh?” Wyatt echoes. He doesn’t have much negotiating leverage, if any, but he also doesn’t want to look like a total pushover. “Doubling my bounty hunting assignment? Doesn’t that entitle me to double the pay?”

“If you’re successful, the reward will be considerable. But I do have another incentive, now that you mention it.” Emma sips her bourbon. “How much do you want to see your wife again?”

Wyatt, who was about to drink more of his own beer, chokes and puts it down hastily, hoping that she didn’t see the look on his face. When he’s more or less certain that he can speak normally, he says, “Jessica’s missing. She’s been missing for several years, the police closed her case and declared that unless new evidence came up, she was dead. Now you’re – what?”

“Didn’t you come here thinking that this kind of world might be useful with that small problem?” Emma looks him dead in the eye. “Not that you actually need magic to bring her back. She’s alive, so –”

“Jessica’s alive?” Wyatt knocks his chair back getting to his feet, even as Anthony pulls hard on his arm. “Jessica’s alive? Did you – if you people kidnapped her, if you – I swear –”

“Sit down,” Emma says. “I’m not going to be intimidated by your little temper tantrum. Do you want to hear more or not?”

Wyatt hesitates, then sits back down with a jerk, as more heads are turning in their direction; they are going to be blacklisted from every fine dining establishment across London, probably, but he has bigger worries right now. In a hiss, he says, “What the fuck did you do to Jessica?”

“I saved her life,” Emma says. “So you can drop the attitude right now. There were plenty of people who wanted her dead, but I managed to get her hidden instead. You think it was a coincidence that Connor approached you for this job? Like we’d tell just anyone that time travel was real and they had to head to a parallel universe for an unspecified length of time? You’ve been connected to this for a long time. This is your duty in more ways than you know.”

“People… wanted Jess dead?” This makes absolutely no sense to Wyatt. He was the soldier, he
was the Delta Force guy who had probably made powerful enemies, maybe he could see an old mark tracking him down and trying to arrange revenge on his wife, but Jessica was just another girl-next-door from small-town Texas. They met in high school, a couple of screwed-up kids who clung together and got married when they were twenty years old. As far as he knows, she has never been involved in anything extraordinary or classified or anything like that. She is – was – a bartender, for God’s sake. Worked at the same neighborhood watering hole in San Diego for ten years, while he was slogging around Afghanistan and Iraq and other places people were blowing each other up with grenade launchers. Put up with all his shit, until she didn’t, and then she was gone. “What the… what are you talking about?”

Emma surveys him with a gimlet green lioness stare. “Wow,” she says, almost pityingly. “You really don’t know anything.”

“I swear to Jesus, I – ” Wyatt remembers belatedly that threats and shouting are not going to work, and wrestles himself back under control with an effort. Harder than it used to be, for those other reasons, and he definitely can’t lose it here. “Where’s Jess? Is she – is she here?”

“Do you want her to be?”

Wyatt honestly isn’t sure how to answer that. Yes, he wants to see her again, he will do anything to see her again, but does he want to see her again now? His problems aren’t solved, he hasn’t found the cure, it’s obviously stupidly dangerous, and her being here means that Rittenhouse (as he has to admit that it seems to be) has her available for explicit blackmail purposes, rather than just implicit. There is nothing particularly kind or altruistic about Emma’s offer to reunite them – if anything, it hints that she has long held more of the cards than Wyatt has ever known about, and can permit or deny their playing as she pleases. He can see why Anthony is afraid of this woman, and why other people are as well. It’s just the only thing you should be.

“I want to know that she’s safe,” Wyatt says at last. “I’m not sure that means here.”

Emma smirks. “And here I thought you’d do anything to see her again?”

“I want our life back. Our real life.”

“As I said. You can have it. As long as you catch Lucy and Flynn. Really, you went all the way to Oxford, when he made it blindingly obvious he was there, and couldn’t catch him?” Emma makes a derisive noise. “I miss fieldwork. It’s a lot more boring life as an office manager. But if you keep fucking it up, I might have to put myself out on assignment again anyway.”

“I did my best.”

“Huh. Let’s hope for your sake that’s not true. Go to Oxford, miss catching Flynn, but come back asking a lot of angry questions?” Emma cocks her head and continues to regard Wyatt with that hunter’s stare. “Better hope I don’t decide to ask who you did see.”

There is a brief silence, as Anthony finishes off his wine and tries to look as if he isn’t there. Wyatt and Emma lock gazes for a final moment. Then Emma smiles and gets to her feet, retrieving her hat and gloves. “Well, I’ll leave the sausage party to get back to their evening in peace. Anthony, I expect you tomorrow morning. We may have had a breakthrough with the Siberian railway project, and I’ll want your opinion. Nine o’clock.”

“Oh course. Nine o’clock.” Anthony manages a weak smile. “See you tomorrow.”

Emma eyes him as if to say that she’ll be interested to see if he turns up, and strides off in a swish of green skirts. Wyatt feels as if he’s been run over by a hurricane, which is probably not
inaccurate, and after a long pause, gets to his feet and grabs his hat as well. He has no idea what
he’s going to do, other than get back to his room and try to sleep. “Night.”

Anthony mutters a perfunctory courtesy in return, and Wyatt heads out. It’s now full dark – it’s
almost October, the days are short – and the sky is dimly speckled with stars, as there’s still not
saturation point on electricity and you can still just see them in London. He smells the city in all its
potent and pungent varieties, thinks about hailing another vaucanson, then decides to walk. He
doesn’t know if Rittenhouse can reprogram all the city tockers to spy on possible subversive
persons and/or grab them if necessary, but it doesn’t seem out of the question.

It’s about twenty minutes until Wyatt reaches the shabby, no-account boarding house where he’s
taken lodgings, which frankly looks like something out of Sweeney Todd and has made him wary
about eating any meat pies (and for that matter, sleeping too deeply). He heads up to his room and
locks the door, sits down on the narrow, creaking bed, and swears some more, rubbing both hands
over his face. When it was just a matter of taking down Flynn, that seemed simple enough, though
he’s now come up on the short end of the stick several times. When it’s Flynn, and Lucy, and the
question of whatever the hell happened to Jess, and the revelation that he’s been working for a
bunch of assholes named Rittenhouse, and what Anthony’s told him, what Emma has hinted at…
he doesn’t know. He really doesn’t know.

Wyatt remains where he is for several more moments, staring at the wall. Then he goes over to the
wardrobe, unlocks the bottom drawer, and pulls out several thick brown-glass bottles, folded
packets of powder, and a corked vial of fat black pills that look unpleasantly like dead beetles. He
put some of the powder on his tongue, washes it down with slugs from the bottles, and then
swallows two of the pills, wincing and gagging and breathing hard as it burns all the way down.
Jesus Christ, this is horrible. But it’s still preferable to the alternative. He’s running low, as a
matter of fact. Needs to find this black market called the Croft and buy some more, which is
always an arduous process. Prefers not to get all of it in one place, and it costs a shit-ton too. He
can’t duck out on this job yet, much as he might have questions. He needs the money.

Wyatt gets dizzily to his feet, grimacing as he doesn’t think it likes chloroform and beer on an
empty stomach very much, and swallows violently hard to discourage any thoughts of it coming
back up. Then he puts the medicine away, locks it up again, and staggers back to the bed. It’ll
knock him out, it always knocks him out. He barely manages to shuck his hat, jacket, boots, and
gun, draping them on the chair, before he teeters face-first onto the mattress, and he’s gone.

Garcia Flynn has enough sense, at least, to keep his mouth shut on the walk to the Bodleian. He
can tell that Lucy is still angry with him, though for his part, he thinks he did nothing wrong. They
needed information and he got it for them, while tidily avoiding a major scene or detection. Wyatt
bloody Logan was lucky to scamper away from here with all parts and properties intact, and
frankly, Flynn doesn’t trust the bastard an inch. Figures he’ll run back to London and squeal on
them the first chance he gets, and is already running through contingency plans and escape routes
in the event of just such a scenario. He is well aware that their current arrangement is not
sustainable, and even if there is a drainpipe to helpfully assist, he’s getting tired of climbing in and
out of Lucy’s window every time he wants to go somewhere. But where the hell, exactly, does he
go next? If London has just been rendered doubly unsafe for obvious reasons (and he hopes Karl
and the rest have the sense to stay very, very far underground) then his friendly harbors are few
and far between. As in, this might be literally the only one.

They reach the Bodleian courtyard a few minutes later, and Lucy curtly pulls her arm out of
Flynn’s grasp. “I’m going inside to continue working,” she says. “You don’t have a reader pass,
so you can’t come in, and besides, I’m pretty sure someone in the Bod has seen a newspaper
recently. You can go back to Somerville and avoid Sophia, or –”
“Aren’t you the least bit concerned that you might have attracted a revenant?” Flynn has been aware that Lucy, while she is obviously a strong, brave, feisty woman, seems oddly unconcerned about this prospect. Not that he expected her to be quivering in her boots, but a few more precautions might be necessary. Revenants are dangerous; he’s tangled with several, doesn’t wish to do so again, and they’re among the class of monsters that even he regards with wariness and slight fear. Shooting ordinary beasts is one thing, but these are different. “Do you know what you’re going to do if it comes back?”

“It’s not going to come back,” Lucy says, a little impatiently, as if he’s the one getting caught up in ghost stories and distracting her from doing her job. “Whatever it was. If it does, I’ll handle it then. I’m more worried about how long it’s going to take for Dodgson to find a way to communicate with – with home.”

“With home,” Flynn puts his head to the side and regards her coolly. “The same place Wyatt Logan is from? And where is that, exactly? I don’t think ‘America’ is the full answer. And if it was, you wouldn’t need that man’s help at getting in touch. There are telegrams, telephones, letters on steamers or airships, other ways. You’re not that worried about revenants because you don’t know what they are, or particularly believe in them. It sounds like a myth to you, an old story. You know a Connor Mason, in San Francisco. This San Francisco, the gold-rush mining town, or… another one?”

An expression of shock flickers across Lucy’s face before she can entirely stop it, and Flynn, who was putting a few pieces together but was still stabbing in the dark, feels a brief vindication. He takes a step. “You said you weren’t lying. I said you weren’t telling the full truth. So?”

“I’ll explain later.” Lucy’s lips are white. Her back is against a wall, Flynn realizes that he’s crowding her with his far-superior height and size and she thinks he might do worse, and for some reason, it makes him retreat half a pace, oddly ashamed. “Just stay out of the way, all right? And don’t make any more trouble.”

This, to say the least, is not an occupation Flynn can normally be found engaging in, and he still thinks Lucy is being too blasé about this revenant business, but he can’t change her mind if she won’t take it seriously. They eye each other for a long moment, until Flynn says, “What did Dodgson tell you about – whatever he was doing?”

Lucy looks at him, clearly trying to decide if the question was asked in good faith or not, and whether he can be entrusted with the answer. Then she says, “We ran into each other at the telegraph office, and he volunteered to take me to dinner. He showed me some drawings. He didn’t think it would be operational until Christmas.”

“And last night, it’s fair to say I alarmed him, yes?”

“Turning up like Billy the Kid on a dark Oxford street and pointing a gun at him after shooting a terrifying shadow beast?” Lucy’s mouth quirks. “I think it’s fair to say you did, yes.”

“So,” Flynn suggests. “If there’s more to know, I might be better suited for getting it out of him, eh? You go inside and work on your research, but I should pay a visit to Christ Church.”

“Please tell me you are not going to go beat up Lewis Carroll in his own parlor.”

“Only if he deserves it,” Flynn says indifferently. “Do you want to know or not?”

“I – yes, I do, but – ”

“Well then. Two birds with one stone. I don’t feel like going back to Somerville for the rest of the
day, and you have things to attend to here. So?"

“Fine,” Lucy says, after another moment. “But at least try to be civil.”

“Why would I be anything less?” Flynn tips his hat at her, gives her a cheeky grin, and watches her up the steps toward the Bod entrance. No revenants ambush her en route, and he bloody well hopes she’s telling the truth about not seeing it again. Then with another glance around the square, he starts off. Wonders if he should turn up the collar of his overcoat, or that would be too suspicious. But it is a windy day, and there are gentlemen doing likewise, so he might as well keep his face mostly obscured. There has to be somewhere around here that sells shtuchkas or something similar. Probably cost less than Blavatsky’s, too.

Nonetheless, it is under his own face that Flynn arrives at Christ Church, strides into the quad as if he belongs there without waiting for the porter (he is a tall and commanding man in a good suit, he could easily have legitimate business) and makes his way over to the Deanery and Dodgson’s adjoining rooms. Raps on the door, and waits.

It takes some moments for it to be answered. “Yes?”

“Mr. Dodgson.” Flynn clears his throat. “I was hoping we could talk.”

There is a marked silence on the other side of the door. Dodgson clearly can’t think how to blow him off directly without being rude (and considering that he also recognized Flynn last night, is probably too scared to). Then at last Dodgson says, “Mr. Preston. I – thought you might visit.”

“Mr. Preston?” Flynn is confused as to how Dodgson could also be under that impression, as no names were exchanged last night, and Sophia is the only one (as far as he knows) that Lucy has been forced to lie to outright. Amusing, if so, not least because Dodgson apparently actually thinks that Lucy would marry a commoner Dalmatian-born London crime lord, and everything else Flynn is that is no good for her. “Where did you come up with that?”

“Last night, when you intercepted us and – ah – valiantly dealt with the creature. Mrs. Preston had told me at dinner that her husband was in London, but had not yet made the journey up to Oxford. The two of you plainly recognized each other, and given that you, ah, have come from London, I naturally assumed…” Dodgson trails off. “Have I made an error?”

“Never mind,” Flynn says. “We can go with that if you like, I don’t care. Open the door, I have questions. I will break it down if you don’t, but your choice.”

Dodgson hesitates as long as he dares, then stiffly whisks it open. “I daresay, sir, your manners are quite abysmal.”

“Are they?” Flynn steps through and shuts the door behind him. Dodgson’s eyes dart to it, and then to the holster just visible under his jacket. “Why did you lie to Lucy about the properties of your device, then?”

“I beg – I beg your pardon?”

“Two years ago,” Flynn says. “In the London Times. I read the article about your Refractory-Glass, a marvelous item which you had submitted to the Royal Aetherographic Society for inspection and patent. You admitted it was still in the drawing board stages, but hoped that with some minor adjustments, it could function as a sort of telescope to the universe, to the other potentialities surrounding our own. Unless I am mistaken, and it was some other Charles L. Dodgson at Christ Church, famed as the author of Alice in Wonderland and children’s tales?”

Dodgson blanches. There is a nasty silence, as Flynn folds his arms and stares at the man.
expectantly. Of course Lucy wouldn’t have known this, but he does, and he would like an
explanation, please and thank you. Finally Dodgson stammers, “It w-wasn’t quite the s-same mold
of device. Not s-suitable for what she wanted. The modifications – ”

“It sounds damn close to me.” Flynn takes another step. “You had a working prototype already, it
was far past just sketches. Why didn’t you tell her?”

“My dear sir – ” Dodgson is starting to perspire freely. He removes a handkerchief and dabs at his
face. “I had obviously never been asked to put the Refractory-Glass to proper use before, it was
only a scientific abstract at best – the demands of testing and – ”

“Except you have,” Flynn says. “You sold a working Refractory-Glass to someone named, I’m
guessing, Emma Whitmore, or one of her associates. They have been using it for the exact
purpose Lucy wants it for, judging by the presence of one Wyatt Logan. Emma has been here
longer than Wyatt has. When I started making trouble, Emma called home to have him sent.” He
didn’t realize he was putting the pieces together until he speaks them out loud, but as he does,
they’re falling swiftly into place. Rittenhouse, Wyatt, Lucy – they must all be from one of those
potentialities, as Dodgson calls them. A neighboring universe or nearby branch of reality, who
have somehow worked out a way to travel into this one. “If I looked through this entire study, I
wouldn’t find the bill of sale for that, or parts from its making, would I?”

“This – ” Dodgson is white as a sheet. “Sir, you – this is quite insane, you can’t – ”

“Lucy ran into you at the telegraph office last night,” Flynn growls. “You were about to send
word to Rittenhouse that someone else was asking for one of the devices, which I’m guessing was
part of the deal they forced you to sign when they bought theirs. Do they know Lucy is in
Oxford? Or were you telling them that too?”

Dodgson opens and shuts his mouth like a goldfish. “Sir – I have the utmost respect for Mrs.
Preston, I would surely not – ”

“What does Rittenhouse have on you?” Flynn takes another step, backing Dodgson against his
fussy little tea table. ‘Or no, let me guess. All those rumors about what really happened with the
Liddell sisters and their family – true or not, it wouldn’t matter, they could get them published in
every paper across Britain and permanently ruin your reputation. Make sure you never sold
another book, that this ridiculous witch-hunting country came frothing to your door and threw you
in jail for the rest of your life, which wouldn’t be that long anyway. Faced with that, of course you
agreed to give them what they wanted and report on anyone else who might ever ask for the same
thing. It was also why you were especially frightened to see me. So. Are you going to deny it?
Who bought the Refractory-Glass?”

Dodgson shrinks in his skin. He can’t meet Flynn’s eyes. “His – his name was Mr. Bruhl.”

“Bruhl?” Flynn runs that through the mental list of known Rittenhouse associates and
collaborators that he keeps in his head, and thinks it sounds vaguely familiar, though he can’t
immediately place it. “And as a guess, you met him at the Royal Aetherographic Society?”

“Yes. In London. He was very keen on the designs. There were, as you say.” Dodgson stops to
wat his whistle. “Certain conditions for the sale.”

“Were there?” Flynn mutters, grimly triumphant. He’s pleased with himself for sussing this out,
even if it points to a new Rittenhouse operative that he has somehow managed to overlook. It’s
possible that Bruhl has something to do with Wyatt, though that too is just a guess. “Well then.
Did you return to the telegraph office this morning? Have you told them about Lucy yet?”
“I have not. Not yet. I was hoping that she would return to speak to me after the events of last night, I would learn more, and be able to make a full – a fuller report.”

“Instead it was me who turned up instead?” Flynn is sorely tempted to throw this spying weasel into the nearest piece of furniture, but he did promise Lucy that he would at least try to refrain, and he doesn’t want any busybodies to come sprinting to Dodgson’s defense. “But I’m guessing you already know enough, don’t you? Where she’s from and who she wants to talk to?”

“She did tell me a few details, yes. But I swear, I have not yet passed those on – though if I haven’t, if they don’t hear from me soon, they’ll – ”

“I don’t give a shit what happens to you if Rittenhouse doesn’t hear from you soon.” Flynn pulls his gun, more to see Dodgson panic than because he actually intends to use it. “Now sit down, write down everything she told you, and give it to me. Promptly.”

Dodgson hesitates.

“Now.”

Flynn doesn’t even need to cock the gun, though he does that with an ominous thunk. The esteemed author wilts like a dying lily, sits at his writing desk, and pulls out a sheet of paper and a steel-nibbed pen. He uncaps a jar of India ink and scribbles intently, looking up every so often to see if Flynn is still holding the gun on him, which he is. Then he blows on the page to dry it and holds it out. “I swear, everything is as she said. You can ask her.”

Flynn doesn’t know if he intends on revealing to Lucy that he’s onto her just yet or not, since that information might be profitable for a later venture. Instead, he takes the page and scans it quickly. According to Dodgson’s version of events, Lucy is from the year 2017 in a parallel and apparently non-magical universe, has somehow traveled here alone, and wants to contact a Rufus Carlin and Jiya Marri back in her home reality. She arrived in 1886, presumably in America, though it doesn’t say where. The name Rittenhouse has not yet been mentioned aloud.

Flynn snorts, folds the paper up, and puts it in his breast pocket. Insane as it seems, he is well aware that space and time are fluid where aether is concerned, that this is not outside the remit of possibility, and it does explain several things, such as Lucy’s odd behavior and apparent cavalier reaction to attracting a revenant. He wonders if her strangeness was elemental somehow, subconscious or unspoken, and that was what first caught his attention. She’s not from here, she wasn’t born here, and she, quite clearly, will also have to leave. It is only understandable.

There’s a brief, unpleasant swoop in his stomach at the thought. He ignores it. It seems likely at least that Lucy will be here so long as Rittenhouse is, and ending Rittenhouse is, as ever, his clear and top priority. He might miss her a bit after she goes, even with all the physical harm she has managed to inflict upon him, simply because she’s made his life interesting in a way it hasn’t been for a while, but that is nothing unusual or insurmountable.

“Well,” Flynn says, turning back to Dodgson. “I thank you for your cooperation. Here’s what you’re going to do. You’re going to keep working on the new Refractory-Glass, and you’re going to make it very quickly. We’ll say a fortnight at most, which shouldn’t be hard, since all you need are the parts. You aren’t going to say a word to anyone, or you’ll tell Rittenhouse that nothing out of the ordinary has happened. You certainly aren’t going to mention me. Otherwise, well. I’m just as capable of destroying your life as they are. You can choose.”

With that, not waiting for an answer, Flynn slings his gun back into the holster, whirls on his heel, and strides out, feeling viciously pleased with himself. He amuses himself in a few dark and out-of-the-way corners of Oxford for the rest of the afternoon, feigns total ignorance of English when
someone asks if he’s been to London recently, and finally heads back to the Bod at dusk to wait for Lucy. She looks surprised to see him, and eyes his knuckles as if to see if they’ve been scraped. “Did you... visit Dodgson?”

“I did,” Flynn informs her. “I was extremely civil, I didn’t lay a finger on him. Got a few things sorted out. He’s going to work very hard on your device.”

Lucy looks very surprised, but almost in an approving way, glancing up at him as if seeing him in a new light for the first time. Flynn ignores the unaccountable heat this brings to his chest, offers her his arm, and for once, Lucy takes it without demur. She seems somewhat pleased with herself too, so Flynn says, “Well?”

“I figured out something about aether,” Lucy says. “It’s atmospheric and it’s particulate, and it’s naturally more prevalent in regions near the pole, or far north or south enough in latitude to see the aurora borealis or the aurora australis. So since Britain lies relatively far north, we have a good aetherium here.” She nods at the streaky golden sunset. “But the quality would be much better either in the Arctic or the Antarctic. If you had the right kind of harvesting equipment, you could practically just stand outside on a clear night and collect it. It’s produced when the solar wind hits the magnetosphere, like the ordinary lights, but here – I mean, the aether is discharged with the electrons. I’m not enough of a scientist to explain the full process, but I was thinking. You said at tea that Rittenhouse wanted to invest in the Siberian railway, that was the intelligence you... got from Stanley. So what if –”

“What if that’s because the best aether would be in Siberia?” Flynn finishes. His heart picks up a notch or two. “Certainly much more easily accessible than the Antarctic. With the railway under their control, they could have an unlimited pipeline with which to mine it and move it. Very clever, Lucy. Very clever indeed.”

Lucy coughs, her cheeks going slightly pink at his praise, and glances away. Then she says, “If they’re looking into the logistics of transporting it, that must mean they know how to collect it somehow. It’s not just a theoretical plan. It’s a real one. They’ve already started.”

Flynn’s smile fades as it occurs to him that she’s right. If Rittenhouse is now interested in how to get aether from place to place, that could mean they already have it, and intend on having more. The construction of the railway would certainly provide them with a convenient cover to have countless aether miners among the workers, they would fund and influence its route, and be able to use its trains however they like. Taking it somewhere, here or elsewhere? To a gate, perhaps, a stable singularity functioning as a doorway to their home reality? That is what they’re here for. To steal this world’s magic, take it back, and do unspeakable things.

“What?” Lucy says, almost diffidently, as if still not sure what she should call him to his face. “Are you –?”

“Yes, fine.” His mind is still racing. Should he tell Lucy that he knows she’s not from around here either? Or for that matter, how the meeting with Dodgson really went? He can’t be certain. He needs to find out more about her, though bugger if he knows how to do that. And even if they know, or at least can be relatively sure, why Rittenhouse is in on the Siberian railway project, stopping it is another matter altogether. There are two of them. Siberia is huge. Rittenhouse has plenty of money and allies, not least the tsars. So how do they knock that off the rails, literally?

Neither of them say much more for the rest of the way to Somerville. Flynn isn’t in the mood for one more daring drainpipe ascent, and he got into Christ Church in broad daylight by looking like he belonged there, so he feels inclined to try again. Lucy walks through without him, and once a decorous few minutes have elapsed and they do not appear to be arriving together, he follows her. Getting up to her room is slightly more dicey, and he has to quickly dodge into an alcove as a few
of the other residents pass. Then he steps in and shuts the door.

Lucy pulls off her dusty jacket and freshens herself up for dinner, promising that she will bring some back for Flynn, and once she has gone, he seats himself at her desk and starts paging through her notebooks. This is vital intelligence-gathering, so he feels no guilt about it whatsoever, and he wants to see if Dodgson was lying out his arse or not. Happily for him, he does not appear to have done so. Flynn doesn’t understand several of Lucy’s references or asides, and her handwriting is like no cursive he’s seen – it’s actually more or less readable, though it does devolve into chicken scratching in places. If it’s reading her journal to figure out who she is, so be it. There are worse ways.

Flynn is just involved in trying to guess what this “Netflix” is that she so bemoans the loss of, when the door opens, he jumps, and hastily pushes the books away to make it less obvious what he’s been doing. He's bloody hungry, and appreciative of the roast, Yorkshire pudding, and peas that Lucy has managed to sneak up in the napkin. For once, the silence is almost comfortable between them as he eats, and he clears his throat awkwardly when he finishes. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Lucy’s eyes dart to his, then away. It feels as if both of them are waiting for the other to say more, but neither of them do. At last she says, “With the Siberian railway, that gives you something to investigate, doesn’t it? Somewhere to go, to get out of England while they’re looking for you. You can probably stop by London and collect your gang, then continue on to Russia. A man like you, I’m guessing you have contacts in Russia.”

“Oh.” Flynn again feels that odd swooping sensation in his stomach, like missing a step going downstairs. “Yes. Yes, I need to do that, and yes, I do. I’ll get out of your way, it’s been a miracle we’ve gotten away with it thus far. Leave you to get on with teaching, but I don’t think that’s what you are, or what you’re really meant to be.”

“I was,” Lucy says. “A long time ago. I was good at it, too. This, here, this is – it’s like it, and it’s nothing like it. I’m still not sure how I’m going to pull it off.”

“I imagine you will.” A crooked, unwilling smile pulls at Flynn’s mouth. “You’re very impressive.”

Lucy opens her mouth, once more turns a delicate shade of pink, and can’t seem to think of anything to say to that. For his part, for half a moment, Flynn is aware of a desire not to go to Russia, which makes no sense. Rittenhouse is there, Rittenhouse is his enemy, this is a major front on which to fight them, and this uncharacteristic few days with a minimum amount of guns have chipped a little, unwarrantly, at all the armor he wears around his head and heart and soul. It is probably a good thing to leave, before he softens too much. The job is not done.

Once more, conversation lags as they prepare for bed, laying out Flynn’s cushions and blankets on the floor and taking turns to change in the bathroom. It seems bizarre that he has fallen into something approaching a routine of living with a woman, even in this scattershot and impromptu few days. Even stranger that she wants to look at his arm, to peel off the strange dressing (makes sense, Flynn thinks, that it comes from somewhere else) and see how the knife wound is knitting. It’s all right, though still a little red and inflamed, and Lucy carefully dabs more of the odd-smelling cream on it; the tube calls it *antibiotic ointment*. Flynn is too aware of her touch on him, and sits tensely, pulse tripping in the hollow of his throat. The light is low, and he hopes she doesn’t notice.

Lucy gets out some clean gauze and white tape, does up a fresh dressing, and economically discards the old one. He half-turns his head as if to say something, thinks better of it, and swallows hard instead. Yes, he definitely needs to get out of here. Tomorrow.
Once she’s finished, he nods awkwardly at her in unspoken thanks, then eases himself off her bed, where he’s been sitting, to his usual arrangement on the floor. He thinks she’s still looking at him for a moment longer, but she goes to wash her hands, then returns and turns the covers down. Crawls beneath them and switches the lamp out, and despite himself, he listens to her breathing. Hard to tell if it’s any shallower or faster than usual, or why he would want it to be.

Flynn firmly informs his body that there will be no further attractions on the evening, and it can pipe down with what it’s doing now, thanks. It’s just simple deprivation, that’s all. Lucy is admittedly an attractive woman, he has not been remotely close to any one of them since Lorena’s death, and, well – it’s been three years, and he is a flesh-and-blood man. He’s dealt with it himself when the physical urge becomes noticeable, peremptorily dismissed the whore that Karl and the boys bought, is used to going without anyway. Even before Lorena, he was never much of a ladies’ man. Too busy out alone, hunting monsters. And he is not about to make some foolish misstep now, not when it finally feels as if Lucy might be starting to trust him a little. They are stronger together against Rittenhouse than apart, and given how long his list of enemies is, it would be wise to cultivate that.

It takes a while, but Flynn manages to subdue the unruly bits of him and drift off into half a doze, which eventually deepens to real slumber. In fact, he’s very deeply asleep when he becomes aware of something, penetrating into the old instinctual part of him that was (and still is) conditioned to wake quickly, the same as when Lucy shook him awake from the nightmare yesterday morning. Some kind of scratching. Soft at first, and then louder.

Flynn’s eyes shoot open as if on springs. He sits bolt upright, groping for the gun he’s left in its usual easy reach, but the room is very dark and he can’t see a damn thing. He’s obviously not about to open fire indiscriminately, not when he can’t be sure anything’s even there, not in the dead of night when the shadows are so thick that it feels like tar in his lungs. He has a brief and inexplicable sense, however, that it is no longer a room, but a black forest, trunks towering to every side and the canopy so thick as to block out any hint of light from stars or moon. A rich, rotting scent fills his lungs when he breathes, and he looks around wildly. He can still see Lucy’s bed and nightstand, can still see her, even the vague outlines of walls and window, but he recognizes in an instant that powerful, unfriendly enchantment is at work here. Is in fact –

He does not, however, get a chance to finish that thought.

That, then, is when the revenant attacks.
Once more, Lucy is in a liminal state of consciousness when the scratching at the door starts up. Maybe because this is when the waking mind is relaxed and disengaged and vulnerable, the subconscious and all its fertile hang-ups and fears and repressions is close to the surface, and maybe because the beast itself occupies a fluid position between reality and nightmare. It exists half in the physical plane and half somewhere else, can slip between the cracks when its target is crossing those places themselves, and that, before Lucy realizes it is anything more than a strange dream, is what happens. She is half-sure she’s in fact still asleep, because her room doesn’t look like her room anymore. It is roofless, open to the cold air, somewhere else than Oxford, and it’s overgrown with thick, wild, dark trees that punch through the floor and spread their branches to a pitch-black sky. She is still in her bed, and she can vaguely make out the outlines of her furniture, but its grip on existence has slipped, been shoved sideways into a crack in the wall. She sits bolt upright, pinching herself hard, but it doesn’t snap back.

“Flynn?” Lucy can just see him nearby, but she can’t tell if he can see or hear her.

The scratching has changed. It isn’t scratching, but a soft, snaky slithering, something moving through the woods at midnight, the most primal and timeless evocation of the witching hour. Lucy grabs at her nightstand for the Colt, but her nightstand isn’t there anymore. Something else is, across from her. It is huge and shadowed and sentient. It doesn’t look remotely human. It is blurred and burned and twisted, and its face is an eyeless grey mask. Its jaws open, and keep opening.

Lucy only has time for a second, strangled attempt at her roommate’s name before it jumps at her. Even that, however, isn’t quite accurate. An animal would spring at her, the tocker grabbed her, but this launches itself in a fluid arc, at once slow and horribly fast – it’s over there, it’s still there, it’s barely moving, and then it is on top of her, as if it laughs in the face of ordinary physics. It probably does. The tocker was huge, slow, strong, and overwhelmingly, decidedly material. It grabbed her and throttled her, but it ended up being straightforward to deal with – a headshot with the right kind of gun electrified it, knocked it out, the end. Whatever this is, it’s not going to die from being shot. It might even be hoping that she’d try.

*Revenant.* The word comes to mind in the same way, nowhere and then slamming into her like a punch. Slimy, smoky tendrils are tangling around her throat, running up her mouth and nose, and Lucy tumbles out of bed under its not-weight. She grapples furiously at it, trying to find any part of recognizable anatomy to strangle. It doesn’t seem to be made of flesh, or notably handicapped by injuries to any part of it, morphing and shifting. She squeezes at where there should be a neck, and then she’s holding some extraneous end of it that lashes at her like a whip. They roll around on the floor, as she kicks madly and keeps kicking. It absorbs it like damp cotton wool.

Somewhere above her, Lucy is aware of the ghastly, eyeless grey face, very close to her, jaws unhinging like a python preparing to swallow an animal twice its size. She grabs at it, trying to dig her thumbs into the staring sockets, and a jolting shock travels over her body. Then in the next instant, it’s her own face that she has between her hands, voiceless and screaming, blinded and bloody, and she lets go in horror. It’s too late. Now it has locked onto her, it’s turned into a column of greasy smoke pouring down her throat, and she’s choking on it, she’s –

She’s ten years old again, somehow. It’s her birthday party and she has had over all her little friends, the ones from school that Carol decided were worthy of an invitation. There are still glittery cards and pieces of gift wrap on the floor, plates with the remnants of colored icing stacked up in the kitchen, as Carol says that she has one more present. This is the best one, and she’s been
waiting to give it to Lucy ever since she was born. Lucy feels important and grown-up and excited. It’s going to be wonderful. It’s going to be –

It’s a talk. The kind of talk that Lucy is vaguely aware that preteen girls get from their mothers at some point, but not about the facts of life or the birds and the bees or just say no. It’s about something called Rittenhouse, an organization that Carol and her mother and her grandfather and however many generations of their family have all been part of. In fact, they are directly descended from David Rittenhouse, the famous eighteenth-century astronomer, clockmaker, and correspondent of the Founding Fathers, who created this wonderful society in his name to carry on his legacy and his vision for the future. Carol is a member. So is Lucy. She’s pure-blood Rittenhouse, on both sides. She’s like a princess, a real-life princess. (Clearly, Carol has calculated this to appeal to a ten-year-old girl.) She’s going to learn more over the next few years, but it’s important that Lucy can keep a secret. She’s going to have to work very hard.

Lucy is ten years old. She has grown up worshiping her mother and wanting to be like her, even though Carol has already pushed her through all of elementary school, keeps asking the teachers if they can give her more challenging assignments, ensured that Lucy does every bit of her homework before she goes out to play. It does not occur to her to ask at this point if her three-year-old baby sister, Amy, is also a princess. Of course if Lucy is, so is Amy. There is no suspicion or questioning. She’s a little confused, but it sounds exciting.

Lucy is twelve, and Amy is five, and they are eating Popsicles on the back porch, and Lucy swears her to secrecy and whispers that they’re both real princesses, it’s called Rittenhouse and Amy can never never tell anyone. Amy pinky-swears, because she idolizes Lucy in turn and it is an easy promise to make. They wear tiaras and spend an afternoon giving each other imperial commands, sending each other on quests. They fight about who is the better princess, at least until Carol comes out and catches them at it. Watches them with a bemused expression, until Amy has finally worn herself out and gone in for a nap. Then Carol tells Lucy that it’s all right that she told Amy, but Amy isn’t quite as special as Lucy. She’s, well. She’s different.

Lucy doesn’t understand, and right then, Carol doesn’t explain anything else. Lucy is still under the impression that Dad is Dad, because he’s always been. Henry Wallace, a gentle, unassuming man who Carol tends to domineer, though he’s the only person who she listens to. He is the one who goes to Lucy’s father-daughter dance at school and tells her to be careful around boys, and answers the door in a suit and tie when she’s fourteen years old and Parker Patterson wants to take her to see Titanic. He is the one who takes the pictures for her Sweet Sixteen and he is the one who, a few weeks later, wakes her up on a Saturday morning, makes her pancakes, and says they need to talk. He’s the one who, sitting across from her in the sunny kitchen, calls her sweet bean like he always has, and tells her he’s not her real father.

He tries to be kind about it, as always. Lucy is stunned and disbelieving and doesn’t want to hear it, and for the first time, the secret she’s been carrying for the last several years doesn’t seem quite as wonderful. She insists that he is, of course he is, and Henry’s voice breaks as he says that he always will be in his heart, but as far as basic biology goes, it’s not him who made her. That is another man. He won’t tell her who, says to ask her mother. It’s not clear if he’s run this past Mom beforehand. They’ve always been in sync before, but something’s changed.

Lucy is reeling, runs off and grabs the keys to the family sedan and lays rubber backing out of the driveway. She just got her license a few weeks ago and wants to drive, drive, drive out of the Bay Area and never come back. She is plunged into the usual teenage froth of hating her parents, though it’s different in this case. Carol hasn’t said much more about Rittenhouse since that fateful tenth-birthday chat, though whenever Lucy tries to slack on her schoolwork or wants to care about the things that high school sophomores usually care about, it resurfaces as a reminder that she’s doing this for a larger purpose. She has to be prepared to take her place. All the legacy and work
of all her ancestors is riding on this. Lucy could be one-of-a-kind. Singular. Carol loves her, and can’t let her mess that up.

It’s then when Lucy realizes that since Henry is not her father, but he is Amy’s, that that’s the reason Amy’s different. A half-blood, a lesser specimen, and Carol hasn’t tried to cultivate her and develop her the way she has with Lucy. Lucy has sorely envied Amy’s comparative freedom, the way Carol doesn’t go over all her report cards and school assignments with a red pen, doesn’t micromanage her friends and her extracurricular activities. She sits down on the beach – it’s freezing cold, it’s February, the waves are booming and cold wind is whipping the spume into her face – and stares out at the horizon. Half wants to walk into the ocean and let the weight of her clothes pull her down. She tells herself it’s too melodramatic, she’s not being practical, but when she is young and this is the worst thing she has ever experienced in her life (god, she was so young, so innocent, Lucy’s heart hurts for that poor child), it’s how she feels.

One week later, Henry Wallace is dead. Car crash. He always was a smoker, said he thought lung cancer would probably get him, though he cut back a lot for the girls’ sake. Lucy and Amy and Carol cry at his funeral, a united front, and for a while after that, they’re closer. Lucy can’t find the right time to bring up her real father. That man is a shadowy phantom who has no part of the Preston family’s grief, and she does not intend to bring him any closer.

She finishes high school, she graduates as valedictorian, she heads off to UCLA just because she didn’t want to ride Carol’s coattails at Stanford the entire way. It’s the first time she’s ever lived outside the Bay Area or by herself; she was a pretty sheltered teenager, has never been drunk or had a bong rip or fumbled with a boy in the backseat, and in her first year, she goes a little overboard, as kids flying the coop from controlling parents tend to do. She still pulls decent grades, but not up to her usual caliber, and panics that she’s going to flunk out. Feels like she’s still spiraling, down and down and down.

(Down and down and down – it’s her sophomore year of college and she was going to just fuck all this and join a band, didn’t see the oil slick, spun out – the car filled up with water so fast, so fast, and after that, she abandoned all the parties and all the friends and devoted herself to her studies, apologized to her mother for thinking that she ever tried to run away. Said that she wanted to learn about Rittenhouse, she wanted to come home, wanted to belong.)

She graduates from UCLA with a double major in history and anthropology and moves back to Palo Alto, and Stanford, for her master’s degree. Really throws herself into this Rittenhouse stuff, takes part in a few youth-group events with the children of fellow devotees. There’s a definite Hitler Youth air to them, though she doesn’t realize it at the time. It’s because of that, the need to define her pedigree and present her credentials, the sense that she has properly earned the information, that Carol tells her about her real father. Benjamin Cahill, a distinguished pediatric surgeon at UCSF. (He operates on kids? Oh Lord. That’s not terrifying at all.) She hopes he and Lucy can still have a relationship.

So Lucy tries. She tries, because she is a dutiful Rittenhouse daughter and she’s brainwashed enough by this point to think that she owes it to Cahill and Henry Wallace was in the wrong for daring to pose so long as her blood sire. She goes over to his house and is greeted warmly on his part, and realizes that she already knows her younger half-brother, Martin, because they’re in the same young adult group. Lucy insists on inviting him over and introducing him to Amy. They’re family. Rittenhouse is family. They should all get along.

Amy tries to tolerate Martin for Lucy’s sake, because she wants to be supportive of Lucy reconnecting with her birth father and all that, but she quickly admits that she really doesn’t like him. Martin is one of those self-righteous teenage white boys whose narrow worldview does not encompass any nuance or challenge, and who feels very proud of himself for being an intelligent
and persecuted nerd who is on a much higher level of existence than the dim-witted jocks and popular girls and etc etc., who will all eventually get what they deserve. Fits the Klebold and Harris mold, frankly, though he thinks guns are only for idiots who aren’t smart enough to get what they want in another way. Rittenhouse is the way to do it. Rittenhouse takes brains, skill, subtlety, non-violence and enlightenment. Rittenhouse is everything.

Lucy and Amy argue increasingly about how much time she’s spending with the Cahills, about how much of their propaganda comes out of her mouth. Cahill’s wife, Evelyn, is almost creepily welcoming, displays no worry or threat about her husband’s illegitimate daughter from a long-ago fling suddenly reappearing and wanting to get closer. It’s clear she too is born-and-bred Rittenhouse, and sees Lucy’s inclusion into the pack as something to be wholeheartedly supported. Starts talking about how Lucy is twenty-two now, has dated a few boys but not really had a serious relationship, but it’s time to think about the future. About a solid match. Is Carol talking to her about this yet? As Rittenhouse women, they have a special duty to propagate the line. Especially with Lucy and her prized, royal bloodline. Princess. Princess.

(“This isn’t you, Lucy!” Amy screams in her face, over and over. “Lucy, this isn’t you! Why can’t you see that these people are – they’re a cult! You’re smart, you can’t do this!”)

(And her own voice, echoing back, shouting that Amy was just jealous that she wasn’t deemed worthy of the same attention, that Amy didn’t understand how brilliant they were and how much good they wanted to do. That she was – and she can hear it over and over, the way she spat it in utter earnest, at her sister who had only ever loved her and wanted the best for her – a half-blood. The look on Amy’s face has never left her, not for an instant.)

Then it’s finishing her master’s degree, and all the Cahills at the graduation party and Amy saying that she’s sorry, but she can’t be there like this, not with them. It’s starting her PhD and meeting the man that Evelyn and Carol have co-selected as her ideal future husband, Noah Berkowski, a talented young doctor that Benjamin knows from the hospital. It’s smiling at him and thinking he’s nice, he’s nice, she’s lucky that they care for her so much to pick someone she will be so happy with. She dutifully begins imagining names for their children. It’s understood that she will be pregnant soon after they are married, and while her history work is very important and Rittenhouse is paying generously for her to finish it, she can’t neglect her role as a wife and mother. It’s having sex with Noah for the first time and thinking it was fine, it was fine, he was decent and he didn’t force her or anything, and then locking herself in the bathroom for two hours and staring at her razor and suddenly wondering if it could cut her wrists.

Noah says she’s stressed, it’s common among overworked PhD students approaching completion, and with everything she’s doing for Rittenhouse as well, all the volunteer assignments she’s taken on, she deserves a break. He angrily insists to Carol and Evelyn that they back off and stop pressuring her, and for the first time, Lucy can actually see herself maybe liking this man one day. Noah is Rittenhouse too, of course, but he takes it less seriously, is able to be wry and self-deprecating and poke fun at it. They make arrangements for her to see a Rittenhouse therapist, who surely must have had to coax people through these kinds of breakdowns before, smooth away all their doubts and keep them on the right track. He (of course it is a he) prescribes Lucy several medications and advises her to just think about all the people she’s helping. They’ve always known that’s what she wants to do.

Lucy floats along, high as a kite but at least not actively suicidal, through the rest of her PhD and as usual, graduates with honors. Noah proposes, since he still technically has to do that, and a wedding date is set. Then Lucy decides that since she’s done with school, she wants to get off the medicines, and does it without consulting her doctor, which is definitely against medical advice. And yet. She has a feeling that if she told him, he’d only insist on more.
It’s hell. It’s utter, total, wracking, withdrawing hell. She can’t function for a week, she shuts herself in her room, she has spasms and visions and can barely see or breathe. She didn’t go totally cold turkey, she’s taking half pills, but even that is a terrible shock to the system. But slowly, it’s like coming up for air, like she’s been asleep for years and now she is finally seeing the true and awful light of what she has done, who she has let herself become, docile and glass-eyed and smiling like a Stepford wife. Amy’s right about all of it. Amy’s right.

Lucy can’t immediately drop all her commitments and back out of everything. That would raise red flags, and she has to be strategic. She can’t tell Noah either; he isn’t as life-or-death about it as the rest of them, but he’s still a true believer, he wouldn’t agree. She’s living a lie, some sort of weird double life where she wants to collect information on them, but has no idea who she’d pass it to or what she’d do. Rittenhouse is everywhere, that’s always been the point.

Finally, Lucy turns up on Amy’s doorstep in the middle of the night. Breaks down and cries for hours and apologizes over and over for how she’s acted and all the awful things that she has believed. Amy hugs her and they sob together and decide they’ll do this, they’ll figure out how to stop these people somehow. It’s not Lucy’s fault. It’s not her fault. It’s not her fault.

(“Amy? Amy! Amy!” The blood on the door handle and on the floor, streaks and splashes of it, Lucy’s voice screaming as she runs through the empty apartment. Signs of a struggle everywhere, and yet, no sign of her sister, no trace of what’s happened.)

(It is absolutely Lucy’s fault.)

Lucy keeps finding excuses to postpone the wedding. Noah’s getting suspicious, and so is Carol. She and Amy are working together more and more, they know Rittenhouse is about to do something major. They are, of all things, funding the construction of a time machine, through the billionaire British entrepreneur and tech genius, Connor Mason, and his company, Mason Industries. The Mothership, as it’s called, is almost ready, and there is a big party to hand it over. A ribbon cutting and a champagne toast, as Lucy stands there in her black cocktail dress at Noah’s side and smiles and smiles until her cheeks hurt, applauding like the rest of them. Now, ladies and gentlemen, Benjamin Cahill says. Now we do what we were meant to do.

Emma Whitmore is the pilot. Dedicated Rittenhouse agent for several years, one of the few recruited, not born in, who has managed to work her way to the top with a blend of ruthlessness, cleverness, determination, and more ruthlessness. Has been an integral part of Connor Mason’s team, but the time has come for her to move onto bigger and better things. She’s going to begin her missions soon. Start removing all the threats to them in both past and present, alter dominoes to fall in more favorable patterns. She looks straight at Lucy as she says this.

That night is when Lucy senses something wrong. When she tells Noah to head home and she’ll meet him later, when she arrives at the empty, bloody apartment and finds nothing, and when she calls the landlord and the police, nobody has any memory of an Amy Preston ever living here. They think Lucy is making her up. Lucy can’t understand why they’re doing this, wants to shake them, wants to scream, and wakes up in a hospital room under an involuntary psychiatric hold. Noah comes to get her out and tries to reason with her. She cannot be reasoned with.

That is when Lucy Preston decides to go to war.

That is when she finds out about the backup time machine, the Lifeboat, and that it can hold three people. Finds Rufus Carlin and Jiya Marri, who are both tech geeks and number-crunchers by nature, but nonetheless have seen this firsthand and are willing to fight it. They are not soldiers any more than Lucy, a small historian, is, but they are who she has ended up with as teammates, and they will have to do. They steal the Lifeboat and learn everything on the job. Teach themselves to fire weapons and to plan operations, based out of a bunker in the NorCal wilderness
since Mason Industries is now entirely a front company for Rittenhouse. They manage to persuade a Homeland Security agent, Denise Christopher, of the truth of their story and the necessity of their mission, and she does what she can for them. They run various trips into American history, chasing Rittenhouse. Win a few, lose a lot, at first. Win some, lose some after that, but still never what they need. Not enough, not enough, not enough.

Lucy runs into Carol and Noah on a few of the missions. They both try to reason with her, to persuade her to come back to the fold. She can still be forgiven, even now. She can still go back. They’ll overlook it, but she has to stop. Why has she turned on them like this? Why?

Lucy doesn’t listen. Manages to pull off a major sting operation through the decades with the help of her own grandfather, Ethan Cahill, which gets a sizeable fraction of present-day leadership (including Benjamin) put away. She and Rufus and Jiya and Denise are all there is, and so they can’t stop, even as they are all slowly losing their minds. Then it’s 1789 in France, and revolution is in the air, and Emma kills Carol and Noah, who have been unforgivably slowing her down with their insistence on trying to get Lucy back. Lucy finds them both in a grimy alley in Paris, Noah already dead and Carol dying. Carol whispers that she’s so proud of her. It is her wish, her last wish, that Lucy goes back home. To Rittenhouse.

After all that. After everything. Rittenhouse.

(Lucy loses a lot more of her mind after that, and she isn’t sure it has ever come back.)

(“An alternate universe? With magic?” She thinks Rufus is having her on, though she doesn’t know why he would be. “And one of us is supposed to go there after them?”)

(Even while knowing that if that’s what they’ve done, that’s where she’s going.)

The images batter against her eyes, over and over, the very worst moments in a ceaseless loop. Henry telling her that he isn’t her real father, and the bloody apartment where nobody remembered Amy, and Carol’s hand falling out of hers as she stared in numb disbelief, and sitting in the bathroom and wanting to die, this isn’t you Lucy this isn’t you – it goes faster and faster. The look on Amy’s face, half-blood, spat in a voice that she only wishes wasn’t hers. The jerk and the wrench of the Lifeboat flying sideways, opening the door to an alternate 1886 entirely alone, I touch no one and no one touches me –

Lucy struggles, flopping and wrenching like a fish on a line, but she can’t get the revenant out of her. It is chewing on her, burning her up inside and out, has broken a crack in the dam of memories and everything is pouring out in a torrential, ugly flood. It is getting stronger and stronger the more it feeds, until she can almost feel its teeth in her flesh, if teeth are something it even has. It swirls in her lungs like smoke, boils behind her eyes, rattles her bones. She is going to die. She is going to die, or perhaps only wish she did, because it will eat everything out of her and leave her as a withered husk. It has forced her to relieve the entirety of her darkest despairs and worst traumas in a few disconnected minutes, slamming her into them like a brick wall. Amy’s there, and then she isn’t, over and over. Everything is screaming, chaotic and tempestuous. Her head is swept under and she’s caught in the undertow, drowning, drowning –

And then, all at once and out of nowhere, it stops. The silence hammers in Lucy’s ears, rings as loudly as a shout, as she curls up, seizures, vomits a burning quantity of grey ash, and falls for what feels like forever before smacking into hard floorboards. She wrenches her malfunctioning eyes open far enough to see a shadowed figure wrestling with the smoky coils of the revenant. There’s a wet pop and a choking noise and a soundless explosion that smells like sulfur, and then the world slams back into place. The monster is gone, the forest vanishes, the roof barrels back down onto its attendant walls, and everything goes still. She is lying on the rug in her dark room in Somerville in a torn and dirty nightgown, retching and sobbing.
“Lucy?” Someone is on all fours next to her, breathing hard, as he crawls over and puts a very ginger hand on her back. “Lucy? Are you – ”

Lucy instinctively recoils from it, and it pulls back as if burned. She lies there facedown, crying too hard to speak, until he grunts with pain, gets hold of her arms, and turns her over, lifting her clumsily off the rug. “Hey,” he says gruffly, as if trying to be comforting, but doesn’t remember exactly how. “Hey, hey.”

Flynn. The name suggests itself to her through the haze of shock and horror, and for some reason, it’s comforting. She doesn’t struggle, if only since she’s currently too destroyed to do so, as he hauls her over to her bed and puts her back into it. “Is it gone?” Her throat feels charred, burned too badly to speak, and her voice is a harsh, husky rasp. “Did you kill it?”

“I chased it off.” He sounds almost guilty, angry that he couldn’t do more. “I told you they were hard to kill. I got it out of you by giving it better prey, and then I managed to banish it, but I don’t think I permanently wounded it. It got… a good feed.”

Lucy shudders with horror at the idea that she only strengthened that thing, that that wasn’t even remotely the worst it could do, that it could return for a second night at the buffet table even more powerful than ever. She understands that Flynn distracted it by opening his mind to it instead, drew it off to feed on him instead of her, even if he hasn’t spelled it out. Whatever demons haunt her, his must be just as lurid, and she can imagine that his head is still ringing with the sound of his daughter’s screams, among other things. She cracks an eye to see that his face is carved more deeply with lines and grief than usual, gaunt and harrowed, and tries to think of something to say. “I’m sorry I didn’t – I should have believed it was really a – ”

Flynn shakes his head tersely, dismissing her apology. At last he says only, “I did tell you that revenants were nasty.”

“Yes.” Lucy looks at him, still sitting on the edge of her bed, head bowed, shoulders hunched, and wonders if she should tell him to move. She can’t bring herself to do it, half-fearing that the monster might reappear the instant she is, in any sense of the word, alone. “Do you think it’ll come back?”

“Not right now,” Flynn says. “If we’re lucky, not for a while. It’s full, it’s satiated, it’ll slither off down its den and enjoy its pickings. But we’ll have to figure out how to destroy it, because otherwise it won’t stop coming until it drains you dry. And the more times it does that, the harder it gets. Then once you’re dead, it will use your body as a host until it is as deformed and monstrous as the one you saw now. I imagine that’s part of its desperation and its hunger. It’s been in someone else too long, and needs a new home.”

Lucy shudders. Every part of that explanation repulses her on a chemical level, and it’s not clear if Flynn, even with his extensive monster-hunting experience, is entirely sure how to stop it. “You’ve fought these before,” she presses. “That’s what you said. Haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Flynn says. “Weaker ones. Younger ones. This one is very old and very strong. I’ll try to think of something, but – ” He stops. “Well, I’ll do that, anyway.”

“Thank you.” Lucy looks up at him, their eyes meeting for the first time. “For pulling it off me.”

He looks set to ask what she thought he was going to do, but decides better of it. She has the definite sense that he knows more than he’s saying, and wonders what exactly he got out of Dodgson during his apparently very informational visit to Christ Church. Instead, he says, “Revenants can sometimes be drawn to people that their current host knew in life, or that they
Lucy doesn’t know how to respond. She possibly has unfinished business with every single member of her family, all of whom are admittedly evil and/or dead, but none of them are from this reality. “I don’t think so.” She feels hollowed out and gutted and fragile as a dandelion wisp, as if all the iron cages she has built to keep herself functioning in the face of massive and inhuman obstacles have crumbled and rusted, and left her here alone, stripped and solitary and shivering in the dark. “I just want to go to sleep.”

Flynn pauses, then nods, and starts to stand up. But just then, before she can stop herself, Lucy reaches out and catches his hand.

He goes tense from head to toe. Even she doesn’t know what she means by it, so he certainly doesn’t, and the moment twists like a harp string, charged with possibilities – some innocent, and some less so. Flynn’s eyes flick to where her fingers are linked around his own, then up to hers. Then he pulls himself free, closes her hand, and sets it on the covers next to her. “Go to sleep,” he says. “I’ll keep an eye out.”

Lucy manages a nod, half disappointed and half relieved, as he moves to sit on the floor with his gun in his lap – maybe he can startle the revenant if it comes back, though he doesn’t seem to think it will, at least immediately. That was a fragile, emotional moment of weakness, clutching for the only real human nearby after she’s been so thoroughly shaken up and thrown to the wind, and she can’t tell if he is gentlemanly avoiding taking any advantage of her when she is in a vulnerable state, or he just does not want to be further burdened with comforting her. Tact or emotional intelligence or gentleness are, to say the least, not traits that she has hereto associated with Flynn, so it’s easier to guess that he just got tired of holding her hand, literally. He did ask her if she’d seen the revenant again, and she said it was fine, so perhaps on some level he blames her for bringing this on them with her ignorance and nonchalance. He could have been much harsher about ripping into her for it, but if nothing else, she’s grateful that he didn’t.

Lucy closes her eyes, her worst memories still swimming murkily behind her eyes, coming and going in brief, bright stabs. She’ll get it under control. It’ll take a while, but she will. She’s always done it before. That’s how it is.

That’s how it is.

Karl Popovich has had the absolute hell of a few days. Because, as firmly established, Karl Popovich is criminally underrated, is starting to think that he may in fact work for an idiot, and was left in abrupt charge of a notorious London crime ring after said idiot jumped out a Buckingham Palace window in a hail of Beefeater bullets and vanished from the face of the bloody earth. Of course, Karl is the one who has to figure out what happened, coordinate with everyone on their various assignments, select a new hideout, kill a man at the Croft asking too many questions, and make an executive decision as to whether Flynn ever plans on being seen again, or returning to command of the gang. Karl doesn’t think he’s captured or dead, because that would have definitely made the papers, but even the boss has kicked a big enough hornet’s nest that he is going to need to sit down and shut up. Not that the boss has ever been good at that.

Their new hideout is in one of the Thames tunnels, a bit musty and damp but able to get fresh air by a grate overhead, and of course the boys are complaining that the Southwark warehouse was more comfortable, which really gets Karl’s goat. Karl is not the one who caused Ada bloody Lovelace’s butler to turn up on the doorstep, the boss to wig out and up stakes, and send them scuttering off like sewer rats. Karl is also not the one who pulled the aforementioned little stunt and abandoned them, and given as one of their runners – a sixteen-year-boy named Sullivan, not an official member of the gang, but one of the allies who passes them messages and material – has
recently become an unwilling guest of the Metropolitan Police, even a blind mouse can occasionally find the cheese. Sullivan’s probably dead, poor bastard, and Karl isn’t going to make a particular effort rescuing him. They need to conserve their resources.

“Where d’you think he went?” Robert Taylor asks that night, as they are cooking a lumpy stew over the brazier. “If he got out of London, that is?”

Karl has a feeling that he knows exactly where Flynn went, but has been debating the merits of sharing it with the lads. He is a capable deputy, after all, and part of that involves keeping the boss’s secrets, no matter how much you yourself may deride them. “No idea. We’re carrying on as normal until either he comes back or they nab him. Anyone have a problem with that?”

Looks are exchanged, as they all know that to speak up risks branding them as an insubordinate or mutineer, but if Karl apparently doesn’t know where Flynn went or anything that they don’t, that doesn’t give him a privileged position. Karl has been second-in-command long enough that they’re more or less used to taking orders from him, but he’s not the same kind of alpha male that Flynn is, and they’re definitely more frightened of Flynn than they are of him. Residual loyalty will probably hold them for a while, and it’s not like they have so many other places to go, but if it stretches on to a week or two with no news from the chief, they may look into exploring other options. There will always be work in the underworld for a fast-talking Irishman who can fire a gun and outwit the peelers. No use sticking around if it’s only going to get your neck fitted for a noose of your own.

“That Preston bird,” Shitmouth says, with an entirely unexpected moment of critical thought. “One he went to tea with. Wasn’t she going up to Oxford, like? Any chance he might have tried to – ” he makes a highly explicit gesture with index finger and circled finger and thumb of the other hand – “with her? Seemed he wasn’t averse to the idea.”

Karl wonders what it says about the transparency of Flynn’s hopeless fancy for Lucy Preston that even Shitmouth has apparently cottoned on, since the moniker could just as easily be Shit-for-brains, but that took too long to say. Glancing around, he can see the boys screwing up their faces, trying to decide if the boss has in fact run off to hide under a little lady’s petticoats (what he might be doing once there, Karl prefers not to speculate). Then someone says, “So what if he did? We supposed to go up there and get him out?”

“A chorus of guffaws obligingly follows this, as Karl raises his eyes to the heavens (or rather, the underside of the street overhead). At least they think that the idea of the boss running off to get laid for once in his damn life is funny, and might help him unwind a few jots if he returned. Someone else appears set to continue with commentary on which assets precisely of Lucy’s might have attracted Flynn’s notice, at which point Karl decides it’s time to put the kibosh on that. Has a vague idea where he might go to confirm this hunch, though it’s still almost as stupid as something Flynn would do. Still. Might be worth it to have a solid answer.

Therefore, Karl wakes up the next morning, scrapes together his cleanest suit and hat (wore it the other day to the same place, which is mildly dangerous, but none of the papers have pictures of him) and climbs out of the tunnel, onto the misty, chilly streets. It’s not that far to St. James’ Square, and he checks that his gun is loaded and loose in the holster, just in case. Glances up at the surrounding windows, but nobody seems to be peering through the curtains. So he raises the heavy bronze knocker, and bangs it heartily.

It takes several minutes until the door cracks. Upon seeing who is on the other side, he nearly shuts it again straightaway, but Karl sticks his foot in. “Morning, guv’nor.”
Mr. Woolsey looks as if he was deeply hoping not to come face to face with this particular fine specimen of London criminality again, for which he cannot be blamed. They eye each other up and down, as Karl tries to decide if Woolsey looks particularly shifty, or that’s just his natural expression. Finally Woolsey says, “May I help you, Mr. … it was Popovich, I believe?”

“Never mind that. Her ladyship awake?”

“And what makes you think that the Countess of Lovelace intends on receiving the scabrous henchman of an extremely wanted fugitive, exactly?”

“She did invite that fugitive and me to tea the other day,” Karl points out. “I’d appreciate a word. Go on, bugger off and ask her.”

Mr. Woolsey draws in a sharp breath, but consents to withdraw and inform his mistress of the breakfast-time intrusion. When he reappears, it is with disappointed-but-resigned mien; after all, Lady Lovelace must have received all number of scandalous guests over the years, despite Woolsey’s best efforts to weed them out at the door. “She says that you may come in, but be quick about it, do not pocket any silverware, and try not to drip on the carpet. This way, please.”

Karl pulls a gargoyle face at Woolsey’s back as he steps over the threshold and into the Lovelace mansion, following the butler to the same private drawing room where they had a tea and a chinwag last week. At least before that medium turned up and scared the piss out of Flynn. Karl does hope that Priscilla Mackenzie is somewhere else at the moment, not that he has any dead loved ones she’d be able to spook him with. Just seems like that sort of talent is constantly ripe for accidents, and his life is already complicated enough.

They reach the French doors, Woolsey raps correctly upon them, and then shows Karl through at a word from within. “The… henchman, Madam.”

“Thank you, Woolsey.” Ada Lovelace is wearing an embroidered silk dressing gown, sipping a cup of tea and consulting the newspaper. She does not seem at all bothered about her state of dishabille in receiving an early-morning visitor of extremely rough social caliber, so Karl goes over to the table and kisses her offered hand, just to make Woolsey’s eye twitch. Ada looks up at him with a shrewd, birdlike gaze. “Well, it’s you again, is it? Not the breakfast guest I expected, but what is life without a few surprises?”

“Pardon the intrusion,” Karl says, since he wasn’t raised *completely* in the jungle and knows that presuming upon wealthy women, even old, rich, and eccentric ones who don’t give a hoot about the neighbors’ opinion, is made easier with some manners and flattery. “Just had a quick question, is all. Any chance you’ve been in contact with Miss Preston recently? Any chance, say, that she mentioned any visitors?”

Ada looks at him sharply, not slow to take his meaning. Then she says, “You *are* after uncovering if your employer turned up in company with her in Oxford, are you not?”

Karl can’t imagine why else he might want to know, though old instinct tells him to make up a lie. “Just thought it was a possibility, is all.”

Ada considers for a moment. “I did receive a telegram from Miss Preston the other day, yes. In which she alluded to the presence of an *old friend* who, I suspect, was neither old nor strictly speaking, a friend. I’ve no notion if the silly git is still there or not, but yes, we can be reasonably confident in thinking that he selected her place of business as a… refuge. How utterly ill-mannered. He’ll be lucky if he doesn’t get the both of them arrested.”

Karl heaves a deep sigh. Even suspecting that Flynn ran straight to Lucy isn’t as annoying as
having it confirmed – well, not by name, but Ada seems to think it’s him, and for that matter, so does Karl. “How long has he been there?”

“Several days, I think. No, for the record, I have not seen fit to trouble the Metropolitan Police with this information, as they would entirely lose their heads and run about like ninnies, and it would doubtless blow back onto Lucy as well. Men are so terrible at handling every situation they’re in charge of, it’s really quite comical. Besides, they’ve recently made themselves quite a nuisance since recovering the frozen corpse of Mr. Stanley from my icehouse, and I have no wish to have them loitering about the premises any more. Is it true that Mr. Flynn broke into Buckingham Palace? You know how the papers exaggerate.”

“Seems to be,” Karl says. “Queen wasn’t amused.”

Ada makes a tutting sound. “Gracious. What a total and indescribable cad. You, Mr. Popovich, you’ve worked for the knave in question for a while. Is he always this unbalanced?”

“No usually.” Karl considers. “Think it’s on account of him being… distracted.”

“Oh yes, by Miss Preston?” Ada sounds completely matter-of-fact. “Indeed, we’ve all noticed that. Hopeless, I say. Quite hopeless. Even if he was an earl with a family title and estate and five thousand pounds a year, I could not possibly recommend him as a potential husband. I married an earl, you know. Horribly dull creatures. On second thought, it may be to his advantage that he’s not. Still not nearly good enough for her, though.”

Karl opens and shuts his mouth, not least because Ada is sitting here talking about the boss possibly wanting to marry this insane American bint. Do a few other things with her, yes, absolutely, but not that, and this is getting rather off topic anyway. He is just trying to think if there is anything else he should ask her, or that she might be inclined to answer, when Woolsey reappears. “Madam. I deeply regret to once more interrupt your morning with the advent of unsolicited and uncivilized gentlemen, but another one has turned up on the doorstep. He says that he believes a Priscilla Mackenzie is currently in residence here?”

Both Ada and Karl look up sharply at that. It could just be a grifter or sideshow man or other entrepreneur eager to profit from Priscilla’s gift, or someone else who has read the society papers’ accounts of the Supper Party from Hell, but still. Ada’s mouth goes thin and wary. “I’ll speak to him,” she decides after a moment. “Mr. Popovich, perhaps you wish to – ?”

Karl is already getting to his feet and preparing for his exit, but it is too late. For the second time in two weeks, Ada Lovelace’s drawing room plays host to an inauspicious and poorly timed chance meeting. That is because the door opens, and Sergeant Wyatt Logan walks in.

There’s an instant in which he and Karl don’t quite recognize each other. Then their eyes lock, they know each other quite unmistakably for the bastard shooting at them in a dark Covent Garden alley, and they both go for their guns at the same time. Wyatt dives behind the divan in anticipation of Karl opening fire, and Karl is in fact about to do that when Ada gets to her feet, seizes hold of his long-barreled Smith & Wesson revolver, and smacks him in the face with her newspaper. “No guns over breakfast, if you bloody well please! Are you both a pair of baboons who recently discovered dynamite? You behind there, were you even planning to properly introduce yourself before you commenced riddling my expensive furniture with bullet holes?”

There is a pause, and then Wyatt gets sheepishly to his feet. In Karl’s opinion, he looks fucking terrible. His face is pale, his eyes bloodshot, and he smells of something stronger than alcohol and not to be messed around with. “Apologies, ma’am,” he says, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and grimacing as if the lunge for cover has rattled the delicate equilibrium of his head. “My name is Sergeant Wyatt Logan. Do you know who that man is?”
“Of course I know who that is,” Ada snaps. “And I would imagine you do too, given as you were so eager to point firearms at him. Do you and Mr. Popovich have a problem?”

“I have a problem with his boss,” Wyatt says, glancing around as if Flynn might be lurking behind the china cabinet. “He here too?”

“No, not that it is in the least your business. If you don’t want me to drag you out by the ear and throw you in the street, you will instantly inform me of yours. To speak of knowing who people are, you do know me?”

Wyatt looks briefly flummoxed. “Uh... Florence Nightingale?”

“What? Much as I admire Miss Nightingale’s work, I have to wonder how on earth you could possibly arrive at that conclusion. I am Ada, dowager countess of Lovelace, thank you very much, and I would hope that even a thundering American nitwit has heard of me. Now, I do believe I asked you what you were doing in my house, as I am still prepared to propel you swiftly out of it. Well?”

Wyatt blinks again, and Karl supposes that he and the boss can commiserate later about being thoroughly outclassed by a small seventy-two-year-old woman. If he and the boss weren’t also trying to kill each other, that is. Finally Wyatt says, “I met Lucy Preston in Oxford. She said that I might call on a Priscilla Mackenzie, if I was back in London. It took a few questions, but I discovered that Miss Mackenzie is presently staying at this address in St. James’ Square. I didn’t realize it was your private residence, ma’am.”

Ada snorts, a sound twice her size. “What on earth is it about Miss Mackenzie and her lightning-rod ability to attract unsuitable gentlemen to my drawing room? Not that it is the poor girl’s fault, not in the least, and nor is she a circus animal to be constantly paraded before gawking customers. The last one went quite badly sideways. No, I could not allow you to see her.”

Wyatt seems briefly about to ask who the other unsuitable gentlemen were, but apparently decides on balance that he really doesn’t want to know. “Are you sure? I – I promise I won’t take long. It’s just – someone told me yesterday that my wife – my wife is alive. If Miss Mackenzie’s talents are as they were reported to me, I just thought she could... confirm or deny.”

Ada eyes him, glances sharply at Karl when he takes a step, and finally summons Woolsey to go upstairs and see if Miss Mackenzie has any interest in this proposition. This leads to an awkward moment with Wyatt and Karl exchanging evil stares, even as Ada sits back down and starts sipping tea, apparently deciding that they will not dare to molest each other with her right there. Since they were both equally uninvited, they can’t exactly order the other to clear out, though Karl thinks that if he gets a chance to get Wyatt off alone and solve that problem, he will. Unfortunately, Wyatt is clearly intending the same thing with him, and they continue to glare at each other, hands hovering near their guns, until the drawing room door opens. Miss Mackenzie looks nervous, but somewhat steadier than she did the last time Karl saw her, screaming in Croatian in a small girl’s voice. That was a bit unsettling.

“Yes?” Priscilla says tentatively. Her eyes flick to Karl, clearly also recognizing him, and she goes rather pale, but holds her ground. “Someone wanted to speak to me?”

“That was me.” Wyatt clears his throat and steps forward. “I’m sorry for the trouble, Miss Mackenzie. I was just wondering if you – well, if I was to ask if you could contact someone who may or may not be dead, how would that work? I – I can pay.”

Priscilla shakes her head. She seems to have a bit more steel in her spine, until Karl supposes that living with the Countess of Lovelace for a fortnight would make any lady feel like charging
headfirst through a brick wall. “No, you don’t have to do that. Here, take my hand.”

Wyatt hesitates, then does so. Karl can’t help a preliminary wince, but no terrified screams result. In fact, nothing happens at all. After a few more moments, Priscilla lets go of Wyatt’s hand and shakes her head again. “I’m sorry.”

“What does that mean? Her name’s Jessica, she’s my wife, she – ”

“I don’t sense her,” Priscilla says. “That means she’s not dead. Or if she is, it is in some way much different than the usual.”

“She’s not . . .” Wyatt’s gaze flicks to Karl, then back. “She’s not from here. Does that affect it somehow?”

“Everyone is equal in death,” Priscilla says. “It shouldn’t.”

“So she is alive?” Wyatt wants the hope, wants it badly, but can’t quite commit himself without reservations. “This is – this talent of yours is real, right? It’s not just some trick?”

Priscilla looks rather insulted, and Karl clears his throat. “I can promise it’s real, not that you deserved to know. Now bugger off.”

Wyatt gives him a very cold stare. “Finally met your boss. He’s a dick.”

Priscilla’s expression changes from insulted to shocked at this coarse language being bandied about in a countess’s presence, and while Ada herself doesn’t appear terribly fussed, Wyatt and Karl are both forced to make a perfunctory apology and beg her pardon. Neither of them wants to leave first, since that might allow the other to make inconvenient allegations against them, but they also can’t fight each other. At least not here, as Karl makes a mental note to redouble his efforts to find out where the sergeant is staying. Certainly not on Flynn’s behalf, but because Karl himself doesn’t want him around when they’re trying to do important things. At any rate, the visit is clearly over, Ada summons a pair of brawny footmen to march them to separate doors, and once Karl is out in the street, he decides he needs to know a bit more first. No use going straight after Logan, yet. He already has enough interesting intelligence.

It is late midmorning, and Karl is not in a hurry to return to the tunnels and go back underground like a grub. He claps on his hat and strolls through the busy streets of London, exulting in his general anonymity; everyone has their feathers in a fuss about Flynn, they don’t have a clue about him. See, this is why Karl doesn’t seriously aspire to run his own gang. Too much visibility, too many complications. He would rather sail along in the shadow of someone who draws all the attention, enjoy a life free from both the constraints of the law and the consequences of such. Works out for everyone.

Karl has stopped at a foodseller’s booth, chatting casually with the proprietor – the Russians on the docks like to stop here, because she sells samovar tea and vatrushka buns and other old favorites of the motherland, and you never know what they might have said – when a woman steps up next to him. Confident of his totally unremarkable nature, he pays no attention to her. And then, as the muzzle of a pistol is placed discreetly against his ribs, somewhat more.

He looks up with a start. The woman is red-haired, freckled, green-eyed, and damn if he doesn’t know exactly who she is. The boss’ nemesis. That one.

Oh, shit.

“Hello, Karl,” Emma Whitmore says sweetly. “We really need to catch up.”
Lucy obviously does not go back to sleep for the remainder of the night after the revenant attack. She can’t. Her mind is too raw and unsettled, fumbling blindly like a diver in thick silt, and her chest still feels physically painful when she breathes, as if her lungs were badly scorched and she is lucky they did not burn up altogether. She is as thirsty as a desert and drinks all the water in the glass on the nightstand, gets up a few times to refill it, but it doesn’t really help. She coughs and wipes ash off her mouth, grimacing and spitting. It’s hard to tell which end of the side effects is worse. She is certainly in no danger of underestimating it again.

And yet. Even as she lies uncomfortably in a half-doze, cracking an eye every so often to check that Flynn is still sitting on the floor and that there are no trees or anything else that should not be there, she is starting to wonder. The revenant is a transitional beast, existing half on one plane of existence and half on the other. Not bound by traditional constraints of reality, in other words, and therefore not necessarily originating from this one. Flynn said that revenants can be drawn to people that their current host knew in life, or with whom they have matters left undone. And Amy disappeared from a bloodstained room locked from the inside, after which nobody seemed to know what had happened, or that she had even ever existed. All of Lucy’s dedicated time-traveling efforts have not succeeded in retrieving her. When she spoke to Amy’s – whatever – via Priscilla at the party, Amy said she was stuck somewhere. Glanced over Lucy’s shoulder, as if at something coming for her. A cold wind, and then she was gone.

It is a ridiculous theory, Lucy doesn’t know what she would do about it if she was right, or if it’s anything except more pain, more unfulfilled hope. Maybe her brain is so desperate for a sign, for any hint that Amy isn’t completely lost, that now she’s even willing to grab onto her being an actual, evil monster. And yet. What if Amy is – in part or in full – the revenant?

It certainly hurt her the most with her memories of Amy, Lucy thinks. Perhaps because that is what she holds the most guilt over, the most easily mined for psychological torture, but what if it was something else, this twisted fragment of Amy’s soul colliding with her like a rattling pinball, an itinerant Horcrux? She kept seeing Amy’s face over and over as the attack was intensifying, right before it ended with Flynn dragging it off her. He said they’re hard to kill, they can’t really be destroyed, but you have to do that if you want it to ever stop hunting you. What if they could break that cycle, set Amy and any other trapped souls free from the dark energy that controls and coerces them? Lucy doesn’t know if this would necessarily return them to life, or at least give them peace, but it has to be better than whatever is currently going on with them.

She tosses and turns restlessly, pummeling her pillow as she tries in vain to get comfortable, or to logically dismiss the idea, neither of which happen. Finally, out of sheer emotional and physical exhaustion, even her brain finally hits the kill switch, and she sleeps like the possibly-literally dead for several hours. When she opens her sticky eyes, the room is full of quiet morning light, she feels like her spinal column has been removed, and tries not to stir a single muscle. It hurts to move her eyes back and forth, much less anything else.

It slowly trickles into Lucy’s abused brain that it’s Sunday, everything will be closed anyway, there is no point leaping up to go anywhere, and Michaelmas term starts tomorrow, finally. Right. Teaching. She has wanted to do it again for such a long time, and now it seems like an odd, alien appendage, a too-small dress that she can’t pull over her head. Either way, is she even going to be afforded the luxury? To say the least, the drama and life-threatening escapades have been pretty much nonstop since she got to England. And with Rittenhouse and now this –

Lucy lies there debating if she should just go find Madeleine Shaw and tender her resignation.
before the term begins, even though that will leave Somerville short a history professor and is bad academic form that she wants to avoid, even if this job will never appear on any CV back in her world. As well, there’s the fact that if she wants to keep researching aether and magic and anything to do with how to disenchant a revenant, she is going to have to stay here. Even if that means sacrificing opportunities to fight Rittenhouse elsewhere. Is Lucy that selfish? Pursuing a possible means to save Amy at the expense of everything else she’s come here to do? Yes, she could find out some things that Rittenhouse intends to do once they have their nice new supply of magic dust, but as far as being on the front lines, no.

The devil’s advocate in her head whispers that she has spent years on the front lines, is now the only soldier in this reality, and it’s absurd and unfair to expect her to do this single-handedly. Why can’t the rest of the damn world step up and save itself for once? If it appreciated anything she was doing, it could demonstrate its gratitude a little more tangibly, except she already knows that it won’t. Superheroes never get the credit, end up generally hated, prophets have honor everywhere except their own house, etc. Saving the world sucks and you get nothing for your efforts except them remembering you fondly once you’re dead. Lucy has done far more than any one human being could remotely be expected or asked to do. Maybe she’s earned a little selfishness. Maybe more. Even taking what she –

Lucy stops short, horrified. That’s not her, that’s not what she wants, and she wonders if that’s another side effect of the revenant: trying to push you toward your darkest, ugliest self, your long-buried or dormant desires, violent delights. And besides, if nothing else, she isn’t alone in the war anymore. Flynn is here too. She doesn’t know what that means, but at least there is that. He must agree that stopping the revenant is important, since otherwise it will drain her dry. They were already talking about him going to Siberia. It would be a start.

Lucy slowly recollects basic motor function and moves her hands out to push herself upright, though her head reels sickeningly and she almost collapses back against the pillows. Flynn is still on the floor, gun on his lap, chin tilted against his chest. She wonders if she should wake him, as he obviously had the same hell of a night. It touches her that he’s sat here like a faithful watchdog, that he was willing to open his mind up to that beast, when his pain is so close to the surface that it took barely a brush from Priscilla to bring it bursting out. He did that for her. No matter how much she has been diligently trying to ignore the spark or two between them, surely that is not something he would do for just anyone. She could use that.

Once more, Lucy catches herself, doesn’t like that shrewd, calculating tone that suggests she put Flynn’s latent infatuation to work. Strategically nudge it along, if that was what it took. She can’t even be sure that he does feel something, or at least strong enough to act on without direct and targeted manipulation. And no matter their other differences, what drew them together in the first place is real: Rittenhouse, and a hatred of it, a willingness to fight it, and grief over loved ones lost to it. She has never had that before, and she could, theoretically, seduce just any old Joe into doing her bidding, if femme fatale was really her style. Does she have to do it on him?

_Do it_, something whispers, something dark and snaky. _Do it. Why not? See how you like it. It would be powerful. You could be powerful._

Lucy discovers that her hand has reached half toward Flynn’s cheek without her volition, and even more horrified, she snatches it back and bundles it into her stomach, as if to prevent it from any more unauthorized wandering. No, there is definitely something still wrong with her, some altered facet of her personality or darkened aspect of her soul. She takes another long sip of water, as if trying to wash it out, and tries to avoid looking at him. This will go away. Eventually.

She sits in bed until the urge to pee becomes overwhelming, staggers out to the WC, and then staggers back. The noise of her feet on the floorboards, soft as it is, rouses Flynn, and he sits up
sharply, reaching for the gun, before realizing it’s her. He utters a long groan and swipes a hand over his face, probably feeling the same literally-monster hangover effects, before he slumps against the bedframe. “Fuck.”

“Agreed.” Lucy climbs back in and pulls the quilts up. Even the brief trip to the loo has exhausted her, and she lies down before the world starts spinning. “I might welcome death.”

Flynn snorts, though it doesn’t sound particularly amused. He twists his head around to look up at her. “We need to figure out how to kill it.”

“Actually.” Lucy hesitates. “About that.”

Flynn raises an eyebrow with a skeptical expression, which only gets more skeptical as she spills out her theory. His mouth goes grim at the mention of Amy, at the realization that Lucy too has a particular person she has lost and is fighting for, but he doesn’t interrupt. When she’s finally finished, however, he doesn’t look convinced. “Try to disenchant a revenant on the vaguest off chance that it might be your sister? No. That’s idiotic, we can’t waste time trying to do that. There are spells that can kill one, though they’d need a powerful magician to work. Not this.”

“Why?” Lucy is well aware that, as just piquantly demonstrated, she is a novice to magic, its possibilities and its dangers, but she thinks her idea is worth at least a little consideration. “If we could help it – even if it’s not Amy, you said it was old and powerful, it could have been feeding on souls for years. Decades. Isn’t it worth at least – ”

“Don’t you think I tried that?” Flynn interrupts. “Don’t you think that once upon a time, I was very convinced that the monsters I hunted had gotten that way unfairly, had been forced into hiding and repressing their powers, and that was what had turned them into what they were? I thought that if I tried kindness, or reasoning with them, or agreeing that society was the real monster, there would be some kind of breakthrough, and I wouldn’t have to kill so many of them. You know what happened? All of them tried to rip my throat out anyway. When it comes to that, how far gone they were for me to be hired to take them down, there was nothing you could do but kill them. That was the only kindness left.”

“But you used to try to help them,” Lucy counters stubbornly. “To help people. If you wanted to do that again, if it was more than just obsessively trying to destroy Rittenhouse – ”

“Let me ask you a question.” Flynn sits upright and looks her dead in the eye. “How much magic is there, exactly, in your 2017?”

It takes a moment to register what he’s said. Then it does, and Lucy gapes at him, feeling as if the rug has been pulled out from under her. “You – you – how do you know?”

“Charles Dodgson was persuaded to say a few things when I visited. Also.” Flynn nods at her desk, without an apparent scrap of shame. “I read your notebooks.”

“You read my –?” Perhaps it was no more than Lucy should have expected, leaving him alone for long periods in her room with nothing to do and a clear need to acquire information, but she can’t help some indignation at this bald-faced intrusion of privacy. She’s used them half to record her information and research results and half as a journal, since there is obviously no one else she can talk to, and the thought of Flynn reading all her personal thoughts makes her uncomfortable for some reason she can’t entirely define, aside from just the ordinary. She hasn’t written anything too incriminating about him, though she’s suddenly scrambling to remember what she did say. “Were you ever actually planning to tell me that?”

“I just did,” Flynn points out, with a certain maddening logic. “Well?”
“What else do you know about me?”

“Enough.” He shrugs. “I know you’re not from here in more ways than one, and that your place, your time, is very different from this one. Since you’re determined to press ahead with this plan after you already didn’t listen to me once, clearly there must be more magic in that other reality than there is here, and you’re an expert on it? Yes?”

“It’s not like that, but – ” Lucy’s cheeks are starting to heat. “I realize you used to be a monster hunter, yes, but even you admitted you weren’t sure how to stop this one, and if – ”

“So you do? Do you realize that, Lucy? Do you still even know what monster means, or understand anything about what’s at stake? I thought we were going to fight Rittenhouse together. I thought that was why you reached out to me, that was everything about what we were doing here. If you’re not going to do that, if you’re going to waste your time and energy trying to help something that wants you dead and will take advantage of your kindness by devouring you more, that’s your lookout. But it makes you entirely expendable to me.”

“Expendable?” Lucy almost chokes. “A few days after you crash into my room in the middle of the night, and have taken advantage of me this entire time to hide from the law, suddenly you’re throwing around threats that I’m the one who isn’t necessary? I never said I was going to stop you from fighting Rittenhouse. I’m not intending to stop either. But if you can’t even see that there might be something important, something vital, in at least trying – ”

“Oh, because you know so much about trying?” Flynn’s lip curls, eyes flashing with an ugly light. He pushes back and gets to his feet, standing over her as she reflexively jerks her knees up, curling into a defensive ball. “Are you going to sit there and tell me I haven’t tried everything I can damn well think of, more than you have any idea about or can possibly tell me? In fact, I get the sense I’m willing to try a lot more than you, pound for pound!”

“Being willing to kill anyone who gets in your way isn’t the same thing!” Lucy’s fingers dig into her calves until they leave marks. She’s not about to give Flynn a simplistic lecture that Murder is Bad, because she doesn’t want to waste her breath, and she knows that in a war, casualties are unavoidable. But that’s just it. She still tries to save it as the last-resort option once everything else is exhausted, and she never wants to get to a place where it’s her first, unfeeling instinct. Not that Flynn is himself a monster. She doesn’t think that; maybe she did briefly, when they met. But his sense of individual right and wrong is either totally disengaged, or has become so skewed as to be essentially non-functional. “What if there was a possibility it was your wife and daughter trapped in that thing? What would you do then? Just say there was no hope, and we should continue trying to destroy it anyway?”

Flynn’s face goes white, then blotchy red. “I already told you not to talk about my family. And I know it isn’t, so unless you have proof – ”

“I need proof now? I need proof? While it doesn’t matter at all for you, apparently? I’ll do it alone if I have to, but if – ”

“I thought you came here to fight Rittenhouse.” Flynn’s voice isn’t quite an outright snarl, but it’s close. “One night of a revenant attack, and suddenly you’re the authority on monster hunting instead. Hard to see what use there is for me, now that you’ve got it all sorted out.”

“For the last time, I didn’t – ” Lucy gets tired of having this argument while cowering in her bed, and throws the covers back, climbs out, and gets in his face, forcing him back a few steps. “Fight Rittenhouse! By all means! Go to Siberia, like we were discussing! You even have henchmen to back you up, other people to help you, so maybe you’re right, you don’t need me after all! If we don’t owe each other anything, and there’s nothing stopping you, then go!”
Flynn stares at her down his long nose with an enraged expression. They continue to lock gazes like a bull and a matador in the ring (if only, Lucy thinks, she did in fact have a sword to prod him with, though she’s already prodded enough) before he whirls away with an exasperated curse. “This revenant-saving idea is the stupidest plan I have ever heard in my life, and – ”

“Well, that’s saying something, isn’t it? Given all of your stupid plans?” Lucy is not about to be judged by the airship-shooting, party-crashing, palace-breaking, Wyatt-kidnapping, generally-going-a-thousand-degrees-too-hot personage of Garcia Flynn, and she feels damn well inclined to let him know it. “You really would be the authority on that, wouldn’t you?”

“Lucy – ” Flynn throws his hands in the air, as if he too has reached the limit of suitable words to express his frustration. “Fine!” he shouts at last. “Get yourself killed, I don’t give a damn!”

“What do you want from me, Flynn?” Lucy has had ideas, one after the other, and yet they have all turned out to be illusions, shifting and elusive, no closer to the truth than she was at the start. “What do you think I was supposed to do? You don’t know me, you don’t know anything about who I really am or what I’ve done. Do you think that just because we have the same enemy, we were in fact forever destined to – I don’t know, you tell me?”

“I don’t want anything from you,” Flynn repeats, as doggedly as he did at the tea party, and in Lucy’s opinion, just about as unconvincingly. “So – ”

“Really? So that’s why you’re acting like I just broke a blood oath to fight by your side until we die?” Lucy feels briefly tempted to give him a good shove, but restrains. “Did you forget that we’re not in fact partners? We’re not even really friends. Unless you’d already rushed ahead and decided that I was now a member of your gang and you could give me orders too? That’s how you’re used to relating to people. You command, they obey. You know what? It doesn’t work like that with me. So get that straight, or get out.”

Flynn continues to eye her with an extremely baleful expression, but there’s something flickering at his mouth that almost might be a proud smile. He bites it at once, leaving Lucy to wonder if she imagined it, and his expression remains just as stormy as before. There is a very unpleasant silence, Lucy realizes that they have been shouting and there is no chance someone else didn’t hear this, and she is going to have a lot of explaining to do later. Then Flynn says, biting off the words with exaggerated, lethal courtesy, “Very well. I’ll take the latter. It has been a delightful visit, Miss Preston. True hospitality. But I do have to be going.”

With that, he sweeps her a viciously sarcastic bow, bends down, and begins picking up the few things he brought with him, yanking on his jacket and shoes, clapping on his hat, and shoving his gun into the holster hard enough that he nearly breaks a strap. Then he strides across the room to her window, pushes it open, and blows her an even more sardonic kiss before vanishing out it. She can hear muffled thumps and crunches as he clambers down the drainpipe, experiences a brief wish that someone will shoot him from a window, and looks out just in time to see him storming through Somerville’s back gate. It slams hard enough to shake.

Lucy stands at the window long after he is out of sight, insides leaden. That could not have gone worse if they tried, and she has the feeling that Flynn, for his part, probably did. Some sort of deliberate sabotage, or a sense of genuine betrayal that she led him on, let him believe they were fighting Rittenhouse together, and then took a sharp left turn into dangerous and highly experimental magic on behalf of the demonic entity that tortured them both last night. That’s – that’s not what happened, it’s not, and Lucy is well aware that she once more disregards Flynn’s warnings about the revenant at her peril. But she has to find a way to deal with it, by one method or another. He said that too. That it wouldn’t stop coming until she was dead, and obviously, that would curtail all future activities, Rittenhouse fighting or otherwise.
Nonetheless, she feels sick and sour and shaken, and keeps glancing out the window as if expecting him to think better of it, come back, and apologize. Of course he doesn’t. He’s probably halfway back to London by now; there are no trains or airship services on the Sabbath, but she would be foolish to think that Flynn is constrained by transport schedules. Probably hijacked another vaucanson, killed some more people, blew up a barn for the fun of it. She doesn’t know. She’s not the horse whisperer for large garbage men. If he gets caught the instant he sets foot in the capital, it is definitely no more than he deserves.

Lucy turns away at last, wondering if it’s permissible to just sleep for the whole day. She still doesn’t feel great, the libraries are closed, and she might as well try to recover in time for Week 1 tomorrow. Nor does she want to go down and explain why she was shouting at an unidentified man in her bedroom, which is certain to be a delight to sort out.

Lucy gets back into bed, wondering if it’s still the case that Dodgson is going to work faster on her mirror, as Flynn said. God, she has to find out what really happened there, or upbraid him for revealing her secrets, but honestly, when faced with Flynn at his most terrifying, she doesn’t blame him for self-preservation measures. Flynn was going to find out one way or another. She might as well get something out of it. If Rufus and Jiya are still there. If anyone is.

Unhappy, restless, sore at heart, she finally goes to sleep.

It is getting late, the ever-present risk of being surveilled means that he has had to wear a hooded sweatshirt, and Rufus figures that he has about one more attempt, if that, before someone calls the cops. He has managed to triangulate Connor’s home address to somewhere in Holland Park, the ultra-rich suburb of Kensington where the one-percenters live in luxury, and the sight of a young black man in a certain sort of clothes provokes a response from affluent and paranoid white people the world over. At least Rufus is less likely to be shot here than he is in the States, but that does not mean that his detention would be pleasant, especially if they dug into the rest of his rap sheet. Half these mansions probably have Rittenhouse ™ Security Systems installed (Our House For Your House) and that, well. That would obviously be a clusterfuck.

Nonetheless, Rufus cannot do anything but try. Ever since Jiya disappeared (disappeared from a room locked from the inside, via something that only seems classifiable as magic) with Jessica Logan, he has been beating down every door, barely short of literally, to find out what happened. He’s gotten squat. And he’s feeling reckless enough that he’s decided that he will force Mason to talk, after Connor went to such lengths to arrange a meeting. Was that a ploy to get Rufus and Jiya to go to Bedlam, and whatever trap was waiting? He gave Rufus the card, told him to look into it. Is this a long con, is this the only way he can help them, does he know, does he know –

Rufus shakes himself. He needs to focus, and he walks along the sidewalk as purposefully as he can, past handsome white-terraced Victorian rowhouses on one side and Lamborghinis and Range Rovers and Mercedes on the other. He checks his phone, where he has managed to sync up some of the heavy-duty hacking he was doing on his laptop this afternoon. This could be Connor’s place, right up here on the corner. If he’s even there, and not at an evil dinner party or whatever. Rufus has no idea how the CEO of Rittenhouse occupies his time, but it’s probably not with a lot of quiet nights at home playing parcheesi.

A car briefly slows on the street as it passes him, and Rufus nervously tries not to glance over or appear more shifty than he already does. He looks straight ahead, does his best not to think about where Jiya is or what might be happening to her, and walks up the steps of the corner house. He thinks about knocking, then decides to speed up the process. He’s already on camera anyway, and being spotted here could backfire on Connor as well as him. Rufus is not in the mood to play around. He shrugs down his hood, and lets whatever CCTV is installed on the porch get a nice
long look at his face.

For several moments, there’s no response. Then there’s the sound of hurried footsteps, several deadbolts unclick, and Connor Mason opens the door in a velour bathrobe, because apparently he too enjoys being a stereotypical billionaire on occasion. Before Rufus can ask if he’s interrupted Connor’s cucumber mask, Mason grabs him by the elbow and bundles him inside, then slams the door behind him. “Rufus!” he hisses. “What the – what on earth are you – ”

“Where’s Jiya?!” Rufus advances on him furiously. “What the hell did you send to Bedlam for Jessica Logan? You have to have a way to communicate with Westworld, so that’s what you’re going to – ”


“Are you really going to pretend you don’t know?”

“I – ” Connor pauses, rubbing a hand over his mouth, and turns away. “I don’t know what happened, actually. Nor what you think you’re playing at by turning up here at my home at ten o’clock at night. It’s dangerous, Rufus, it is bloody dangerous, and if anyone got wind that you were spotted here – ”

“What? They might tow away your second Jaguar?” Rufus has absolutely no patience for Connor’s version of problems. “Maybe subpoena that private yacht? Or – ”

“It would be dangerous for both me and you,” Connor repeats, with a grimness that doesn’t make it seem as if he’s just talking about losing his expensive toys. “I have been doing everything I can to stall Emma and Rittenhouse in Westworld. Telling them to look somewhere else, or try a different application. If my agent can return in time, then it might be different, but – ”


At the look of shock that crosses Connor’s face, Rufus bulls ahead. “Yeah, we visited Bedlam, like you suggested. We met Mrs. Logan there, she said her husband had been sent to Westworld. Not directly, but we read between the lines. Then some kind of weird package arrived for her, it activated, and she and Jiya vanished. Disappeared. Went somewhere else, in this big glow of golden light. I don’t know why it didn’t take me too, but if you do, you had better start talking. Right now. I’m not messing around, Connor.”

Mason’s eyes flick from side to side, as if in search of a cavalry that is definitely not coming. Then he grabs Rufus by the elbow and pulls him through a pair of glass doors into another room, expansive and dark and furnished with low black leather couches, blue-glowing accent lamps, and sleek, polished chrome gadgets that look straight off the bridge of the Enterprise. He beckons Rufus to sit, and Rufus stubbornly remains standing. Mason switches on something that looks like an electronic disruptor, as if to buy them a few moments to speak in privacy, and Rufus wonders if his home is subject to surveillance too, especially if anyone has any whiff that he might not be completely trustworthy. There is a very awkward silence. Then Mason says, “You have to believe me. I don’t know what happened to Jiya.”

“Maybe,” Rufus says. “But you know something. Why is Jessica Logan locked up? What do you use to communicate with Westworld? Is that where they went?”

“The case of Jessica Logan is… complicated, and regrettable. We do not have the leisure of getting into all of it at present. Yes, very well, it was her husband that I sent as my representative to Westworld, when Anthony returned to pick him up.”
Rufus tries not to flinch at the mention of Anthony. He knows that Anthony is also in Westworld with Emma, went there as part of the first delegation, but this seems to hint that Anthony might also be on whatever side Connor is, part of the secret cabal trying to sabotage Rittenhouse from within. It’s making Rufus’ head hurt trying to keep track of all this palace intrigue, the double and possibly triple agents, who is ultimately reporting to who or fighting in service of what cause. “So Anthony made a trip back here with the Mothership, picked Wyatt Logan up, and returned there? Obviously you’ve figured out the calculations for more than one person to travel into that dimension. And the Mothership’s back in Westworld now, with Rittenhouse?”

There’s a pause, as Connor can be seen trying to work out whether it prejudices him in an obvious way to admit that. He must decide it doesn’t, because he says, “Yes.”

“So…” Rufus doesn’t have any obvious way of reaching the Lifeboat and modifying it, because it’s stuck in Westworld wherever Lucy landed it, and while they upgraded it to an indefinite battery with a piece of tech jury-rigged in the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, there’s still the fact of, you know, the alternate dimension. Which Rufus can’t reach without several more pieces of technology that he does not presently possess, and seems unlikely to, unless he robs Connor of them. “Do you think Jiya and Jessica Logan are in Westworld?”

“I have no idea,” Connor repeats. “I can’t be sure. But on balance, it seems likely that they are.”

“So there’s another way to travel there?” Rufus presses. “Without a machine, with just whatever little gizmo Jessica got in the mental asylum mail. And you have some way of talking to Emma, since you said you’ve been stalling them and providing different suggestions. What is it?”

Connor hesitates. At last he says, “It’s called a Refractory-Glass.”

“Where is it? I want to see it.”

“It wouldn’t do you very much good. On my end, it’s just a small specialized mirror. It is attuned to the main glass, which Emma has on her end. It’s not like a satellite that can receive any broadcasting transmission, it can only pick up her channel, so it can’t be used to telephone anyone in Westworld at will. They’re also in the 1880s there, so technology has unavoidable limitations. There is no visual connection, nothing like inter-worldly video chat. The messages are transmitted in something akin to Morse code. A programming language written specifically for the device. Due to the literary fame of its creator, we have dubbed it Jabberwock.”

“Wait,” Rufus says. “Lewis Carroll made your steampunk transistor radio?”

“Actually, yes. His real name is Charles Dodgson, and he is an extremely gifted mathematician and inventor, in Westworld as in our history. He built the Refractory-Glass, and sold it to Anthony for a very handsome sum. Anthony brought my end of the device when he came to pick up Wyatt Logan. Before that, we could only communicate with him serving as an actual courier, traveling from one reality to the other with messages, but it is dangerous to attempt too many cross-dimensional trips. It collapses wave-function in irregular ways, and destabilizes the fabric of the universe. Think of it, if you will, as a load-bearing wall increasingly poked through with holes, like Swiss cheese. Eventually the structural integrity fails, and everything implodes.”

“Oh wow.” Rufus rolls his eyes. “Rittenhouse might destroy the world? Never saw that coming.”

“Not just the world,” Connor cautions. “The entire multiverse, the system of realities and potentialities organized along the quantum chain. That includes not just our world and Westworld, but many thousands of existences that we have no way of accessing or comprehending. That is one of the arguments I’ve been using to stall Emma, that we have to allow time for the cosmic fabric to heal itself, before we attempt any more journeys either way.”
“Doesn’t Lady Voldemort want that? Destruction, chaos, end of the world, whatever?”

“No.” Connor flashes a thin, mirthless smile. “She doesn’t want to destroy the universe, she just wants to control it. It’s no fun winning the war if you have no kingdom left to rule, after all. In any event, the healing process, and unlimited journeys, would be much sped up once they have their hands on a suitable quantity of aether. So it is rather a double-edged sword. The longer I keep them there, the more time they have to search for the instrument of ultimate power.”

“Great.” Rufus rubs both hands over his face. He doesn’t want to suggest that they just inflict Rittenhouse on Westworld instead, because then they could easily become powerful enough to take over the whole multiverse, not just one of its branches. “You helped them do this, Connor? You signed off on all of it? Sure, you’re telling me this now, but why? Just trying to assuage your guilty conscience, or stall me too, or what? What?”

Connor flinches. Finally he says, “I too am trying to save the world, in whatever path or ability may be open to me. You don’t have to believe me, and I am well aware that I have not done much to merit it. It is possible that I cannot be forgiven. But Rufus, please don’t meddle with what you don’t – ”

“With what I don’t understand?” Rufus almost laughs. “I’ve been fighting this war for years now. The love of my life is missing. She might be in the freaky magical alternate reality you helped send the Death Eaters to, elaborate justifications or otherwise. But no, clearly, the best course of action for me here is to sit back and trust you’ve got it figured out. Right.”

“I deserve that,” Mason acknowledges. “One moment.”

With that, he turns on his expensively slipper-shod heel and leaves the room. Rufus watches tensely, half-expecting that Mason went to call the cops and/or his private-security team, or someone else he won’t like. Despite himself, he’s half-convinced that Mason is telling the truth about working to delay, frustrate, and thwart Rittenhouse in the guise of their top executive, and it might actually be true that there’s some value in his efforts. But to Rufus’s mind, this could have all been avoided if Connor had the spine to openly defect, to flatly put his foot down and leave this world, his fortune, his life, his reputation, rather than trying to spin it both ways. Rufus knows that the seductive lure is strong, that Connor has built all his wealth from scratch and now lives here, in this uber-deluxe London mansion, rather than sitting and watching as his Jamaican-immigrant mother cleaned one. But Rufus and Jiya and Lucy have given up everything and then some in this war, and Rufus, at this point, can’t really respect anyone who won’t.

After several minutes, Mason returns with a sleek black flash drive, which he hands over to Rufus. “This has the schematics,” he says tersely. “For my end of the Refractory-Glass and the Jabberwock code, and for the calculations that we used to modify the Mothership to take multiple passengers. If you can work it out, godspeed, but remember what I said. The quantum fabric is fragile, you cannot muck about with it. I’m sorry about what happened to Jiya, I am. But I don’t believe that she would want you to put the fate of the entire multiverse at stake by recklessly crashing after her. If you reckon how to save her safely, then do, but otherwise – ”

“And what?” Rufus stares at him loathingly. “Don’t risk any more trips on our end, but let Rittenhouse take as many as they want? To come back, and find you all ready to – ”

Connor looks as if he’s weighing up his words, deciding whether or not to speak. Then he says, “If Rittenhouse arrives back here in the Mothership with a viable cargo of aether, and there is no other option, I am prepared to blow up our headquarters and everyone inside them, including myself. I don’t know that it would permanently cripple our global operation, but it would certainly be a very stringent setback. It would, if nothing else, deprive them of the time machine and the
magical substance that could enable them to change reality, or so I very much hope. I do not want to be responsible for the deaths of so many people, especially given as plenty of our employees think they work for a successful international philanthropy outfit and feel proud of what they do and the people they believe they are helping. Nor do I especially want to die. But that is the choice I have made, Rufus, and if the time comes, will follow through upon. So I suggest, even as you may disdain me, that you do not pass hasty judgment upon what I’ve done, the sins I have committed and may yet still, and what, indeed, I am prepared to sacrifice.”

Rufus discovers that his mouth is open, and shuts it. He and Mason stare at each other for another long, fraught moment. Then Rufus nods once, stiffly, and turns to go. Walks out of the room, down the hall to the front door, and after a long look to check that the coast is clear, flees out into the night.

Flynn returns to London in a vindictively charblack mood. He had more close calls than he cared for getting out of Oxford, he’s still going to have to spend time digging his gang up from wherever they’ve gone to earth, figure out how to get them to Siberia, and whatever else. Not to mention that he is obsessively replaying the argument with Lucy in his head, worrying at it like a tongue at a missing tooth. It’s a foolish thing she’s suggesting, foolish and sentimental and entirely without logical basis, and it’s probably going to get her killed. Flynn said they had to destroy the revenant, not hold its hand and help it out of its monster melancholy. He thought they were going to work together. Be a real team. Instead, she’s chosen the ball of sentient evil energy that nearly killed her, after he offered himself up to it on her behalf, and that apparently is worth nothing either. Fine. Altogether her choice. He wishes her bloody well of it.

Flynn is still fuming as he ditches his stolen hackney in a back alley in Whitechapel (its previous owner is now dead in a ditch) and tries to figure out how to move around without instantly being spotted. His odds of detection here are a lot worse than they were in Oxford, and even getting to the docks and asking Blavatsky to make him a new shtuchka is a dangerous journey. Besides, he doesn’t want to think what the bastard would charge for this one, knowing that Flynn urgently needs it, and he is, at present, quite skint. There was a little money in the hackney, but only the day’s takings, and nothing enough to cover that. Besides, he might need it for other reasons.

At last, Flynn decides that his only option is to go underground as fast as possible, though they will not be pleased to see him there either. He has brought more attention on the London underworld than it has been forced to endure for years, as there is otherwise an unspoken arrangement that if they leave the peelers alone, the peelers will leave them alone, or at least be willing to accept plenty of money for that end. As Flynn noted earlier, corruption is fairly systematic in the Metropolitan ranks, but even they cannot be bribed enough to overlook a direct attack on the Queen and break-in at the Palace. Not to mention everything else Flynn has gotten up to recently, and Rittenhouse whispering in their ear. He’s already gotten himself reviled in the Croft, and if the other gang bosses join forces to take him down, that would be bad. Again, that is why it is fucking advisable to go to Russia for a while, immediately.

Flynn finds a hatch down into the tunnels, descends a rusted ladder into the subterranean murk, and jumps the last few rungs, landing with a thump in thick mud. He wrinkles his nose at the smell – home sweet home – and sets off, trying to keep his focus on the search for his men and not rehearsing all the things he wishes he had said to Lucy. He should have impressed more upon her what a stupid idea it is, the multifarious ways in which she can get herself inventively killed, and will if she doesn’t leave it off. She has no idea how to handle a revenant in any sense of the word, that much is clear. And she thought – she actually thinks –

Flynn is so absorbed with his inner argument that he almost walks past the tunnel from which distant voices emanate – voices that, once he stops and listens, definitely sound familiar. He
shoves the fetch of Lucy aside, turns in that direction, ducks through several low archways, and thus finds himself on the wrong end of half a dozen guns, as the men jump up and grab for their weapons on the unannounced arrival of an intruder. The light is bad, and Flynn does not want to wait for them to work it out on their own. “Stand down, you idiots! It’s me!”

“Boss?” There is a communal goggling and disbelief among the lot – the Taylors, Shitmouth, their Chinese fixer Li Xiao (his brother owns an opium den in Covent Garden, which is a convenient spot to acquire information and blackmail), and a few others. “What are – what’re you doing here? We thought you were – ”

“I’m not,” Flynn snaps. “Where’s Karl?”

“Dunno,” Taylor senior says. “Went out this morning and hasn’t returned. We thought it was wise to lay low, what with us presently fallin’ like flies – first you, then Karl, and they nabbed poor Sullivan earlier as well. How the fuck did you get back to London?”

“Never mind that.” Flynn nods at them sharply, since a few of them still haven’t put down their guns, and they sheepishly do so. “We’re going to Russia. We’ll have to find a way to convince the Sokolovs to get us out. Well?”

The gang exchanges looks, as if he seems to be expecting them to jump into action and pack their suitcases on the spot, and they aren’t sure whether they are going to or not. Finally Shitmouth says, “We thought as you’d be in a better mood, surely?”

“Well?” Flynn has no time for whatever the plank is on about now. “Why would I be in a good mood after running for it?”

“Didn’t you go off to the American bird?” Naturally, Shitmouth is oblivious to the extremely thin ice he is skating on. “And you know – have a bit of the old rumpy-pumpy?”

“Wh – ” Flynn doesn’t know what’s more absurd, that they all seem to know (or at least guess) that he went to take refuge with Lucy, or that they are all assuming he got a few good lays out of it. “No, that is not what happened. Not in the least. Now shut up before I kill you.”

Shitmouth may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but even he has enough sense not to miss that tone in Flynn’s voice, and makes himself very busy for their upcoming getaway to St. Petersburg. At least Flynn thinks that’s where they will go, as their smuggling contacts on the Wapping docks, the brothers Anton and Gennady Sokolov, have friends in the tsars’ capital, and it will also be the place to start gathering information about Rittenhouse’s involvement with the Siberian railway. They’ll have to get a spot on one of the cargo airships, since they don’t dare take the passenger service, but the Sokolovs owe Flynn a favor, and they don’t want to endanger their most prolific distributor of Marxist literature in England. They’ll get him out. Probably.

By glaring and threatening and similar measures, Flynn manages to cudgel the gang into preparing to depart, and as another hour goes by with no sign of Karl, decides that if he doesn’t come back soon, they’ll just have to leave without him. Karl is a competent enough right-hand man, if only one whose loyalty is bought with money (Flynn still misses Stiv, is never going to find another like him), but he’s not irreplaceable. As far as skills go, Li Xiao is probably the best choice for a replacement, but he is not really a full-fledged member, has other interests and loyalties outside the gang, and Flynn wants to avoid any more compromised or divided aims in the chain of command. Damn it, where is Karl? It’s unlike him to be so clumsy as to get caught.

At last, just as Flynn is on the brink of giving the order for them to head out to Wapping, there’s a rustling in the tunnel, and his disheveled henchman clambers out. He sees that the boss is back, stops short, and gets a look on his face that is something less than unqualified delight. They stare
at each other. Then Karl says, “Well then. Apparently you made it back.”

“Yes,” Flynn grunts. “Now get your things together, we’re leaving.”

Karl has worked for Flynn long enough to know not to waste time in frivolous and unwanted questions, and economically prepares for the trip. The gang strategically staggers their departure, heading for different routes through the tunnels, and Flynn jerks his head at Karl, ordering him to follow. Karl pauses, then does.

They take the tunnels as far as they can, until they have almost reached the closest egress from the system into Wapping. If all goes well, they will be hidden aboard an airship before the night is out, on the way out of this godforsaken country and en route to Russia, and Flynn makes a mental note to kill several Russians once he gets there, because he needs the stress relief and he doesn’t like Russians anyway. But before they start up the ladder, he turns to Karl. “Where were you today? Did something happen?”

Karl pauses. Then he says, “Went to visit Lady Lovelace, actually. Had a suspicion about where you were. She was so kind as to confirm it.”

“You went to – ?” Flynn is almost sorry he missed that, if only for the expression that was sure to have been on Mr. Woolsey’s face. “Well, that was a stupid idea.”

“Makes us square, doesn’t it?” Karl’s eyes gleam in the shadows. “Given what you’ve been up to, wouldn’t you say?”

Flynn gives him a cold stare that reminds him that he, Flynn, is the alpha, he, Karl, is the beta, and this is not up for discussion. “That’s it? Anything else?”

“Nope,” Karl says. “Had a little trouble getting away, so I had to hide for a while, but that was it. So are we going or what?”

“Yes, we are.” After another pause, Flynn turns and starts climbing the ladder. He can hear the distant hum of airships at the docks above, and hopes that a cargo transport will leave before dawn, or at least provide a way for them to sneak aboard. He’ll have to find the Sokolovs, roust them out of a whorehouse most likely, but that is the next problem. He is getting out of here, and he is not looking back. No reason to.

None whatsoever.
Lucy works brutally hard for the next several weeks. She’s finally teaching again, which is surreal enough on its own, and while she doesn’t know what will come of inspiring gently bred young Victorian ladies to burn down the patriarchy, she also doesn’t care. She can’t do it openly, of course, but her lectures quickly develop a reputation as shocking, which is at least good for attendance. Looking at these debutantes with their upswept hair and lace collars and cameo brooches, staring back at her in fascination, horror, or both, Lucy feels ever more like a curio on show, a traveling magician here to astound the locals in a way much deeper than her obvious Americanness. And yet, she feels incredibly protective of these sheltered girls, half of whom have only been allowed to attend Somerville because their families think it will be useful for attracting a husband if she can display her intellectual refinements. They will not grow up in her history, in her world, but she is going to fight for their future anyway.

Then again, it’s not just Lucy’s lectures that have acquired a reputation. Her irregular marital situation is also the subject of whispered campus gossip, which she really can’t disprove at this point without getting herself into even more trouble. Obviously, people did overhear the argument with Flynn, and since Lucy already told Sophia about and introduced her to “Mr. Preston,” she’s basically stuck into the lie. Madeleine Shaw is a little confused why Lucy never mentioned a husband in any of their correspondence, so Lucy has to come up with a story about it being a recent marriage, which clearly leads half of them to suspect that she indecorously got herself in the family way and had to take urgent steps not to be totally disgraced. They also strongly suspect that her husband is a swine – if not for the shouting, since a man has the right to chastise his wife, blah blah misogyny blah, then certainly because he is incapable of using doors and windows for their God-given purpose, and the numerous, numerous other ways in which his visit appears to have breached the all-important etiquette. Oh lord. It is for the best that they don’t know the half of it, but that won’t stop them making it up.

For her part, Lucy has absolutely no idea what to think about any of that any more. It took a few days for the effects of the revenant to fully wear off, and yet it left her feeling even worse. From the perspective of somewhat more objective hindsight, she can admit that Flynn wasn’t wrong to think it was a dangerous and unwelcome diversion from their purpose of fighting Rittenhouse – and she was the one who recruited him for that first, after all. She had somehow gotten used enough to him to tell him about Amy and other sensitive details of her past, expect that he would help her do something about it, and – admittedly after he told her she was expendable first – tell him to help out or hit the highway. Blamed him for being stubborn and headstrong and utterly unwilling to listen to advice or just objections, which yes, yes, he is. But for that matter, so is she. She’s gotten used to working alone, of deciding on a course and following through, and she, Rufus, and Jiya were always in essential agreement anyway. She’s never had someone like Flynn, who is on the same side of the war but so far away from automatically following or supporting her. It’s unsettling and unpleasant, but it’s also a wake-up call, like a slap across the face or cold water over the head. Is she doing the right thing? Would she even know?

Lucy knows that it might be another effect of the revenant to trick her into wanting to help it, instead of stopping it, and she dutifully tries to adjust for this possibility in her plans. Maybe before she does anything either way, she should go back to London, find Priscilla, and see if she can contact Amy again. Maybe Amy can tell her more about her situation, and selfishly, Lucy longs with her entire being to have a real conversation with her sister. But she can’t. Not yet.

The other strange and uncomfortable effect of this whole situation is that Lucy has found herself actually missing Flynn. How, she can’t put her finger on, or even why. He certainly was nothing but trouble when he was around, tended to aggravate most situations as a general principle, and is
so blunt that he could probably be used as a battering ram (and so, for that matter, could his head). But she feels guilty about telling him they weren’t partners, and was already subconsciously counting on his help with the revenant situation, however grudging. He already pulled it off her once. She thought he’d endorse a longer-term solution. No, she doesn’t know about magic or monsters or any of it, but if Amy… but if Amy…

Intellectually, Lucy knows she made a mistake. She grasped too quickly onto something she doesn’t understand, made a rash and emotional decision, blew it with her one tentative ally as a result, and now she may or may not ever see him again. However, she shouldn’t discount Flynn’s uncanny ability to turn up in the most random places, so the odds are at least decent that she will. Whether or not he’ll hold a grudge is harder to say. He clearly feels bait-and-switched, and Siberia may cool him down literally but not metaphorically. Has he found anything about Rittenhouse’s plans for the railway? Would he even tell her if he had, or does he see himself once more as a solo agent?

Lucy does not have any answers for these questions, and dedicates herself to continuing her research on revenants and aether, which takes up most of her time apart from class. She spends long hours in the Bod and the Radcliffe Camera, poring over their most obscure books, incunabula, texts, treatises, and manuscripts, and while she’s gotten a crash course in Latin abbreviations, obscure alchemical ramblings, and cryptic marginalia that she is not enough of a medievalist to interpret or decipher, she is not much closer to cracking the puzzle than when she began. After all, it takes years and years of magical education to make any systematic sense of the vast corpus of its literature, and she is being naïve to the point of absurdity by thinking she can crack it in a fortnight or two with nothing more than really wanting to. Maybe she’s just pretending it’s helping, and letting Rittenhouse run amok in the meantime.

The only connecting tissue that Lucy can identify is that quite often, authors across the spectrum of her reading use the same thing as a citation. She can’t always understand what they’re talking about, since her Latin is very basic, but it crops up enough to catch her eye. It’s a monogram of three initials – *CvS* – and a doodle of some kind of bird. The dubious artistic ability of the various writers means that it is impossible to tell which bird. It is, so far as Lucy can tell, used as a self-evident referent that would probably make sense to anyone from this world, but doesn’t mean anything to her. It’s only in “A Briefe & Generall Historie of the Noble Art of Alchemye” from 1542, which is neither brief nor general, that she finds it referred to in more detail. The author laments that “the loss of *Corvinus* maketh it Impossibele to say” whether whatever he is trying is going to work, and draws a larger picture of the bird. This time, Lucy is pretty sure it’s a raven.

*Corvinus*, she thinks. Yes, that means “raven” or “belonging to the raven” in Latin, so if there’s a bygone famous magician with that name, maybe he has a bunch of lost spells that his followers are trying to reconstruct without success. It sounds glancingly familiar for some other reason as well, but Lucy can’t bring it to mind. Besides, this is still just a scholarly tangent that is very interesting, but cannot be proved in any way to connect to Rittenhouse whatsoever. And yet, whatever she found about disenchanting a revenant or releasing its trapped souls or anything else always ended in the *CvS* monogram. If there is magic anywhere for doing what she wants to do, it is bound up with the mystery of Corvinus.

It’s getting well along in fall by now – it’s late October – and the days are shorter and greyer, the sun gone by a little past five o’clock and not rising until comparatively late the next morning. With increasingly long hours of darkness, Lucy is very careful about being outside at night, and takes her gun wherever she goes. She’s managed to fit it with a new kind of bullets that are supposed to stop ordinary magical beasties, but she still doesn’t want to take her chances. If the revenant *does* come back, she might be forced to kill it before knowing if it has anything to do with Amy, but she’d rather not.
It is Halloween morning when Lucy, at breakfast in the Great Hall, is handed an envelope from the porter, and opens it to find a note from Dodgson. He has finished her device, the Refractory-Glass as he calls it, and wonders if she would wish to visit this evening to attempt its first operation. As has been known since the pagan feast of Samhain, All Hallows Eve is the day on which all worlds are closest, and he thinks it would be easiest to obtain a connection tonight.

Lucy agrees, though not without brief misgivings, and sends the porter to convey her response to Dodgson. It’s Monday, so she has classes and tutorials all morning, though the students are chatting about their plans for tonight and don’t pay much attention. Young gentlemen get to go a-soulin’, door to door in search of small sweets or money in the precursor to modern trick-or-treating, but young ladies will have to content themselves with séances and costume balls and other appropriately private activities. One of them asks if Mrs. Preston has any engagements for the evening, in the tone of voice that means they hope she will do something really outré.

Alas, Lucy must disappoint her, though she supposes that trying to make contact with a parallel universe would certainly count as beyond the pale. She is distracted for most of the afternoon as well, trying not to get too invested in the thought of actually speaking to Rufus and Jiya soon, though she doesn’t know if it’s even possible to patch the connection through. They won’t have one on their end, after all. Has Dodgson thought of that?

At last, she heads up to her room at the end of the afternoon, changes into something rather witchy – black and high-necked and makes her look like a heroine straight out of a gothic novel – and slips her gun in for the twilight walk from Somerville to Christ Church. The streetlamps are balls of amber glow, bells are sounding, the wind is blowing, she can hear the distant strains of a soulin’ song, and it could not be more atmospheric and eerily lovely and spooky if it tried. She passes the church of St. Mary Magdalene and its ancient graveyard on her way up to Cornmarket, and tries not to glance too long, to see if anything is moving in the shadows.

Lucy reaches Christ Church without being set upon by ghoulie or ghostie, heads to Dodgson’s rooms, and knocks. He answers after a few moments, looking nervous. “Ah, Mrs. Preston. How are you this evening? Settling – settling into Oxford well, I hope?”

Lucy assures him that she is, as Dodgson asks after Mr. Preston in a way that makes it clear he is doing it to be courteous and not because he really hopes she will volunteer the information, and Lucy likewise offers platitudes about Mr. Preston’s health and general vivacity. It catches her with unexpected poignancy in the gut. She has no idea where Flynn is, or what he’s doing. The papers have piped down a bit, which probably means he’s followed through and bailed out to Russia, but even that is only a guess. Maybe she really was too hard on him. He did save her life.

“Mrs. Preston?” Dodgson says, making her jump. “Would you like to inspect the apparatus?”

Lucy turns around quickly, agrees that she does, and follows him to where he has set it on a table, a complicated confection of wires, tubes, plate-glass panels, and other intricate mechanical Rube Goldberg-esque extensions that connect to a small typewriter. The keys on it aren’t English – or for that matter, Morse code, which would be her other guess for a telegraph machine. Dodgson says it is a special register of language for the device. “One of, ah, one of my other clients rather wittily dubbed it Jabberwock. For the poem.”

“One of your other clients?” Lucy eyes him in surprise and slight suspicion. After all, Dodgson hasn’t mentioned other clients, or that he’s made Refractory-Glasses for anyone apart from her. Once again, she wonders what exactly Flynn said to him during their little chat, and how he got Dodgson to so drastically speed up his completion date from Christmas. “Who else have you made one of these for?”

Dodgson coughs. “I, ah, I sold a rough prototype to an interested collector, when I first conceived
of the idea, a few years previously. I daresay it isn’t likely to be fully functional, and I did have to conduct further extensive modifications for yours. Shall we power it on?”

Not waiting for an answer, he leans forward and touches a conductor switch, starting a blue spark of electricity, as Lucy frowns at him – damn, Lewis Carroll, why you gotta be so shady? But at least he has presented her with a complete and presumably working version, and Lucy makes a mental note to ask him for a full rubric of Jabberwock later, so she can study it herself and ensure accuracy in any transmissions or translations. The spark continues to travel from branch to branch, coil to coil, with a certain precision that is enjoyable to watch, and finally ignites a strip of phosphor beneath the mirror, reflecting a hot white glow that builds like a miniature supernova. Dodgson beckons Lucy back. “I would not look at it directly, Mrs. Preston.”

There’s a distant crackling and hissing like a badly tuned radio array trying to pick up a signal, as the lamps in Dodgson’s room flicker and sputter out. Lucy’s hair is practically standing on end from an ambient charge of static electricity, so that she might set the whole place on fire if she suddenly picked up a fork, and she clenches her fists, feeling a faint fizz between her fingers. It’s not entirely painful, but it’s a relentless pressure in her chest, like a balloon being blown up between her ribs and squashing her lungs. The air has a distinct reek of ozone, and she coughs.

Dodgson fiddles with the dials, reducing some of the glow on the mirror, and the constriction in Lucy’s chest eases slightly. It’s hard to tell if this is actually working, but Dodgson strikes a few keys, sending some sort of test message into the void. The void does not answer. Of course not.

“Well,” Dodgson says, after a few more alterations and repetitions produce the same result. “We have established a connection, but I don’t think there is any way to specifically raise your friends just now, alas. Perhaps if I was allowed more time to refine the design – ”

Just as he’s reaching for the off switch, the various bulbs and tubes and fibers light up like a Christmas tree, the sheet of paper fed into the typewriter is cranked down, and the inked keys hammer out a short message. Dodgson pulls it out of the rollers with the look of a man who was sort of hoping that wouldn’t work, and Lucy moves at once to glance down over his shoulder. The characters are something like Wingdings or hieroglyphs, presumably continuing the Jabberwock theme. “What does that say?”

“It says – ” Dodgson clears his throat. “It says, Receiving. Please identify. RC.”

“RC?” Lucy’s heart skips a physical beat. “Rufus? Rufus Carlin?” She didn’t think that there was any way for the message to get through, but then, she might have underestimated Rufus’ genius and resourcefulness. “Tell him it’s LP. How long does the transmission take?”

“It is entirely relative.” Dodgson, brow furrowed, begins to peck at the keys in a way reminding Lucy of how everyone’s grandmother types. “After all, the Refractory-Glass must transit not only space, but time, so our outgoing messages must arrive in the future of another dimension and his incoming ones must reach the past of same. Encoding and re-coding that information through multiple governing mathematical and physical properties is not a certain science.”

Lucy supposes that this is true, and she’s waited long enough to contact Rufus and Jiya that she can wait a few minutes more, but she is afire with anticipation and anxiety and can’t hold still as Dodgson finishes the message and sends it out into the quantum ether. It is the most nerve-wracking wait she’s possibly ever had. Then the keys start to hammer, another sheet of paper is rolled in and struck upon, and when Dodgson pulls it out, it is discovered to read, Princess Leia, this is Yavin 4. Come in, Princess Leia.

Tears spring to Lucy’s eyes as she presses her hands to her mouth, smiling and crying at the same time – yes, oh God, yes, it is definitely Rufus. She has to take several moments to compose herself
before she can dictate an answer, though she wants to pour out with all her questions and sheer relief and telling him how good it is to hear his “voice” for the first time in months. It is agonizing to have to wait for Dodgson to tap it in, the transmission to go out, and for the reply to come in, but considering just how massively far apart they are, a lag time of six to seven minutes isn’t that bad. Yet Rufus’s return message punches through her euphoria almost as fast as it’s arrived, and makes her stomach drop. Jiya missing. Several weeks. May be in WW too.

“Jiya’s miss – ?” Lucy briefly forgets that he can’t hear her, and stares accusingly at Dodgson, as if there’s a chance he’s intentionally mistranslating the message. There are far too many questions that she can’t easily get an answer to, and she cables back, Confirm Jiya missing? Possibly HERE? How ??

Long story. Rufus’s response takes longer to spit through, and the keys skate and shake more wildly, as if the connection is starting to weaken. Chance u kno a Wyatt Logan?

Shock lurches through Lucy from head to toe – not quite as much as it would be if she didn’t already know that Wyatt was also from home, but it still gives her a turn. Rufus must have dug into Wyatt’s origins on his end, maybe spied on Mason or something, and come to the realization that someone else made it here – to Westworld, as Rufus dubbed it before Lucy’s departure. Yes met him, she sends back, wishing Dodgson would type faster than a retiree responding to a Nigerian-prince email scam. On our side?

NnOtr surare. Unless Rufus is also innovating a new programming language, the connection is definitely flaking out. Trying 2 find wayyyy ini, but dangerous. Look4 Jiy. Breaki up. Loveu.

Love you, Lucy sends back, practically pushing Dodgson out of the way in her desperation to transmit it before the connection is lost. There’s another pop and spark as the phosphor strip burns out and the mirror goes dark, as the various chugging and banging and spinning parts whir to a halt. Lucy presses her knuckles to her mouth again, trying to reconcile her euphoria at communicating with Rufus with her disappointment that it was so brief, and left so many disturbing questions. As well, there is the unavoidable fact that Dodgson was privy to all the transmissions, and while Lucy doesn’t distrust him, exactly, she also isn’t entirely sure that she trusts him. Flynn said that Dodgson let a few things slip when he came to visit, clearly including the fact that she’s from 2017, but what else?

“Can you reboot the machine?” Lucy asks. “For another try?”

Dodgson squints at her, not understanding her usage of “reboot,” though he can probably guess it from context. “I’m afraid not. It will take time to reset each of the components and to obtain a proper calculation for the conjunction. As well, the phosphor is very volatile, so I keep only small quantities in my laboratory at any one time. I hope that I have at least proved its functionality to your satisfaction?”

“Yes,” Lucy acknowledges, “you have, and I’m very grateful for that. But I’m also getting the feeling that you may not have been entirely honest with me. You said you had other clients, other people using this too. Do you want to tell me who they are, or should I guess?”

“Mrs. Preston – ” Dodgson smiles uncomfortably. “Professional confidentiality – ”

“ – doesn’t really exist right now,” Lucy finishes, cool and flatly. She’s not going to actually pull a gun on him, but perhaps it’s not so bad if he thinks the possibility is on the table, and lays a hand casually on her bag. “So?”

There’s an expression on Dodgson’s face similar to when he saw Flynn shoot the revenant for the first time, and as he looks at her, Lucy can tell that he’s seeing exactly what he thinks drew the
two of them together. He’s wrong, of course, since she and Flynn are no longer together in any sense of the word, but somehow she doesn’t mind being thought capable of his same ferocity. Within limits, of course. But still.

“I’m surprised your husband did not tell you,” Dodgson says, after another moment. “As I… related to him upon his visit, I sold another of the devices after its first patent, to a gentleman of the Royal Aetherographic Society. A Mr. Anthony Bruhl.”

“Anthony?” Lucy is briefly outraged that Flynn in fact did not tell her any of this, though he has no reason to know that Anthony is part of Emma’s cohort. Well, with Wyatt being here, that makes sense, even if she wants to shake Dodgson for being such a weasel. “Have you reported on me, in any way? To Mr. Bruhl, or anyone he knows?”

“I was…” Dodgson looks grudging. “Obligated to provide updates on anyone else interested in the technology, by the terms of the contract of the sale. But at the same moment he urged me to work on your device with my best speed, your husband made clear that doing so would have unpleasant consequences for me. Really, he did not tell you any of this?”

“Mr. Preston and I… quarreled.” It’s the truth, and might explain why she is out of the loop. Lucy can tell that Dodgson is healthily terrified of Flynn and that is what is getting him to fess up at all, so she isn’t going to disavow that connection now. She also doesn’t know what to make of the revelation that Flynn threatened Dodgson to finish her mirror and to avoid making any report to Rittenhouse. “He departed after that. We haven’t spoken in several weeks.”

“Oh. I’m – very sorry.”

Lucy nods, unsure why her throat briefly feels too thick to respond. There is a long and awkward silence, until Dodgson rallies. “Well, then. Is there anything else I can do for you this evening?”

“No, thank you.” Lucy rises to her feet, gathering up the precious sheets of Rufus’ transmissions. “Except for a copy of the Jabberwock code book. I’ll be checking these for accuracy.”

Dodgson looks briefly miffed at the fact that she’s not just taking his word for it, but seems to decide that he doesn’t have much of a leg to stand on. He more or less graciously furnishes her with a thick stack of programming manifests that Lucy will have to grit her teeth and try to plug through. She’s almost getting the hang of the confusing old manuscripts, but she is not a science or math person, so half of this will fly over her head anyway. But she needs to be sure. Rufus said that Jiya was missing, and that for some reason, he thinks there’s a chance she’s here, here, in Westworld. But without any more information, that is completely impossible to narrow down. Here, as in this dimension, this year, this country? Lucy can’t track across all of 1887 steampunk planet Earth on such slender surety, but if Jiya is here somewhere –

Lucy is troubled and distracted as she slips the papers into her satchel, pulls on her hat and coat, and takes a very firm grip on her pistol before she ventures anywhere. Halloween night is a bit of an ephemeral space in any reality, and especially in this one. She is hyper-vigilant to the possibility of the revenant’s return, and there is no Flynn to save her bacon this time. Lucy even went to the covered market the other day and purchased some amulet intended to ward off evil, which feels impossibly superstitious, but she needs to start taking it more seriously. Wearing some supposed relic of the pharaohs, a charm to ensure safe passage through the underworld, is better than a second go-round with that. Even if there’s a whispering voice in her head that if it did attack her again, she could try to make a conscious effort to see if Amy was in there.

Nonetheless, though it completely shreds her nerves, Lucy makes it back to Somerville without being attacked from one quarter or another. She then bars the door and sits nervously half-awake for the remainder of the night, before crashing just before dawn and almost sleeping through her
morning tutorials. It’s the first of November, grey and blustery, the daylight short and getting shorter, and she yet again catches herself thinking that it’s probably not very nice in Russia at this time of year either. God, she needs to stop. She’s not pining, that’s absurd.

Lucy finishes the week with no more unusual incidents, though she’s so busy with teaching that she doesn’t have time to do more than a cursory review of Rufus’ messages. As far as she can tell, Dodgson did transcribe them accurately, his fear of Flynn keeping him in line, and she starts to wonder if she can afford to come back to Somerville next semester. This has been an oddly but deeply enjoyable hiatus, a simulacrum of her old life, and she doesn’t regret that she’s done it. She has gotten some good information and it’s been nice to wake up in one place for a while. As well, she loves Oxford, she loves it, she just feels right here, somehow. It will kill her to leave it. But she would be foolish to think that everything else is settling down just because she is. She needs to get back to the real world, the fight. Go back to London over the Christmas break; Ada will doubtless be happy to let her stay. See how it’s shaping up, and if there’s any news of Flynn.

(That is not the only reason she wants to go back, and yet. It keeps crossing her mind.)

That Saturday, the fifth of November, is Bonfire Night, which means the working-class children of Oxford get to have their own version of Halloween, collecting wood and bits and bobs and ha’pennies to build the biggest fire and march their painted Guys through the streets. (The more well-to-do gentry patronizingly regard it as a nice chance for the poor folk to enjoy themselves, but prefer to stay away from any too-coarse festivities.) There are some magical fireworks, dragons breathing gouts of golden sparks and bursting Catherine-wheels of color, and by now, Lucy isn’t too fussed about being regarded as proper; she’s pretty sure that ship sailed long ago. She puts on her hat, scarf, and jacket, grabs her bag, and heads out.

The wind is brisk and chilly, scraping her cheeks and sending dead leaves cartwheeling across the cobblestones, as boys in tweed caps run by with hoops and sticks and a painted effigy of someone who – as Lucy looks at it twice – in fact appears to be Flynn. They’ve given him a prominent nose and a menacing scowl, which is not wrong, but while Bonfire Night effigies are normally reserved for hated politicians and then burned accordingly, this one doesn’t seem destined for burning. In fact, to judge from the way the boys are parading it admiringly around, Garcia Flynn is quickly turning into an anti-establishment folk hero, the same as Guy Fawkes. They even share the same initials, and a propensity for blowing up important parts of the British government (or at least trying). It’s possible, Lucy reflects, that one of the reasons he hasn’t been caught, either now or in the two years he’s been operating in London, is because the Victorian underclass is so large, so deprived and dispossessed, and probably really doesn’t mind seeing someone, even a foreigner crime boss, poking the system in the eye and causing headaches for their rich, oblivious imperial overlords in their rich, oblivious lives. Of course the papers hate Flynn, but the common people aren’t so sure.

Lucy bites her lip on a smile, and makes her way to Duke Humfrey’s Library in the Bod. She has finally figured out which manuscript she wants to look at, a rare one buried deep in the listings, and it might shed more light on the mysterious Corvinus. She goes inside, presents her reader card, and as she’s waiting for the manuscript to be brought up, paces restlessly. Maybe there’s some way to contact Flynn. She can’t just wing a message in the general direction of Russia in hopes that a wanted fugitive will pick it up, and yet. She wants to see him again, she wants to apologize, she wants to see if they can still be partners. He’s been prickly and standoffish and difficult, to say the damn least, but she can’t let that get in the way. She needs, she needs –

Lucy is so preoccupied with her thoughts that she almost doesn’t hear the library gate opening behind her, the smart click of heeled boots on polished floorboards, and turns too slowly, only when she hears a revolver clunk. It takes her a moment to connect it, and then she whirls around.
“Hello, princess.” Emma Whitmore flashes a sharklike smile at her. “I thought it was time for us to actually talk, don’t you?”

Lucy’s tongue feels glued to the roof of her mouth. The closest she’s been to Emma was in Mr. Li’s opium den, right after Wyatt rescued her from the tocker, and that half-felt like a poppy dream itself. She can’t quite reconcile the fact that the two of them are here, staring at each other dead in the eye, in an elegant old reading room in an alternate-dimension Oxford University, and she feels like a deer in the headlights, totally unable to react or reach for her own gun. Not that she would, because she imagines that Emma has no compunctions about blowing away innocent bystanders if she looks inclined to make things difficult. God, she hopes the archivist doesn’t walk back in right now, not least because anything that she wants, Emma will perforce take, and she doesn’t want Rittenhouse knowing about – whatever this is. But how –?

“Well?” Emma raises a ginger eyebrow. “Aren’t you even going to say hello?”

“Cut the crap, Emma.” Lucy’s voice finally returns, sounding hoarse and savage to her own ears. “We both know you aren’t here expecting to be invited to tea.”

“They do drink a lot of tea, don’t they?” Emma grins, as if inviting Lucy, her fellow modern woman, to share in judging their foibles. “Been having a good time in Oxford?”

Lucy doesn’t answer, trying to fight down the surge of emotions rising in her chest. This is the first time that she’s directly confronted Emma since finding Carol and Noah shot in that grimy Paris alleyway, and it is pushing all her buttons at once, more than she expected or was prepared for. She doesn’t trust herself to stand here and engage in casual, barbed frenemy banter, not least because there is nothing “frenemy” about them. They are on diametrically opposite sides of this war, and Emma has systematically taken away everyone Lucy ever loved. She flashes back to the cocktail party at the handover of the Mothership, Emma looking directly at her as she said that she’d handle all threats to Rittenhouse external and internal – going by Amy’s apartment that night and finding that – if the revenant is what Amy is now, if that is what Emma did –

“Let me see if I can guess what you’re here for,” Emma goes on, when Lucy still can’t muster a response. “MS Selden Superius 125?”

Another deeply unpleasant jolt goes through Lucy’s insides. That is indeed the call number of the manuscript she’s here to consult, and the fact that Emma knows about it sends up all sorts of red flags. She did tell people in London that she was going to take a post at Somerville, it’s not inconceivable that Emma could have tailed her here (especially with Flynn blazing the trail first). But she bursts out, “Did Charles Dodgson tell you where I was?”

“No.” Emma shrugs. “Though now that you mention it, he really should have, so I’ll have to pay a visit later to enlighten him on the fine points of contract law. I have another source of information now. Anyway, enough chitchat. Selden Superius 125, yes or no?”

Lucy hesitates.

Emma shrugs again, raises her gun, and points it in the direction of an oblivious student several shelves away, who has somehow managed not to notice anything at all (then again, this isn’t too surprising). “I don’t think they’ve invented school shootings here yet, but…?”

“You –” Lucy says furiously. “Just like you murdered my mother and Noah, you –”

“Oh, please.” Emma scoffs. “Like you’re really that sad about losing your mother, the Rittenbitch? And Nice Guy Noah – honestly, I did you a favor, sparing you from spending your life shackled to him. You’d have been bored witless. As for your sister –”
At that, despite herself, Lucy snaps. She lunges forward like a small and striking tigress, knocks the gun to the floor with a clatter, and grabs the lapels of Emma’s tailored velvet walking dress with both gloved hands, slamming her against a bookshelf with considerable force. “What the hell did you do to Amy? Huh?”

Emma looks briefly taken aback at the force of the reaction, even as disapproving hushes start popping up like mushrooms and Lucy remembers that they can’t really scrap in the middle of a magnificent old fifteenth-century library without probably ending up in Oxford Prison themselves. She slowly lets go of Emma, but kicks the gun out of reach beneath the shelf, and the two women eye each other evilly, brushing themselves off. Then Emma says, “Would you believe that I’m here to help you with that?”

“No.” Lucy’s spine stiffens into iron. “I don’t believe anything you say. Especially not about that.”

“Do you want that manuscript because it’s associated with Corvinus?” Emma folds her arms. “Do you know who Corvinus is?”

Lucy hesitates again. It’s unfortunately clear that Emma has been doing plenty of digging of her own – after all, she’s been here for at least five years, she’s probably much better prepared and informed, and has been busy getting all her evil ducks in a row. But anything that Emma wants is something that Lucy, strictly speaking, should not help her get. She can’t cut a deal under any circumstances, since Rittenhouse won’t return the favor. That’s what they’ve done – taken advantage of Lucy and Rufus and Jiya’s sense of fairness, of compassion, of honoring promises, and Lucy doesn’t feel again like being caught out for naïveté. Finally she says, “I’m taking it that you do.”

“Matthias Corvinus,” Emma says. “Better known as the Raven King. He ruled Hungary and Croatia between 1458-1490. He was one of the most learned and powerful magicians of the entire late Renaissance, right when this world was discovering how to systematically identify and use aether and make it do what they wanted. He had a vast library full of books on philosophy, theology, history, law, literature, geography, mathematics, medicine, architecture – and magic. The Bibliotheca Corviniana. It was destroyed by the Ottomans in 1526, or at least as far as anyone can tell. I think at least some of the books were hidden or smuggled or sold off and put into private collections, and I’ve been working on tracking them down.”

Lucy stares at her, wary as to why Emma would let this sensitive piece of intelligence slip with such apparent casualness. She also doesn’t want to reveal how much she knows or guesses of Rittenhouse’s plans in response, as Emma might be hoping she would. As far as she can estimate, there’s some especially priceless or valuable book in Corvinus’s collection that might help Emma solve the final problem of moving large quantities of aether between realities, and if so, it is imperative that she does not get her hands on it. As to why on earth she thinks Lucy would ever help her with that –

“You’re smart, princess,” Emma goes on, when Lucy still doesn’t answer. “I know you’ve put some pieces together. Including about what might have happened to your sister. The magic of revenants is very old and very dark and powerful. Nobody works with it anymore, not these tame, civilized Victorian-gentleman magicians. Corvinus did, though. He used revenants in battle, and for other things. He could control them, make them or unmake them. Interested yet?”

“Just say what you mean.” Lucy’s knuckles are starting to ache from where she’s clutching onto the edge of the shelf, to stop herself from slamming Emma into it again. “Is my sister in that revenant somehow? Is that what you did to make sure I could never save her?”

“Yes.” Emma transfixes her with that green-eyed lioness stare. “So I’m guessing that has
something to do with your sudden interest in obscure manuscripts about Corvinus.”

Lucy tries to breathe steadily, in through her nose, out through her mouth, even as her heart is racing, her knees are weak, and she is briefly afraid that she’s going to pass out. On the one hand, she’s almost perversely grateful for the confirmation that she wasn’t wrong, that it is Amy, that she still exists somehow. There is still the obvious possibility that Emma is lying about this, and Lucy isn’t going to rush to take her word for it. She feels like she’s caught in a maelstrom, being sucked and battered down against the rocks. She obviously can’t say yes, and she doesn’t know if she can outright refuse either. She isn’t going to trust Emma. Not a bit.

“So what is this?” Lucy asks neutrally. “A bribe? You think that if you help me get Amy back, I might finally retire from this job and leave you with a clear playing field?”

“The thought crossed my mind,” Emma says. “But I know you too well by now to think that you’ll just duck out and quit, princess. I figure we’re fighting to the death. Anyway, my most recent intelligence says that there’s a good chance several priceless books in Corvinus’ collection, possibly including the one I’m after, were hidden somewhere in the Balkans. Somewhere, in fact, in what is presently Dalmatia, in the King’s old territories. Do either you or I know someone from Dalmatia? Or should I say, since it’s just us time-travelers, Croatia?”

“You…” Lucy feels as if a giant icy fist has gripped her around the throat. “You would have to be out of your mind to think that Flynn would ever help you.”

“Oh, so you’re suddenly an expert on him now? Good to know you two have in fact met – and hit it off in more ways than one, from what I’ve heard. Don’t worry, I’m not that pie-in-the-sky. I have no expectation that he’d help me. But what about helping you?”

“I don’t think so,” Lucy says reflexively, half-grateful that Flynn stormed off in a tizzy after that argument, and is to all appearances no longer even in the country. “We’re not in contact.”

“Mmm. Hmm. I’m sure that couldn’t be changed at all, could it?” Emma folds her arms. “Flynn used to be a monster hunter. That was how we met. I was roughing it out in a cabin in Missouri Territory in 1882, he had been called in to deal with a persistent local – I forgot what it was, the Mothman or whatever. I was able to give him useful intelligence, and when I came to Europe, I looked into recruiting him. That, well – ” She pauses, then tosses her head scornfully. “He blew it. You’re probably familiar with that facet of his character.”

Lucy wants to agree that yes, she is, but she is not going to give Emma the satisfaction. At last she says, “If by that you mean that Rittenhouse murdered his family, yes.”

“Oh, come on.” Emma looks just as impatient as she did when Lucy mentioned Carol and Noah. “Maybe that was a little too much, and I didn’t really want to kill his daughter – she was special. She was going to be especially useful. But there was no other way to send a message. At any rate, however, I’m willing to change that. Something else that would be on the table, if I got the correct tools. A goodwill offering. Bring Amy back, and his family.”

Lucy opens and then shuts her mouth. The obvious fact is that if Emma ever got that much power, it would be too late for anyone to stop her from doing anything she wanted, and Lucy and Flynn would be tossed back their respective loved ones like crumbs to beggars in the street. Is it worth that? She doesn’t think so, necessarily, and she doesn’t think Flynn would, but she doesn’t know. Emma is probably dangling gilded, baited lures that she has no intention of ever following through in the least, will say anything to get Lucy to help. She seems to think that Lucy will approach Flynn and ask him to help track down this book under the guise of saving their families with it, and then – what? Pull the shock reveal that she was using him on Rittenhouse’s behalf the entire time? No. They’ll find another way. They have to.
“Oh, and,” Emma adds, seeing that Lucy hasn’t cracked yet. “Wouldn’t you like to know about your little friend Jiya?”

Lucy’s hand jerks on the shelf so hard that it knocks several old leather-bound volumes to the floor with a clatter, and she hastens to gather them up before a wrathful librarian can swoop down on her. As if that’s her biggest problem right now, but she is genuinely afraid that Emma may have just pulled a trump card that she cannot honestly counter. Amy and Flynn’s dead wife and daughter are one thing – wanted back badly, yes, and if Flynn knew that this was even possible, surely he’d fight for it as hard as Lucy would. But when it comes down to it, they are still gone, still lost, not of direct relevance to the war or the future of the fight. Jiya is different. If she’s trapped in Rittenhouse custody somewhere… she’s been part of the team fighting them for almost three years, they’re not likely to treat her with kid gloves. And if they spur her visions into starting again, or worse – this is obviously a horrible place for people who are viewed as insane or mentally deficient in any way. And it’s Jiya. Jiya. Her best friend and confidante, the love of Rufus’s life, their third part. No matter what, Lucy cannot turn her back on Jiya.

“Well?” Emma prods. “Yes or no?”

Lucy can hear her heart rushing in her ears, fingernails digging into her palms until they almost draw blood, as all she can think is that she wants to kill Emma as slowly and painfully as possible. “So what?” she says at last, her own voice coming to her as if through a wet white fog. “Carrot and the stick? I can help you, or you can take away another person that I love? Eeny-meeny-miny-mo between Amy and Jiya, is that it? After you already admitted that you turned my sister into a monster?”

“Should I let you think about it?” Emma seems to sense that it might be time for her to make an exit, no matter how much she wants to stay and gloat. “Did you actually want to see Flynn again, or did you decide that even stopping us isn’t worth that?”

With that, she swivels on one morocco-booted foot and negligently drops a calling card on the floor, as if to leave a way for Lucy to get in contact with her if she changes her mind later. Lucy has half a thought that she should grab for her gun – as if she can really shoot Emma in the middle of the library – but her hands still aren’t working. She just stands there, staring after her, as the gate swings shut. Maybe she could catch Emma on the stairs. If she could move.

“Ma’am?” The archivist shuffles into sight – very fortunately for him, having managed to be so damn slow at digging up the manuscript as to miss all the Shakespearean drama that just went down here. “MS Selden Superius 125?”

“Yes.” Lucy’s lips are numb too, cold as clay, and it requires an impossible effort to force them into a smile. “Yes, please. I suppose I’ll take that now.”

St. Petersburg, in Garcia Flynn’s professional opinion, is a shithole.

Frankly, he’s felt that way ever since they landed, after an uncomfortable, jouncing, twelve-hour voyage crammed in the belly of a cargo airship, hidden under crates and tarpaulins and getting banged by a sharp corner every time they hit an unexpected updraft. Flynn thinks they might have had a smoother flight if someone shot down this airship too, but nobody expects passengers with a cargo transport, and it was the best the Sokolovs could do on short notice. Now here they are, in the frigid arsehole of Europe, and it has not done much for his temper. The architecture is admittedly beautiful, vast neoclassical palaces and onion-domed Orthodox cathedrals lining the Neva, and its status as the major steam-and-air port of the Russian Empire means that there is always a lively interchange of people coming and going from all over, so Flynn and his gang have
attracted no particular notice. He speaks fluent Russian, after all, and looks native.

The one redeeming factor that St. Petersburg has going for it is Flynn’s ability to walk freely in the open air (really fucking cold though it is). He has spent a long time underground in London, metaphorically and literally, and has had to take care to stay out of sight, or disguised, when he’s out. Here, nobody gives a damn who he is or what he’s done, and the ability to stand on the Nikolayevsky Bridge at nightfall, as the streetlamps come on and his breath frosts the air, hands in his pockets as he stares out at the thin pink sun, is intoxicating. It almost – almost – makes him want to never go back. Though if he took up his usual catalogue of activities here, it might soon come to hate him too. All his Marxist smuggling is already enough to get him hanged.

For now, however, the fact of Flynn’s effective anonymity has worked well in his favor, as he is able to make his way around the city and casually ask for information about the Siberian railway project without setting up too many red flags. It’s an au courant topic of conversation anyway, with most people feeling that it’s arrant nonsense for anyone to think they can build a railway all the way to Vladivostok on the distant Pacific coast. There is a more-than-healthy market for laborers – anyone who can swing a hammer or drive a spike is being taken on, though it is entirely unlikely that they will see a single red ruble for it. Strictly speaking, serfdom was abolished over twenty years ago, but as far as Flynn can tell, that has made no difference.

He has considered whether he should head out to the construction on the Siberian frontier, but common workmen are unlikely to be privy to Rittenhouse’s top-secret plans, and rooting out a few individual moles would not do anything to disrupt the overall system. Which, if Lucy is correct, is designed to harvest, transport, and store industrial quantities of aether from its richest deposits in high northerly latitudes, and if it’s kicking off now, is probably precisely organized and ready to roll. Flynn has considered the idea of also breaking into the Winter Palace, just for a really spectacular follow-up to his Buckingham caper, but even he has to admit that that would be a terrible decision. But he’s heard rumors of Amerikantsy coming and going for important meetings with the tsar and his advisors, and in this context, that can only mean Rittenhouse.

At least the project has enabled Flynn, more or less (or less) successfully, not to think about Lucy. He has told himself that it is nothing to him if she stupidly gets herself killed, but that is so transparently a lie that even he is having difficulty convincing himself of it. He has been determined to hang onto his anger, because it could crumble so easily into something else if he doesn’t, and while he knows there is no earthly way that the unexplained death of a young female Oxford lecturer would make the Russian papers, that has not stopped him looking. It sits uncomfortably in his chest no matter what he does. If she’d just listened – if she wasn’t so damn stubborn – if she would just trust that he knows far more about it than she does, and –

And yet. Flynn is self-aware enough to know that he has given her absolutely no good reason to do any of that whatsoever, that he might be right but he’s gone about it with the deftness and interpersonal skills of a blast furnace, and he hardly explained to her what a bad idea it was, before he went barging out the door as disruptively as he came through it (or, well, the window). It is possibly no wonder that Lucy has decided that their ill-fated partnership lark was more trouble than it would be worth, and cut her losses. And she is right that they need to do something about the revenant. But that means killing it, not – whatever this –

(And then Flynn thinks about Lorena making tea for the former were-beast that had kidnapped her in Bulgaria, hitting him when he tried to take her away, and informing him that the poor old man just needed some kindness. To say the least, Flynn would not have hesitated in killing the monster, but Lorena saw something else, and that managed to save the man inside. Lucy is in the same mold. He wishes, he wishes he still believed that mercy, that compassion, that any of it would work, that it mattered, but it too died with his wife.)
He wants to see Lucy again. He doesn’t know anything about what would happen next, and he grimly supposes he’d make a dog’s breakfast of an apology, but he does know that. If Lucy is even inclined to hear one, after the trouble and heartache he has caused her, and he doesn’t know that she is. He would have to respect it if she wasn’t. They can go back to fighting Rittenhouse alone, the proverbial ships passing in the night, though it makes his chest ache in a different way when he thinks about it. It just seems like such a waste, that way. It seems so desolately empty.

By now, it is a week or so into November, and Flynn has to decide if he’s actually committed to staying in Russia all winter, just to make a point. Even for that, he’s not sure he wants to put himself through it, and shipping connections slow considerably in the off-months. He’s been fighting with his guilt about essentially telling Lucy the revenant would kill her and leaving anyway, but he’s finally started to tap a fruitful vein of intelligence in St. Petersburg, and he can’t cut that short either. Hiram Sibley Jr., son of the original telegraph maestro who wanted to connect Russia and America, is the man-on-the-spot for the railway project, and while Flynn can’t be sure without also kidnapping him, it sure sounds like he’s coordinating it for Rittenhouse. Construction is ahead of schedule, though it will also slow as the snow starts falling and the tundra freezes solid. Several hundred miles of track have been laid already, and test trains will soon be running. That means the aether pipeline could be operational.

It is a chilly wakeup for the gang at their base near the Catherine Canal along the Fontanka, the one that Dostoyevsky disparagingly dubbed the Ditch for its general shabby, smelly downmarket appearance and character. They rub their hands together and boil tin kettles of coffee over sputtering braziers, and Taylor elder looks unhappily at the iron-grey sky. “Any chance we’re going back to England soon, boss? Sure, they want to kill us, but at least we’d die with our balls still intact. Not bloody sure that’s the case here.”

Flynn grunts in answer, poking the coals with a stick and pulling up his scarf. Finally he allows, “I’ve been thinking that we might need to make a trip back and see how matters stand. It’s been too long with no news, it’s making me suspicious.”

“We’ve had a bellyful of Russkies,” Shitmouth puts in. “If we found a way to kill this Sibley berk, that would solve the problem, wouldn’t it?”

“We don’t know that.” For once, Flynn is the one arguing that the situation may be more complicated than the next murder on the docket. It’s confusing and he isn’t sure he likes it, especially since his own instinct is also to just shoot the bastard and sort the rest out later. But removing one Rittenstoooge likewise won’t stop the wheels from grinding forward, and might even have the inadvertent effect of whipping up more sympathy or funding for the project. But how does he do more than that? It was the intelligence unwillingly coerced out of Stanley that has gotten them this far, and while that has served its purpose, Flynn would rather avoid another high-profile “accident” like the airship downing. Yet no one is going to talk willingly, and while he feels tired at the thought of beating it out of someone else, if that’s the only choice. . .

“I have an idea,” Karl says. “I’ll go back to England, get a status report, see how it is. Whatever I find, I’ll send it back to you. You stay here and keep working on Sibley.”

“What?” Flynn has been thinking about Lucy again, and forgot to listen to that. As it belatedly percolates, he nods brusquely. “Yes, fine. Do that, make yourself useful. If I can’t force a break in the case in another fortnight, I’ll have to think of something else, but I imagine I can. Take Shitmouth with you, give him something to do.”

“Want me to stop by Oxford?” Karl enquires, with deceptive casualness. “See how the research is going there?”

Flynn looks at him coolly. He doesn’t want to agree out loud too fast, or even at all, but he also
obviously doesn’t want to disagree either. There’s a slight pause. Then he jerks his head as
dismissively as he can, as if it’s nothing to him one way or the other. “Fine,” he says. “Go.”
In Which There Are Quite A Few Surprises

Jiya wakes up in darkness. She feels like someone put a lot of shit in a bottle and shook it, and there’s a nauseous, burned taste in her mouth that won’t go away no matter how much she swallows. She can’t work up enough saliva to wet her throat, anyway. Every tissue feels freeze-dried, dehydrated, only badly reassembled, and she lies there with her head pounding, wincing every time her heartbeat whooshes in her ears. She’s alive, at least. But just now, that really doesn’t seem like such a wonderful thing.

After a few more minutes of wishing fervently for renewed unconsciousness, Jiya decides she needs to start taking stock of her surroundings. Is she still in Bethlem? Did someone grab her and stuff her in a closet somewhere? Wherever she is, it feels confined. She’s not as claustrophobic as Lucy, but she would still prefer to, you know, not be locked in a trunk. Her groping hands encounter something that feels like wood, and it doesn’t give when she pushes at it. Above her is a smooth arched span that seems to be a lid. Do they think she is in fact dead? Did they just toss her in here because they couldn’t find a proper coffin?

Who the hell are they?

Jiya racks her bedazzled brain, trying to remember. The hospital room. Rufus. Jessica Logan. That strange package, some kind of uncontrolled reaction. And then –

Wherever she is, she’d very much like to not be here anymore. It’s difficult, given the limited space, but she rolls onto her back, gathers her legs above her, then kicks at the trunk lid. It feels like it’s latched, but not padlocked, and it rattles. Plaster flakes down onto Jiya’s face, making her grimace and spit, and she tries to recall those advice pamphlets about how to get out of a car trunk. None of that is useful in this situation, though, and she’s going to have use brute force. Not something that she has a whole lot of, since her legs still feel like jelly, but she doesn’t care.

With another few upward kicks, grunting with the effort, Jiya manages to knock one latch free, and wriggle around enough to force her hand through the crack, straining at the lid, until she flips the other one. It pops free as the trunk tilts forward, and she somersaults out, banging her chin, biting her tongue, and knocking her wind out. The air smells of some unfamiliar, astringent chemical, and the floorboards are rough. When she finally lifts her head, she glances around and sees a bare, locked room, curiously devoid of modern decorations or appurtenances. There aren’t any plug outlets or light switches, the one window is barred, and the noises that Jiya can hear through the thin walls, as her ears likewise slowly start working again, aren’t very pleasant. This place does not look like somewhere that anyone comes by choice.

Jiya pushes herself to hands and knees, then to her feet, staggering over to the window. It looks down on a forbidding brick courtyard, mostly empty, though there are a few people in old-fashioned wicker wheelchairs being pushed by nurses in severe, high-collared white uniforms. A broad turret of chimneys drift smoke into the slaty-grey sky. It looks like a hospital, yes, but it doesn’t look like a very cheery one, barely a step above prison. What the – how can –

At that, a horrible, cold suspicion crawls over Jiya like skittering insects, as she continues to stare into the dismal courtyard, the clothes of the people, and the austere nineteenth-century aesthetic of her cell. She doesn’t know how it’s possible, but she thinks she might know where she is. Oh God. Oh God, Rufus. Rufus must be worried sick.

Jiya steps away from the window, leaning against the wall and trying to think logically, which is admittedly pretty difficult at the moment. She must have come through in some sort of fit, which would not be surprising given that she had been just inadvertently inter-dimensionally transported.
without a time machine or anything else to shield the blow. There is probably some horrible Victorian medical wisdom about how you should confine someone prone to seizures, or maybe Rittenhouse has someone stationed here to keep an eye for unauthorized arrivals. She can’t be – but she is. Is Lucy here? Can she find her? Can she even get out? One thing at a time.

Jiya takes a few more deep breaths, attempting to collect herself, then turns to face the prospect of the door. She isn’t going to be able to kick through it, but a woman with a 4.4 GPA in high school and honor roll all the way through a doctorate at Caltech should be able to figure out how to open a goddamn door. Jiya is fairly certain that she is in fact still in Bethlem Royal Hospital, just like she was the last time she was conscious. She’s just now in Westworld Bethlem, at the height of its Bedlam days. That would explain the sounds from next door.

Trying to push away the thoughts of all the creepy mental-asylum horror films she’s ever watched, Jiya tests the door, determines that it is locked, and spends a while contriving a makeshift lock pick from the bare elements of the room. She hopes there isn’t a bar on it from the outside, since that would be harder, but it seems to be a fairly simple pin-and-tumbler lock, though with a large enough key to make it difficult. Tongue between her teeth, she feeds in her pick, jiggles it a little, then a little more. She can almost turn it, but not quite.

Jiya has just decided she might need to pull the wire out of her bra when she hears footsteps outside in the corridor, as if one of the orderlies has detected ongoing funny business from the inmates and is here to sternly put a stop to it. The key grates in the lock as Jiya flattens herself to the wall behind the door, it opens, and a voice with a thick, old-timey Cockney accent says, “What’s all this, then, what’s this – ”

At that, Jiya moves. She pushes the door hard with both hands, slamming it into the orderly’s face, and there’s a shocked grunt and a crunch that sounds like a breaking nose. He blunders around, reaching for her, and Jiya jumps on his back, wrapping her arms around his neck, her legs around his waist, and trying an amateur WWE chokehold. She’s still not a trained soldier, but she’s done plenty of fighting on the team’s missions, and this poor underpaid flunkey was completely unprepared for resistance, which helps. He kicks and flails abortively, going to his knees, and in another few moments, his head slackens. He’s unconscious.

Jiya lets go carefully, glances down the hall in case he has friends, then drags him just inside the room, shuts the door, and strips off his heavy canvas smock and hat. She really hopes he’s wearing his vintage pantaloons, as she does not need to see his pasty white ass, but thankfully he has on regular workman clothes underneath. Grimacing at the smell, Jiya hauls on the thick, unwieldy smock, and bundles her hair up under the hat. Her disguise is not going to pass any sustained inspection, but it might just allow her to blend in enough to make it across the grounds. Then – where does she go next? Is Lucy here, in London? They thought Rittenhouse might head here eventually, but she took the Lifeboat to alt-1886 New York. If Jiya has landed in the same world, but on the other damn side of the ocean, that is almost too cruel an irony to be allowed.

Having checked that the orderly is still unconscious, Jiya is briefly tempted to stuff him in the trunk as well, but that would take more time. She tears off a strip of his shirt to gag him so he can’t immediately wake up and yell for help, both surprised and unnerved by her own steely pragmatism, and picks up the set of keys. Steps out, locks the cell, and starts to walk.

She’s in a long, dim corridor lined with locked doors, some of which have small viewing ports to allow doctors to peer at patients without actually going in, and pronounce their judgments from on high. Jiya can hear herself breathing what seems much too loudly, focusing on one step after another, picking her way down through the labyrinthine corridors. She passes a few blank-eyed zombies in the hallway, edges her way through a common area, and hopes that no one will ask her to fetch a few more ampoules of morphine, or however they keep everyone here compliant. From
a modern medical ethics standpoint, and basically just a human one, this place is completely horrifying, but she can’t focus on that right now. Not until she’s free.

At last, Jiya makes it to the courtyard, edges casually across to a secluded corner, then hastily strips the smock and hat off, eying the brick wall to judge her prospects of climbing it. There is a stir across the way that seems to suggest someone might have discovered a defrocked and disoriented orderly locked in a cell and its respective prisoner on the lam, and Jiya ducks as someone glances in her direction. She holds still, then, when she’s sure she hasn’t been spotted, grabs onto the trailing ivy vine and starts crab-walking up the wall.

The vine isn’t quite strong enough to support her weight, and she crashes to the ground on the first attempt, rattling her teeth and badly bruising her tailbone. The second time, she takes as much of a running start as she can, leaping halfway up the wall and clawing at it with sheer furious stubbornness, hands scraped and feet skidding. There are shouts from behind her as Jiya grabs for the top of the wall, hauls herself bruised-butt-first in the air, and then free-falls down the other side, right into thick and foul-smelling mud. She’s lucky, since that means she doesn’t break any bones, but she can only imagine what is in this stuff, and it’s nasty.

Jiya lurches to her feet, not sure if they’ll break out the sniffer dogs or cops with nightsticks, but then, they probably won’t need to – a strange woman literally covered in shit and on the run from the most notorious mental hospital in this or possibly any age is not exactly a low-profile random citizen. As she struggles to her feet, she can just see the vast brick building looming over her on one side, and the spread of late-Victorian London on the other side of the Thames. Since she’s lived in its modern counterpart for the last six months, Jiya is fairly sure that she is in Southwark. Bethlem moved around a few times during its existence, she knows, so it is presently in the city, rather than the outskirts. She knows her way around a little, she isn’t completely unfamiliar, but how much use is that going to be here?

An hour or so later, Jiya has a grim answer: really not much at all. She’s managed to rinse off some of the gunge at a public spigot, but a woman wearing trousers is an eye-catching scandal, and heads swivel like they’re on ball bearings everywhere she passes. She’ll have to steal some clothing somewhere, but thieves are heavily punished, and she doesn’t want to end right back up in prison for her efforts. Maybe if there’s an unattended laundry line, a skirt or shirtwaist she can just nick and run. Word has to have spread about her escape, and she needs to hide. Right now, she might as well be walking around with a neon sign.

Jiya is just preparing to execute her clothing heist when a hand grips her very firmly by the shoulder. It’s only when she looks up when she realizes that it isn’t a hand, but a gear wheel, and it belongs to a huge metal man – robot – that makes her utter a startled half-scream. Automaton, right? That’s what they call these things? She lashes out at it reflexively, hitting its copper casing with a dull bong, and it tightens its grip. “You are being taken into the custody of the Metropolitan Police,” it drones at her, from its riveted mouth slit. “Do not attempt to resist.”

Jiya thinks wildly that the Borg is literally assimilating her, looks around to make the joke to Rufus, and remembers that he, of course, isn’t here and has no idea where she is. She has never gone on a trip solo before, and wonders if this is what it was like for Lucy, this utter disorientation and dizziness, at being plunged headfirst into this strange steam cauldron and having to figure out how to somehow, possibly, land on her feet. They’re used to other times than their own by now, but this place is different.

Jiya can tell that the automaton could probably mash her like a meat grinder if she keeps fighting, and decides to follow its advice. It rolls her down to the nearest precinct station, staffed by a bored middle-aged bobby who has been booking petty criminals all day and does not pay special attention to Jiya or connect her with the recent prison break from Bethlem. However, there is one
thing he insists on questioning her about. “Do you know, have you ever known, assisted, fraternized, informed, or otherwise been associated with the criminal, Garcia Flynn?”

A brief shock goes through Jiya, which she just manages to keep off her face. Rufus mentioned that name, said that that was the notorious local gangster causing so much trouble for Rittenhouse here that they delegated someone specially to go after him. That someone, as discovered, is named Wyatt Logan, Jessica’s husband, who needs to be avoided if he’s still actively working for them. But while it is obviously a bad idea to fess up to knowing Don Corleone (and after all, Jiya doesn’t), she can’t help but wonder if he might be some sort of last-resort ally. If he also hates Rittenhouse, he might see some strategic value in keeping her away from them, though expecting a criminal kingpin to be any sort of major help or place of safety is also unwise. But Jiya doesn’t have a ton of choices. She’ll have to come up with something.

She assures the bobby that she doesn’t, dodges his follow-up questions about where she’s from, and finally, from her scandalous dress and unbecomingly bold deportment, he concludes that she must be a lady of the evening and gives her a ticket of referral to the Church Penitentiary Association for the Reclamation of Fallen Women, on Harley Street. This is, in Jiya’s opinion, a little rich, but it will get her out of the cold for the night, and she can (hopefully) think things through tomorrow. London is sufficiently large that even Rittenhouse can’t find her right away, but she still needs to lie low.

It’s past dusk when she arrives at the Association, presents her ticket, and is given a clean dress, a pair of shoes, a towel, and a bar of vinegary-smelling soap that she is instructed to thoroughly delouse herself with. A shower does sound nice, but this one, under cold water with several other ex-prostitutes gawking at her from the next stall, is among the more mortifying experiences of Jiya’s recent life. She rushes through it, scrubs until she smells less like a Victorian sewer, and dries off, still shivering. She is trying to keep her chin up, but she really just wants to crawl into bed and cry, and that doesn’t seem to be in the offing either.

After a rather meager supper, Jiya is assigned to a small, plain room with a sappy Jesus lithograph on the wall, two narrow beds, and a young roommate named Bella. She is a fairly recent arrival to the Association herself, having previously worked as a call girl at some noisome sink in Covent Garden, and asks what house Jiya is from. “Someone rescue you too, then?”

“I’m actually not a – ” Jiya tries to think if there’s a specific term, politically correct or otherwise, to use here. Sex worker is probably quite a way from being in vogue. “A, you know. I’m not supposed to be here.”

Bella peers at her curiously. “You’ll be an American, then?”

“Yes.” Jiya is surprised. “I came to – to London a few months ago, though.”

“It was an American brought me here too,” Bella says. “Queer like you. Never saw a woman ‘ad so many guns. Lucy.”

“What? That, to say the least, jerks Jiya’s head up. She only barely restrains herself from leaping across the bed and shaking the girl, but her heart is pounding. “Wait, did you say an American woman named Lucy, with a lot of guns? Did you get her surname? What did she look like? How long ago did you see her?”

Bella looks startled at this explosion of questions. “You know her, mum?”

“I might. It’s important. What do you remember?”

Bella thinks, scrunching up her freckled nose. “Dunno if I heard the surname. She was smallish,
brown hair. It was the end of September, thereabouts. It was a kind thing she did for me, I said I wouldn’t forget it. Are you meaning to hurt her?”

“No, no. No, not at all. She’s my friend, my best friend. I’ve been – I haven’t seen her in a very long time, but if she’s here –” Jiya almost feels like laughing with relief, even though her troubles are far from over. “Do you know where she is now?”

“No, mum.” Bella shakes her head. “Could be she’s still in London, but I can’t be sure. I know plenty of folk on the street, though. If you’re sure it’s no harm you mean her, I’ll have ‘em ask.”

“Please. Like I said, it’s very important. If you really do want to repay Lucy for helping you, I promise, this is how you can.”

Bella considers that, agrees she’ll try to slip out tomorrow when the ward sisters are distracted (she likes it much better here than at her former profession, but has a disparaging opinion of their strict, buttoned-up nature), and goes to sleep, blissfully oblivious to Jiya’s state of extreme turmoil. She can’t let herself get her hopes up, or consider this too much a blessing in disguise, not least because she has no idea how she’ll get home. But still.

Jiya is on pins and needles for all of the next morning, ignoring the nuns trying to teach her useful skills (they all seem to be needlework, anyway) and being sternly reprimanded that she should make the most of her second chance. It gives Jiya flashbacks to the Catholic school that her parents, both Lebanese Maronites, had her attend for several years as a kid, until it became clear that Catholic school and Jiya would always have fundamental differences of opinion and it was best for everyone concerned to allow them to go their separate ways. These are Anglican nuns, not Catholic, though there’s not a lot of difference, and Jiya finally finds somewhere to hide out from their relentless attempts to improve her life. Finally, one of the other women comes to find her and tell her that Bella’s back. She has a gentleman with her.

“A gentleman” is obviously not Lucy, but Jiya needs to see what’s up with anyone who might have a lead, and she hurries to the reception room at the front of the house. Bella, looking triumphant, is standing next to a scruffy, blue-eyed man who Jiya can somehow tell is American before he even opens his mouth. He’s dressed like a steampunk gunslinger, overcoat and thigh holsters and hat, and she skids to a halt. “Bella, who’s this?”

The man answers on his own behalf. “My name’s Sergeant Wyatt Logan. I heard you were looking for Lucy Preston.”

Oh. In one sense, Jiya isn’t surprised at all that Connor Mason’s private bounty hunter has crossed paths with the second – well, third – denizen of ordinary Earth who has also ended up here. Wyatt might be tasked with taking Lucy down too, since she’s also a threat to Rittenhouse, and Jiya smiles as blandly as she can, as if actually meeting a stranger. “Pleasure.”

Seeing that Bella is waiting to be told if she did well, Jiya nods graciously at the girl, who bobs and hurries away. Wyatt glances after her a little suspiciously, then turns back to Jiya. “She said you were a friend of Lucy’s?”

“And are you?”

“It’s complicated.” Wyatt blows out a breath. “If that’s the case, are you – from home?”

“Yes.” Jiya can’t really beat around the bush with that. There’s a long pause as they eye each other, as if sizing up the other’s likely motives or methods, until Jiya says, “So what? Are you trying to kill her?”
“What?” Wyatt looks startled. “No! I’m trying to – well, honestly, I’m not sure I have any idea what the fuck is going on anymore. But yes, I did meet her, and I know, I think, where she is. But you’d have to help me with something in return.”

“Oh?” Tit for tat, apparently. “What?”

“If you work with Lucy,” Wyatt says, after a glance around to make sure they aren’t being overheard, “you must know about something called Rittenhouse. I only learned about them recently, and pretty much entirely the hard way. But it turns out that’s who I’m actually working for, and oh yeah, nobody told me that they’re nuts.”

“Oh?” Jiya repeats. Her attention is piqued now. Wyatt is clearly a very valuable potential source of information, if he’s discovered the truth of his employment and to all appearances, isn’t pleased with it. Then again, he could also be putting on a cunning double-agent act, and she can’t jump at it too quickly. She doesn’t think he’s lying, but she needs to know a lot more before she feels inclined to open up in return. “What’s that?”

“My wife.” Wyatt looks as if he isn’t sure he should have gone for it or not, but too late now. “Her name is Jessica Logan. Is there anything you can find out about her?”

Well then. Apparently it’s just a day for serendipity. Jiya isn’t sure whether to tell Wyatt that yes, she met his wife locked up in a mental hospital back in their home reality, they then vanished down a portable wormhole to this one, and she doesn’t know where Jessica is now. Still locked up in Bethlem, but this one instead? It’s possible. But what if –

“You know her?” Wyatt asks. Jiya clearly couldn’t keep that one off her face. “When? Where? Did you hear about her?”

“We – met,” Jiya admits. “Recently. I think so, at least.”

“Someone said that she might be here. Do you know if she is?”

“You’re supposed to help me find Lucy, right? Then I can tell you what I know about Jessica. If I can trust you, that is. I know you work for.”

“Connor Mason.” Wyatt clearly sees no point in subterfuge, which is hopefully a good sign, but Jiya still can’t be sure. “He and Anthony Bruhl are both underlings for some very terrifying woman named Emma Whitmore, who – oh, you know her too?”

“We have plenty of experience with Emma, yes,” Jiya says grimly. “She’s a nasty piece of work. Whatever she’s told you, whatever she’s promised, I would take it with a very large grain of salt.”

“She was the one who said that Jessica was alive, and that she might be here. But if you’ve met Jess – she is alive, right?”

“Well, she was, when I saw her. But then something – something happened, and . . .” Jiya waves a hand. “I ended up here. It’s a long story.”

Wyatt regards her suspiciously for several moments, arms folded, as Jiya stares back at him. It’s clear enough that they badly need the other to tell them where Jessica/Lucy is, but aren’t sure if they’re going to extend so far as actually trusting each other with the information first. Finally Jiya says, “What if we meet up tomorrow, for dinner or whatever, and talk about it some more?”

“No.” Wyatt tenses, tone snappish. “Not tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Jiya says, a little stung. “I was trying to be helpful, but if not – ”
“Just – contact me next week or something.” Wyatt seems to be getting agitated. “I’ll be able to think about it better then.”

“Next week? I’d really like to find Lucy as soon as I can, so – are you sure you’re that busy until then?” Jiya doesn’t want to ask what apparently deeply pressing work commitments are keeping him occupied until then, but this seems odd. “Not to mention that gives Rittenhouse more time to catch up to me, and if they were holding me prisoner in the first place, I’m pretty sure they won’t roll out the red carpet. Or do you need to have time to check back with –”

“It’s important!” Wyatt practically snarls, making Jiya flinch away. Then he immediately looks ashamed, rubbing both hands over his face and shaking his head. He’s pretty haggard, so his adventure here clearly hasn’t been a bucket of laughs, and his eyes are red-rimmed. “Sorry. I’m sorry. I just really can’t do tomorrow. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Ohay,” Jiya says again, uncertainly. He seems weird, and a little rough-edged, but not evil, and she’s relieved to know that she’s not totally alone here, that she has a decent chance of catching up to Lucy. It’s certainly a vast improvement on being locked in a trunk in Bedlam, so that has to be enough for now. “I guess I’ll see you then.”

Lucy stirs slowly, with enough of a throbbing in her skull to make her wince, reach up as if in search of a goose egg, then hiss and snatch her hand away. Oh God, that explains the headache, but she’s still at a loss to explain why she has it at all. The immediately preceding moments are all a little fuzzy. Did the revenant come back? She doesn’t feel like she did the first time, ashy and sick and wrung out. This feels a lot more like a good old-fashioned knock upside the noggin, and perhaps with the comparative mundanity of her existence for the last five weeks, she was overdue for another incident. But what – ? Did Emma get tired of waiting for an answer and decide to press the point? And what – what is buzzing?

Lucy sits bolt upright, regrets it as it jostles her tender head, and stares around. She can see a metal crossbeam above her, a seam of some sort along the far wall, and the dim, scattered shapes of crates to either side. If she’s not much mistaken, it looks as if she’s in the cargo hold of an airship, which also explains why it’s frigid enough to see her breath. Memories are slowly coming back to her. Walking home after another marathon session with Selden Superius 125, which has proven no more willing to yield up its secrets than before (Lucy wonders if it’s the same person who wrote the Voynich, it feels about as inscrutable) and telling herself that she really has to make a decision one way or another, it’s been three days since Emma’s visit and she’s still in a state of paralysis over Jiya. Then seeing someone coming toward her, preparing to pleasantly bid them good evening, then –

She can’t quite remember what was wrong with his face. Was he wearing a handkerchief over it, or some kind of mask? Was it another tocker? She doesn’t think so, but she still can’t quite be sure. In any event, judging by the sickly chemical gunk in the back of her throat, she got a full-strength dose of the same kind of super-chloroform that Flynn used on Wyatt. No way to tell exactly how long she has been in dreamland, though long enough for her captors to move her aboard the airship and, to judge by the steady droning, take off. Oh God, it has to be Rittenhouse. Emma came back and now Lucy is on her way to whatever hellhole they’ve stashed Jiya down. A gunfight on an airship is a very bad idea for obvious reasons, and she doesn’t know how many of them there are. She needs to wait and choose the right moment.

Shivering, Lucy wraps herself in a burlap sack, blowing on her hands and rubbing them to keep the blood circulating. After her run-in with the revenant, a mere human kidnapping seems less alarming, but she can’t make the mistake of shrugging it off. How long will it take before someone at Somerville notices she’s missing? She has lectures and tutorials, her students will certainly
wonder if she’s absent. It’s another few weeks until the end of Michaelmas term, not the holidays yet. Not that kidnappers are going to schedule abductions around the professional commitments of the victim, but it still seems rude.

Lucy sits in the semi-darkness for some indeterminate amount of time, going through half-remembered meditation rituals to keep herself calm and focused. Then the floor begins to tilt down beneath her, a thin grey light spears through the ventilation slats at the front of the hold, and she crawls toward them, narrowly avoiding being crushed by a crate, to peer out.

A blast of wintry air scours her face like the breath of an ice dragon, and she winces, eyes watering, as she peers down at the ground several thousand feet below. The airship is coming in over a city, mantled white in a recent snowfall that makes it look like something out of a fairytale. The aetherium is quite a bit stronger here, the pale morning sunlight mixing with the glittering gold dust in the air that means they’re much further north than London. She catches sight of a robin-egg-blue cathedral dome, the distant grey squares of vast palaces, and –

Hold on. Hold on. Is this Russia? Did Rittenhouse take her to Russia, whether for the next phase of their plan to control the Trans-Siberian Railway, or – or something else? All the aether they can collect here is very pretty, but of not much functional use, if Emma can’t get her hands on that unknown book from Corvinus’ lost library, the one she was trying to bribe Lucy to trick Flynn into finding. Lucy doesn’t get the sense that Rittenhouse wants to stay in this universe permanently, exotic and diverting as it might be. They view it as a useful colony to be exploited for its resources, drained dry, and to have the spoils shipped back home for personal enrichment, just like any good imperialists. Its chief natural resource happens to be magic, so they’re going to mine it to the bone, as much as they can take and no matter what damage it does to the laws and societies and even fundamental physical sciences of this reality. It’s not theirs, so why does it matter if they destroy it? At least, Lucy would bitterly imagine, so the thinking goes.

Lucy sits back, trying to think fast. This definitely looks like Russia, so she’s most likely destined for a meeting with whichever one of Rittenhouse’s lackeys is running the show with the tsar. That would be Alexander III, right? She has obviously learned more European history since she arrived here, but it’s still not her overall specialty. Not that she really needs to know the fine details, as she can guess well enough what they mean with her. Maybe they’ll turn the screws a bit more, threaten to summon the revenant back directly if she doesn’t cooperate. It seems to be under their control or at least of their making somehow, if they used it to snatch and devour Amy. Are they really going to agree to losing such a useful agent of terror? Not likely. Or –

The airship bumps and jolts through a few currents on its way down toward the docks, which are just resolving into sight below. Lucy can see several signs in large lettering, but she can’t read Cyrillic and thus is left to wonder where they might have ended up. Moscow? Possible, but it’s still regarded as a bit second-rate, a provincial backwater compared to the center of administrative gravity in the tsars’ sparkling capital, the jewel in the Great Imperial Crown. If she had to guess, Lucy would bet that she is presently a rumor in St. Petersburg.

She rolls away from the slats, trying to prepare her cold, stiff muscles for action, as the airship dips the final few dozen yards down to the mooring and she can feel jerks and lashes as they’re tied down. She thinks luridly of her first arrival in London via airship, which was much more civilized than this, and supposes it figures. Her hair is coming out of its pins, her clothes are rumpled, she is very cold, very hungry, and very annoyed, and she has just spent a night freezing in a cargo ship after being chloroformed. She is not in any mood to be polite.

Lucy lies low, heart pounding, as she can hear someone approaching the hold, and then the main trapdoor swings open, allowing three figures to enter. Two are quite large, one of more modest stature, but he seems to be in charge. He says something to the brute squad in low-voiced Russian,
and at that, recognizing it, Lucy goes first stunned with shock – then more outraged than ever. Too furious to think about subterfuge or clever plans or anything except her sheer fury at ever wanting to apologize, she shoots to her feet. “Karl, is that you?”

Karl Popovich, as indeed it is, is very surprised to see her shoot up like a wrathful jack-in-the-box, perhaps expecting her either to be still drugged or just cowed and hiding. He takes a step back, as his companions, two large blond Russians with the look of brothers, move for their guns. Lucy stomps forward, reaches Karl, and slaps him across the face.

“Oy,” Karl says, rubbing his cheek. “Would you bloody hold on a minute, woman?”

“No.” Lucy is well and truly breathing fire by this point. “No, I will not hold on, and I don’t know if you kidnapped me on Flynn’s behalf or what, but after you – you and your Bolshevik friends here decided to just – I want to see him right now, and then I want to kill him!”

Karl looks briefly as if that would be a spectacle he wouldn’t want to miss, but after a moment, he shrugs. “Boss doesn’t actually know you’re here. Yet.”

At that, one of the brothers turns a betrayed look on Karl. “You said he know,” he complains, in a heavy Russian accent. “You are filthy weasel, Popovich. Total mudak.”

“He’s going to know,” Karl corrects himself, with an edgy look. Both of them are much larger than him, after all. “But you – ”

“You throw poor lady into hold?” Red Peril #2 interrupts. “Down here, in cold and dark? After knocked her out? You did not ASK HER, Popovich?”

“You have no idea how stubborn both of them are,” Karl says, rather feebly. “ Couldn’t take any chances, so I decided to – ”

Ignoring him with utmost haughtiness, the first brother makes a deep bow to Lucy. “Beautiful lady, my name is Anton. Brother is Gennady. We are the Sokolovs. Most apologies for horrible shithead behavior of him there. We did not know of your presence.”

“Uh – thank you?” Lucy is completely bewildered, as well as unsure if this is a good cop/bad cop routine, but the Sokolovs seem genuinely outraged by Karl’s unchivalrous behavior. “Would anyone like to explain what’s going on?”

“I’m just going to go tell the boss I’m back from England,” Karl says. “I told you two, if you cooperated with this plan, we could end up with – ”

“Did not mention IT WAS ABDUCTION OF LADY!” Gennady interrupts. Lucy thinks she might be able to tell them apart, because he’s the one who speaks in booming capital letters. “It is EXTREMELY STUPID PLAN. We are ashamed. As Anton says,” he adds to Lucy, so she knows that he is in accord as well. Despite this ridiculous situation, she almost can’t help but be amused. “We know Flynn in London. Work on docks. Help smuggle him out to Russia first time. Popovich then return and say he has good idea. HE LIE TO US.”

Anton cracks his knuckles. So does Gennady. Karl looks shifty. “You two stay here with her, fine,” he says, clearly in an attempt to cut his losses. “I’ll be back in a bit.”

“We watch you, Popovich,” Anton informs him. “We all go together.”

That is how, about ten minutes later, Lucy finds herself being helped off the airship with rather adorable gallantry by two large Russians, both of whom hasten to offer her their overcoats when she starts shivering like a nutcracker in the frigid St. Petersburg air. Anton takes her arm and starts
giving her a running commentary on the sights of the city, while Gennady occasionally shoots more evil looks at Karl. Lucy has lost all sense of what’s going on, has decided she’s just going to have to go with the flow and regard it as a sudden adventure. She doesn’t seem to be in danger presently, though she’s still spitting with fury at Karl for the whole kidnapping scheme and is going to catch up with more slaps later. Flynn has something to do with this, apparently, but what? Does he honestly not know that his minion larked off to Oxford to drag her off by force? As Gennady says, couldn’t he have just asked?

At that, Lucy has to admit that Karl has an unwanted point about her and Flynn both being extremely stubborn, and the chance that she would have seen a sudden appearance and invitation to speak with him as suspect, especially given their last parting. Apparently Karl thought it was a better idea to cut out the middleman and just haul her off here without the irksome business of asking permission, but if Flynn agreed to that, Lucy is also going to slap him until his head spins. He was the one who stormed out, who basically pulled the then perish move on her, and he has no right to contrive this nonsense in return. None whatsoever.

Lucy fumes for the rest of the walk, though she does enjoy Anton and Gennady’s attention (honestly, about time that someone knew how to treat a woman), until they reach a shabby warehouse on the Catherine Canal. Karl holds up a hand, bringing them to a halt, then says, “I’m going to go tell the boss you’re here. If he wants to see you, we’ll work out what I get for it.”

“Wait a minute.” Lucy stares at him even more angrily. “Are you saying that you in fact didn’t run this by him? You grabbed me for what – workplace leverage?”

“It’s complicated, eh?” Nonetheless, Karl takes another judicious step out of her range, especially since the Sokolovs are once more looking thunderous. “Just – stay there.”

With that, perhaps to execute his cunning plan and perhaps to get away from whatever the precursor to a KGB hit squad is, he darts inside the warehouse, the door slamming shut behind him. For her part, Lucy can’t decide if she’s more outraged that Karl has apparently in fact kidnapped her in order to blackmail Flynn, or that he clearly thinks it has a good chance of working. She has no idea what Karl’s demands are – a union for crime-boss minions? Forty-hour work week with health insurance and vacation pay? Serving as human corollary in forced labor negotiations was yet another role she never saw herself playing, but there you have it. The Sokolovs are glancing at her with avid curiosity, and Anton says, “Wait, then. You are Lucy?”

“Yes?” Lucy is startled. She didn’t realize she was a notorious enough figure among Flynn’s gang to warrant being known on first-name terms, though perhaps it’s not surprising. “Why?”

The brothers look at each other in what appears to be a darkly significant manner. “Kazanskaya Bogomater,” Anton says. “Karl in huge trouble.”

“Yes?” Lucy is startled. She didn’t realize she was a notorious enough figure among Flynn’s gang to warrant being known on first-name terms, though perhaps it’s not surprising. “Why?”

“Or we could break door down,” Anton suggests. “Scare shit out of Karl.”
“But maybe we get SHOT. Is bad of us to get shot when other men are FOOLS who do not treat ladies with PROPER RESPECT.” Gennady huffs. “If we die, who will get Lucy back to England? We do that, of course,” he adds, turning to her. “We will get you back with seat on nice airship, we know many people here in St. Petersburg. Do not worry.”

“Ah – thank you,” Lucy says again, coughing. She’s just about to suggest that they turn right around and do that now, when the warehouse door bangs open, startling everyone. Karl is propelled through it at considerable speed, catches himself against the canal wall, and spins balletically around, as if trying to pretend he meant to do that. Well then. That appears to have gone exactly as well as you would expect.

“Well,” Karl says, straightening up. “If we would?”

With that, he reaches out to grab Lucy’s arm, pulling her along with him, as Anton and Gennady utter twin noises of outrage and speed in on their heels. Lucy is, for once, possibly even more exasperated with someone than she is with Flynn, and jerks hard at Karl’s grip; he is stronger than you’d expect for a slight man. While the Sokolovs are still registering voluble Russian objections, they stride across the floor of the warehouse, strewn with sawdust, spent shotgun shells, and broken nails. Then Karl says, “I wasn’t bluffing, see?”

“Let go of me!” Lucy shoves at him. To Garcia Flynn, who is standing in front of her with a gobsmacked expression on his face, she orders, “Tell him to let go of me!”

“Let go of her,” Flynn says, though what with everything, it’s not clear if this is something Karl feels obliged to listen to. Nonetheless, this time, he does, loosening his grip on Lucy’s arm as the Sokolovs look prepared to take him behind the woodshed, metaphorically or literally. There is a massively awkward silence. Then Flynn says, with remarkable composure, “Good morning.”

“Did you put him up to this?” Lucy demands. She doesn’t think so, but she wants everything straightened out post-fucking-haste. “Did you send Karl to kidnap me?”

“I sent Karl, yes,” Flynn says. “I didn’t tell him to kidnap you. You’re not a prisoner.”

Anton clears his throat. “We pound on him, boss? Treated Lucy very badly.”

Flynn’s eyes flicker to Lucy, as if to check whether she’s hurt (then again, she might have imagined that). Finally he says, “He’s claiming that he has more important intelligence to share. You two, haul him off and figure out what this plan was, exactly.”

“I told you what the plan was,” Karl interrupts, apparently not eager for a private session with the Sokolovs. “I tricked Whitmore into thinking I’d turned, fed her enough information to force her to make a move and show her hand, and now I’ve got Lucy for you, huh? When are you going to appreciate what I do for this gang, boss? Never?”

Flynn eyes him as if he honestly can’t decide whether to laugh, admit he’s had his own garbage tornado turned on him for once, or just kill Karl for being so massively impertinent. It is not clear exactly how Lucy’s presence enters into this equation yet, or if it does. “I told you to go to Oxford and see how she was doing, not – ”

“Well, I’m not your traveling cupid,” Karl interrupts. “So I brought her here for you to do it your-damn-self, eh? Scuse. I want some breakfast.”

With that, apparently confident that he has gotten the last word on his employer for once, Karl strolls off with a determinedly casual air, while Flynn, the Sokolovs, and Lucy all stare after him. It’s difficult to say who is more stunned, or why. Finally Flynn says, “I will kill him later.”
“Wait.” Lucy rubs her face. “You really didn’t know I was coming?”

Flynn’s eyes flick sidelong at her, then away. “No. Apparently Karl took it upon himself to force us to talk face to face.”

Lucy has to admit that they probably would never have gotten around to it otherwise, but that doesn’t mean she’s going to forgive him for the chloroform-and-cargo-hold version of things. Flynn clears his throat in a significant manner, and the Sokolovs bow over Lucy’s hand and follow Karl’s lead in making a precipitous exit. Flynn beckons to Lucy to be seated on one of the broken crates, and she does so, Anton’s overcoat dragging on the dusty floorboards as she pulls it around her shoulders. Neither of them seems to be in any haste to breach the silence. Finally he says, “I can arrange to have you sent back to Oxford.”

“That’s what they said.” Lucy is tired and hungry and not in the mood for any more nonsense. “But since I’m here, I might as well share the intelligence I have. If you care.”

Flynn opens his mouth, thinks better of whatever he was going to say, and makes the too-polite gesture that he does when allowing her to go ahead. With that, as coolly and clinically as she can, Lucy tells him about Emma’s visit, and the possibility that all the things Rittenhouse wants to do here, and back home, rests on their ability to find the magical books of Matthias Corvinus’ lost library. They’re stockpiling aether, but to know how to move it, to change the laws of time and space across multiple realities, they need this. That according to Emma, who still might be lying out her ass, Amy is in fact part of the revenant, and that they also need Corvinus’ magic to free her. That obviously, they cannot let Rittenhouse succeed, at any cost.

As she speaks, Flynn’s brows draw down darker and darker. “Matija Korvin?” he says at last. “Gavran Kralj? That is – that’s what they’re looking for? They dare?”

“What?” Lucy’s somewhat surprised by the tone of personal affront in Flynn’s voice. “I’m guessing you have heard of him, then?”

“ Heard of him?” Flynn laughs dryly. “The Raven King is a legend where I’m from, the way King Arthur is in England. He is the hero of all our folktales. People are not convinced he ever really died. He is a symbol for the people who resist the Austrians, he’s cast as our mythical savior who will return and make the country whole again. But if Emma thinks she’ll find his books, or that I’d ever help her do it, she’s wasting her time. Everyone has looked for that damn library, dozens, hundreds of times. It was destroyed by the Ottomans. It doesn’t exist anymore.”

“Emma thinks it does,” Lucy says. “And she’s looking for it.”

Flynn grimaces. “Even if so, why would we –”

“Because she has my friend prisoner.” Lucy looks down at her hands. “At least I think she does. Her name’s Jiya. She was one of my partners in fighting Rittenhouse, back… in my world. I talked to Rufus – that’s my other friend – with Dodgson’s help, on Halloween. He said she was missing, and that he thought she was here.”

“Jesus.” Flynn raises his eyes to the warehouse ceiling. “How many problems do we have? The revenant, the Siberian railway, Korvin’s library, your friend, anything else Rittenhouse is doing? It feels like they just keep spawning, don’t they?”

“But they are all connected,” Lucy points out. “They all feed into Rittenhouse’s main project of moving aether to my world. The railway is how they get it, and Corvinus’s library will tell them – or so they hope – how to transfer it between realities. And the revenant – that’s their most effective weapon of terror. Maybe that’s what they used to snatch Jiya. If they can do that on a large scale
“Jesus,” Flynn says again. He adds a few more choice remarks in either Croatian or Russian under his breath, then glances up at her. “Has it been back?”

“Not yet,” Lucy says. “But that doesn’t mean it won’t be.”

Flynn regards her from under the dark shadow of his brows. He looks tired, grooves worn deeply in his face and mouth grimly set, chiseled out of stone. Finally he says, almost gently, “The two of us can’t stop all of this, Lucy.”

Lucy is tempted to make some sort of pointed remark about how she didn’t think it even was the two of them, but she’s grateful enough for this implicit acknowledgement of their re-partnered status, grudgingly or otherwise, not to do so. For all his flaws, he’s what she has been stuck with, and if two can’t do it, one has no shot at all. Besides, despite the yet-again-ridiculous circumstances of their reunion, there is a part of her that is genuinely relieved to see him again. She thought he might hold a grudge for weeks or months, or longer, but – for now, at least – it doesn’t appear that he has. They have even avoided a new argument. Shocking.

“It doesn’t have to be just the two of us,” Lucy says. “We have others we could recruit. Ada knows plenty of people. Your gang, if they can avoid any more stunts like the last one. Jiya, if we can find her. And.” She pauses delicately. “Wyatt?”

Flynn looks like he’s just been asked to eat a live cockroach. “Why?”

“He has access to places we don’t. He works for the most high-level operation of Rittenhouse in the country, possibly in this world, and he also knows his way around guns. I know you two... didn’t exactly get off on the right foot, but it would be much more sensible to be allies with him, rather than enemies. We’re not exactly spoiled for choice.”

“I’ll think about it,” Flynn says, in a tone that implies he’s hoping Wyatt will suddenly drop dead and spare him the indignity. “But he’s still the one who was trying to kill me.”

Lucy is about to point out that she’s pretty sure there is plenty of blame to go around on that front, but it probably isn’t worth it. “Fine,” she says. “Think about it. Now do I even get something to eat after I got dragged this far, or –?”

“I’ll find some breakfast,” Flynn says, getting to his feet. “I doubt you really want to subject yourself to the company of those idiots.”

Lucy starts to stand up as well, but her legs are very cold and cramped, and she stumbles and almost falls before Flynn flashes in to catch her, grabbing her forearms with both hands and settling her with surprising gentleness. She looks up at him, and their gazes catch and hold. He opens his mouth as if to say something, wets his lips instead, and can’t seem to bring it to mind. Lucy is still very cold, and shifts instinctively toward him. Why, or what she expects to come of it, she doesn’t know. Just that it feels better than fighting with him, and if there’s any chance of this attempt to work together ending any differently from the disastrous others, then they might –

“Boss?” The door at the back of the warehouse opens, and Anton Sokolov sticks his head in. “We are keeping lookout, and we see police inspectors come this way. Probably is good we get out of here for the morning, da?”

Flynn looks down at Lucy, realizes he’s still holding her, lets her go, and swears. “If you were so clumsy as to get yourself followed from the docks –”

“Is Karl’s fault,” Anton says. “Gennady is having small chat with him, about how to treat Lucy.
But police inspectors come often through Catherine Canal. We will clear out and come back later tonight, when they are gone.”

Flynn considers that, decides he can’t really argue with that, and pulls Lucy with him as they bundle out and into a narrow back alley, freeze-dried washing strung up on lines from windows and barrels and crates crowding the slippery cobbled stones. Lucy is suddenly aware that she is the object of intense interest from half a dozen none-too-clean gentlemen – not in a leering way, but more like they’re finally seeing someone who they’ve heard a lot about, and are eager to see how she stacks up. Oh God, has Flynn’s gang been gossiping about her like a lot of fishwives? You’d hope that they had something better to do with their time, but apparently not, and Lucy probably shouldn’t throw stones. Given that she is now on the run in the slum districts of St. Petersburg with a wanted crime ring, after being unceremoniously kidnapped and thrown into an airship last night. In other words, Tuesday.

“You go that way,” Flynn instructs, pointing the men off in one direction. Lucy notices that Karl has a fresh black eye and a fat lip, and Gennady Sokolov looks vengefully pleased with himself. “Split up, don’t draw attention. If the coast is clear, we’ll come back after sunset.”

The men do as ordered, not without final looks at Lucy, and disperse like rats down a sewer. Flynn and Lucy themselves subside into the crowds, wandering casually from one avenue to the next, pretending to glance at the street markets and checking over their shoulder every so often to see if anyone has popped up consistently after them. They don’t think so, but still.

This impromptu tour of the city is weirdly fun for a while, but Lucy hasn’t really slept, she didn’t get her breakfast, she’s freezing even with Anton’s coat, and she’s exhausted and footsore as they finally come to a halt in a narrow park square off the bustling Nevsky Prospect, streetcars and buggies clanging past and fashionable shoppers filtering into the Great Gostiny Dvor. “Can we stop?” she manages, hands on her knees as she tries to work out the killer stitch in her side. “Or at least sit down for a bit? I’m dead on my feet.”

Flynn considers, then sits on one of the benches, jerking his chin at her to do the same. Lucy does, though it’s more of a half-controlled fall as her legs stop working. Her teeth are chattering hard enough to make her seriously fear that she’s getting hypothermic, and after a brief consideration, Flynn reaches for her, puts his arm over her shoulder, and pulls her against him. It’s as terse and economic as everything else he does, recognizing the practical necessity of warming her up, and he undoes his own overcoat enough to wrap it over her shoulders. Lucy does not have too much pride to tuck herself into his side, trying to find somewhere to put her frigid hands. He yelps as they land on the thin cloth of his shirt, on the small of his back. “Christ, Lucy.”

“S-sorry.” Lucy doesn’t move them, because he’s warm, she’s very cold, his idiot henchmen (and his inability to give them proper instructions) are the reason she’s here in the first place, and this is the least he owes her. He gathers her up in both arms, her head tucking under his chin, as she closes her eyes and shivers some more, letting some of his heat sink into her. He holds his jacket closed around them both, and for a long moment, neither of them say anything. He is very effective at blocking out the cold wind, it is again much nicer to do this than to shout at him, and while Lucy hasn’t forgotten her promise to dole out a few slaps to him too, that can wait for later. She shifts position, accidentally digging her elbows into his stomach, and he grunts.

“Sorry,” Lucy murmurs again, even as she becomes aware that there is a certain tenseness in the way he is holding her, an odd look on his face, that might hint he is unavoidably responding to having her snuggled so closely against him, and is trying desperately not to let her notice. For her part, Lucy can feel a distinct hot, watery fluttering in her stomach, as well as elsewhere, and is suddenly unsure if this was entirely a good idea. Trying to reestablish some semblance of their usual dynamic, she says, “Flynn?”
“Hngh?” He looks down at her with the expression of a man who is concentrating very hard on keeping his blood in his head. “Wha – what?”

“I had a thought.” Lucy shifts against him again, which is possibly counterproductive, and can feel a faint tremor run through him from head to toe. “I still don’t know much about magic, and if it’s wrong, you can tell me. But what if, instead of mucking around trying to find Corvinus’ library before Rittenhouse, there was a way to just ask him where it was, or what was in it?”

“Wh – ” It’s clearly difficult for Flynn to muster coherent words just now, but he does his best. “Did you – did you miss the part where I said he’s dead?”

“Yes, but you also said plenty of people don’t believe he’s really gone. And besides – ” Lucy is well aware that the last rash magical solution she suggested to their problems was the cause of Flynn running off here in the first place, so she should be careful, but still. “It would be difficult and dangerous to actually summon the Raven King. I’m guessing. But we know someone who can speak to the dead. If Corvinus’s magic is the key to everything – the revenant, the aether, what Rittenhouse is doing in this world, maybe even whatever Wyatt wanted a cure for – then could it possibly be worth the risk?”

Flynn is silent for several moments, though it’s unclear whether it’s because he thinks she’s crazy or because he is girding himself to speak properly. Then, sounding extremely startled, he blurts out, “What? Priscilla?”

“Yes.” Lucy looks up at him. Their faces are close in the chilly air, and their breath steams in matching silver. “Priscilla.”
The horizon is low and grey by the end of the afternoon, with a bitterly cold bite in the wind that seems to promise more snow in the offing. People hurry by clutching fur hats and mufflers, horses’ hooves and cart wheels track and splash through the muddy slush, and stray flakes float past the streetlamps as they fire to life. Flynn has bought Lucy a hot toddy at one of the sidewalk cafes, and they sit in a dim corner, a votive candle flickering on the table and Russian conversation murmuring to each side. Lucy still feels like the little matchstick girl; her dress hem is soaked and ragged, her feet are blocks of ice, and even repeated sips of the drink, some kind of strong dark tea with a blessed spike of vodka that hits her mournfully empty stomach like a hot coal, is only making intermittent progress at thawing her insides. Flynn finally gets up and orders them two steaming bowls of borscht with black bread, and Lucy tears into it.

Flynn watches her eat with an amused, quizzical expression, seeming to sense that more conversation can wait until she is properly fed. He also doesn’t want to discuss their secret plans in public, so there is a long pause as he visibly struggles for a safe and neutral topic of general interest. Finally he says, “So you’ve been teaching?”

“Yeah.” Lucy blows on the spoon, decides she doesn’t care, and gulps it down anyway, even though it scorches her throat. “Is there a telegraph office around here? If I’m delayed for a few days by the snow, I’ll have to send something back to Somerville and tell them not to worry.”

“I’m sure the Sokolovs can point you in the right direction.” Flynn dips his bread in the stew and takes a bite. “Since they’re so eager to be white knights.”

“They seem nice,” Lucy says defensively. “Unlike some other men I could name.”

At that, a snarky smile twists his mouth. “What, Lucy? You don’t think I’m nice?”

Lucy chokes on her borscht, swallows it too fast, and coughs, eyes watering. “No,” she says, with as much dignity as she can muster. “Plenty of other things, yes, but not that.”

“Oh?” He doesn’t seem insulted, more curious. “Such as what?”

“Ah – ” Most of the things that Lucy has decided Flynn is are not things that she ever imagined saying to his face (and some not even to herself). “Stubborn,” she says at last, since it’s relatively safe and also highly accurate. “Clever. And devoted to the cause. Rittenhouse isn’t an easy enemy to fight, and you’ve managed to figure out quite a bit by yourself.”

Flynn takes that in inscrutably, pausing to sip his own drink. His eyes flicker to their fellow patrons, as if one of them might be listening in, and Lucy remembers that since Rittenhouse is (at least as far as she knows) also here, she should likewise be careful about speaking the name aloud. She looks back at Flynn, wondering how on earth you would make casual cocktail-party conversation with this man. They’ve plunged straight past the small talk and light minutia of getting to know each other, and into the weeds of lost loved ones, tragic pasts, different worlds and dark magic, the idea she suggested about whether to summon one of the most powerful sorcerers who ever lived, in order to stop an evil secret society from taking over and/or destroying multiple universes. How do you go from that to asking someone what their hobbies are, or their favorite color, or other trivial details? Does it even matter if they like each other at this point? They’re bound by something else than personal preference, some deeper gravity. If you think about it, it’s insane that they met at all. They are from different times, different places, different goddamn worlds. And yet somehow, here they are. It doesn’t make logical sense.
“I had to,” Flynn says at last, having clearly considered what, if anything, he wanted to respond. “Figure it out. It was that, or let them win, and I wasn’t going to do that.”

No, Lucy thinks, he wasn’t. Just like her, when she went past the point of no return, decided that Rittenhouse had taken outside of enough from her and everyone, and could no longer be tolerated or ignored or excused in any sense of the word. This fight has certainly taken both of them to strange places, but rather than digging more into that, she finds herself curious about his monster-hunting days. Obviously, it’s an exotic occupation from her point of view, though for all she knows, it’s as common as accountants or data entry in this world. But it also doesn’t feel like the stuff of pleasant dinnertime conversation, especially since he told her bluntly that he’d had to kill those that he once thought he could have saved. She doesn’t want to dredge up more painful memories, especially since she gets the sense that there have been relatively few moments of light and happiness in Flynn’s life as it is, and the main part that was – his wife and daughter – were, of course, taken from him in such a shocking and terrible way. She wants to say that she understands, that she knows the feeling of the weight pushing you down and down and down, but that also seems too dangerous. She takes another bite of bread and just nods.

Supper is finished more or less in silence after that, as Flynn puts a crumpled ruble on the table and gives her a slightly too-gallant hand to her feet, as if to prove that he has manners too, thank you very much. Lucy rolls her eyes a little and takes it, and once they make their way out to the street, discovers that the snow is coming down faster and the cobbles are starting to freeze. She is thus obliged to keep a firm hold on Flynn’s elbow so as to not go ice skating, tucked into the sizeable lee of his windbreak, and penguin-shuffles determinedly along. He keeps glancing at her sidelong, as if he is finding it cute but refuses to actually say so, and Lucy squints against the wind, feeling her damn eyelashes crusting with ice. “Are we going back to the warehouse?” she asks, fervently hoping he will say no. “Because honestly, that sounds terrible.”

Flynn glances around, considers the worsening weather, the fact that it’s a walk of something close to two miles back to the Ditch, and the fact that she would have to spend a cold night with a lot of interestedly staring criminals of various nationalities (or at least, Lucy hopes that enters into his calculations) and, finally, makes an executive decision. “No,” he says. “We won’t go back tonight. I’ll find somewhere for us to stay, come on.”

With that, as the downpour of snow is thickening, he leads them into a nearby district of lower-middle-class brownstones, lamplight throwing shadows from curtained windows, and finally finds one with a notice of empty rooms (or Lucy supposes that’s what it says). They go up the steps, knock, and wait until someone opens it. He and Flynn converse in rapid Russian, Flynn beckons to her, and Lucy nods and smiles and tries to look like she knows what’s going on. Flynn hands over a few tarnished kopeks, and the mistress of the house appears to lead them upstairs, to a narrow, creaky garret room. On balance, it is not substantially warmer than the air outside, but at least it’s out of the wind, and there’s a brazier with a few sullen coals.

Flynn thanks the landlady, who nods and retreats, then shuts the door and puts the bar in. He likewise draws the thin calico curtains, squats by the brazier, and spends a while getting the embers prodded back to life, while Lucy watches him. There isn’t much light in the room aside from the coals and a rack of low-burning candles, and it casts him as half a monster himself, a troll under a bridge or a creature of a dark Transylvanian forest. There is a spindly chair, a roll-top desk, and a bed with a brass headboard and patched quilt. The snow hisses over the slant of the roof, and there is a slight howl at the window, rattling the old glass, as it tries to find a crack.

After Flynn has finally gotten the coals back to life, and the brazier is throwing out a decent amount of heat, he stands up and shucks his overcoat, hanging it on the back of the door. Snow drips from its hem into cold puddles on the floor, and Lucy does the same, hoping that Anton has acquired a new one by licit means or otherwise. Then again, he’s one of the born-and-bred
Russians who probably thinks zero degrees isn’t that cold, and has been hardily running around in his shirtsleeves. The thought makes her grin. Hopefully the gang found a sheltered spot too.

Lucy can’t help but steal an under-the-eyelashes glance at Flynn, who is now shucking his dirty boots, with an apparent determination to act as if she isn’t there. Given the dynamic between them, which has been in some ways present from the start, and what happened this afternoon, she is aware that it is a delicate situation for them now to be shut in a small room for the long hours of snowy darkness. He may insist on sleeping on the floor again, for reasons best known to himself, but otherwise it looks as if they will be sharing that not-exactly-capacious bed. Lucy’s pulse is fluttering in her throat, her mouth is dry, and she is trying not to be too obvious about it. Her eyes keep swinging back to him as if drawn by an invisible compass needle. He clearly likes her, but this goes back to her brief temptation to seduce him after the revenant attack. Can she be certain that she’s thinking straight about this, that there isn’t any left-over poison? Is this just simple hunger and unbearable loneliness? Is that enough of an excuse, if it is?

Lucy follows his lead in removing her dirty shoes, then steps around the corner, behind a paper screen, to the pitcher and washbasin and small bronze mirror. She pulls the pins out of her hair, which she last properly did yesterday morning in Oxford, and the tangled twists fall down onto her shoulders. She combs them out with her fingers, trying to focus on the task more than, strictly speaking, she exactly needs to. It’s too cold to take off too many clothes, but she does want to get out of her dirty dress. Which involves, of course, the corset.

Lucy debates about this for a while, then clumsily shrugs off the dress and puts up a valiant effort at undoing the corset herself. She more or less succeeds, though she has to wrestle with the last few laces, and finally scrapes it over her head with a muttered curse, smoothing her chafed torso. She’s now in her shift and drawers and petticoat, and away from the brazier, the air is chill enough to raise gooseflesh on her arms.

After a pause, she steps back around the screen, to find Flynn in his half-buttoned shirt, trousers, and socks. He glances up at her for half a moment and then instantly away, doing nothing for the ambient level of tension in this very small attic, and Lucy thinks that there’s no way he can’t have noticed. Maybe he feels like he would be dishonoring his dead wife if he did anything, which she can respect, but it would help if he would say so one way or the other. Not that she’s eager to broach the topic first either, but it’s getting increasingly difficult to pretend it isn’t hanging between them. Flynn probably told the proprietor they were married, to avoid another repeat of the “Mr. Preston” scandal at Somerville. There is an undeniable ache between Lucy’s legs, and something hot and liquid as molten gold in her stomach. Everyone seems to think they’re an item. So what would be the harm, perhaps, in once?

Flynn, however, still isn’t saying anything, or meeting her eyes, and she doesn’t want to pressure him in what is evidently a very awkward situation already. She swallows to wet her throat, which doesn’t work, and moves over to the bed. “So I guess I’ll just – ?”

He glances up with a start, as if he has lost all track of the ordinary sequence of events in this situation. Then he nods. “Ah. Yes, fine. I’ll take the floor.”

“The floor.” Lucy tries not to sound exasperated, but, well, she is, a little bit. Or more than a little. “Garcia, it’s freezing.”

Flynn jerks in surprise, as to the best of their recollection, that is the first time she has ever used his given name. She didn’t even do it on purpose, it just slipped out, and she can imagine that it isn’t something he hears very often. Briefly, she wonders how a man from Dalmatia ended up named “Garcia Flynn,” but that is definitely a story for later, and maybe he has ancestors from elsewhere. Frankly, at the moment, she’s more interested in whether this man can possibly be oblivious to the fact that she wants him quite a lot, no matter how (not) winning his personality is and how (not)
civilized his manners. How that has happened, she doesn’t know, and it’s probably best not to dwell on it. But it’s been years, and she is very alone, and he… he matches her, somehow. Makes her think of the quote about souls made from similar stuff. There are long-term ramifications, there are plenty of smart reasons not to, and yet.

When Flynn obstinately still does not answer, Lucy gives up, turns back the covers, and crawls under them. The mattress is lumpy, but soft, and there are enough quilts to provide a pleasant weight atop her as she lies down with a groan. She stares up at the slant of the roof, then looks over at Flynn, who is taking his overcoat off the peg to serve as a blanket. This is straddling the very thin line between adorable chivalry and utterly exasperating idiocy, and just then, Lucy decides that she is not letting this dense motherfucker sleep on the floor without a damn good reason (and possibly not even then). “Garcia,” she says. “It. Is. Freezing. Get in the bed.”

Flynn goes very still, so she can almost see the small shifts of the air around the shadowed profile of his head and shoulders. Then he says, “I’ll be fine on the floor.”

“It’s cold,” Lucy says. “It’s dark. I’m not lying here by myself and listening to you shiver all night because you’re too stupid and – pigheaded to stay warm. If you’re still angry at me, if this is some kind of punishment – of me, of yourself – then why don’t you just tell me?”

Once more, the expression of startlement on Flynn’s face seems to suggest that he wasn’t aware that that was a thing that people were allowed to do. There is a long and very tenuous pause. Then he says, half as if he didn’t mean to, “I’m – I’m not angry at you.”

That surprises Lucy, given as he was doing an excellent impression of it earlier – though not, admittedly, since they were unexpectedly reunited. “You’re not?”

“I – no.” Flynn glances down. “I just think it’s better that we don’t.”

“What, that we don’t sleep in the same place for one night? Even when I’m telling you that it’s all right?” Lucy has no idea what he wants to hear, what’s holding him back, if she should push or if she shouldn’t. “You would honestly, literally rather freeze than do that?”

There is another extremely pregnant pause. Then Flynn says, sounding choked, “Of course I wouldn’t rather freeze.”

“They why don’t you just – ” Lucy really undersold it earlier with stubborn. She honestly can’t find a word to do it justice. “Come over here, get under the covers, and shut up.”

Perhaps it’s the case that Flynn just does best with clear and unambiguous instructions, because he finally crosses the creaking floorboards, turns back the quilt, and slides in next to her, thigh brushing up against hers. There’s not a lot of room in the bed, and he takes up most of it, obliging her to squirm around and find a suitable position to rearrange herself. Flynn is biting his lip, steadfastly avoiding her gaze, as she shifts arms and legs and brushes over his stomach and shoulders, which are so tense that you could probably use him to prop up a small building. It seems clear that he’s going to be staring at the ceiling like an owl for most of the night if he can’t unwind and go to sleep, which Lucy is briefly tempted to help him with, but she’s already performed enough of a miracle at getting him into the fucking bed. Anything else, and he might jump up and sprint downstairs, right into the snowstorm, and never look back.

They lie there in exquisitely awkward silence for several moments. It doesn’t seem likely that either of them are getting any sleep at this rate, though for other reasons than you might hope. Flynn is a castle wall with a barred portcullis, imperviously repelling invaders, and Lucy isn’t exactly ready to make any major move herself. She’s both intrigued and terrified by the idea. After all, there is no way to know what she would find on the other side, or if she’d be happy that she
did. They have barely once again reached the plateau of being allies. Pushing for anything else feels ripe to be disastrous.

And yet, she is lying in a small bed with this man on a night that is going to go on for quite a while more, and if nothing else, she isn’t spending twelve more hours like this. Lucy considers, then says, “How about you tell me a story about the Raven King?”

Flynn turns his head halfway on the pillow, looking shocked. “What?”

“You said he was a popular folklore hero where you grew up. We need to understand more about him if we might ask Priscilla to contact him for us. Besides, there’s nothing else to do, is there? It’s not really that late, and it’ll be dark until – what, ten o’clock tomorrow morning?”

“Something like that.” Flynn takes a breath, settling himself more comfortably. “I don’t know where to begin. You don’t learn about the Raven King, you just know he’s always been there. Your mother tells you to behave, or the King will see you. You’re a boy, and you argue endlessly with your friends about who gets to be him. You wander into a wood and you see someone has scratched a glyph of a raven on a trunk, and you remember that all the woods belong to him. You see a raven on a post and you make sure to stop and leave some corn, and you never scare him away from the field. Some old beggar man comes to the door and asks for bread, and you give it to him, because Matija the Just wandered in disguise among his subjects and remembered who gave him aid and comfort, and who didn’t. The idea that Rittenhouse thinks they can just find his library, that they can take all that magic, that myth, and use it, destroy it – ”

He stops, throat moving in the dim candlelight as he swallows, before he continues. “Anyway. It’s not uncommon to find a statue of Matija on the altar in a tiny ancient church, or an icon tucked on some household shelf. He’s not officially a saint, but we pray to him as if he was. Not a Christian prayer, though, and not with Christian words. I’ve seen old grandmothers who devoutly tell their rosary to God and the Virgin Mother, who leave corn on the windowsill and call Matija from the woods to watch over the house. There is no conflict between it. Of course, he was a human ruler while he was alive. He imposed heavy taxes and fought many wars and tortured his enemies. He knew Vlad Dracul, in fact. Threw him in jail once.”

“The Raven King knew Dracula?” Lucy is fascinated. “I suppose they would have been contemporaries, date-wise? And I have to say, throwing Dracula in jail is a ballsy move.”

Flynn raises one eyebrow, apparently amused by her earthy turn of phrase. “There are plenty of people who believe it’s the reason the creatures of Dracul’s line hate magicians and hunters,” he says casually. “That Dracul cursed Matija for it, and that curse still hangs strong in the old places. That if you stumble into one of them, you’ll be changed, and you can’t turn back.”

“Creatures of – ?” Lucy has obviously learned a lot about this place, but she doesn’t know if she was prepared to hear that vampires are real. Even as she guessed they probably were, or at least something like that, given as Flynn seemed to be referring to real monsters in his former profession. “What kind of creatures?”

“The dark ones.” Flynn looks to be warming to his subject, enjoying the spooky aura that his tale is conjuring, and it makes Lucy shiver and unconsciously move a little closer. “Matija originally created revenants in order to fight them. But after he was gone, nobody else could control them, and they spawned and transmogrified and became just as violent and uncontrollable and dangerous as the things they had been made to fight. Dracul’s creatures are rare these days, almost stamped out by civilization, by hunters, but they’re still around. Blood-drinkers, or were-monsters, or the like. Peter Stumpp, the Werewolf of Bedburg, in 1589 – he was one of Dracul’s more impressive descendants. Incidents like that don’t happen much anymore. Usually.”
"The Werewolf of Bedburg? What did he do?"

"I tell you, you wouldn’t sleep at all." There’s a low, growling note of playfulness in Flynn’s voice, though Lucy might have imagined that. “Murder, rape, cannibalism, incest, cavorting with the Devil, the lot. Of course, plenty of the charges were politically motivated, but others weren’t. Oh, and Elizabeth Báthory, of course.”

“I think I’ve heard of her,” Lucy says. “She existed in my world too. The Blood Countess?”

“She was Dracul’s lover, the legend goes. She was born a hundred and thirty years after him, but he became immortal and turned her.”

“Actually became immortal?” It’s possible that’s not just a figure of speech, and the last thing you want, obviously, is goddamn Actual Dracula running around, four hundred and fifty years old and more fangy than ever. “Wait, he is dead, right?”

Flynn laughs at the worried look on her face, which is the most open and bright she has ever seen him. He almost looks relaxed, ironically given that the subject is horrible historical murderers and gruesome ghost stories of the haunted Transylvanian mountains. “Yes, he’s dead. The great Abraham Van Helsing killed him, many years ago.”

“Isn’t he just – ” Lucy struggles to remember if Bram Stoker’s Dracula has been written yet. She thinks it isn’t until the 1890s, but in this world, Stoker may be drawing on a famous real monster hunter for his fictional equivalent. “Was Van Helsing a colleague of yours or something?”

Flynn gives her a strange look, as if she’s just done the equivalent of him asking if she personally knew George Washington (the answer is actually yes, but would not be the case for anyone apart from her). “He was the founder of the hunting profession, but he died long before I was born. At any rate, we have plenty of other things to worry about, but no, not Dracul.”

“That’s a relief,” Lucy cracks (though yes, she is in fact honestly relieved). “Things are bad, but at least no Dracula?”

Flynn rumbles a low chuckle. Some of the ice between them seems to have been broken, and he isn’t being quite so conscientious at holding himself stiffly away from her. Their legs are pressing together, half-tangled between the quilts, and he tugs out his arm to settle it on the pillows, lightly over her shoulders. “No,” he says. “No Dracula. You know him too, I take it?”

“Yes, he’s pretty famous in my world.” It strikes Lucy that she’s become fairly comfortable at talking about this fact with Flynn, when before, the only person she’s told here was Dodgson, out of necessity. Flynn must be unavoidably curious about it, but thus far, he hasn’t asked any direct questions, or treated her like a strange alien specimen (she remembers Dodgson’s request to make closer anatomical studies of her, and shudders). “I take it these are the monsters you were talking about hunting? Dracul’s children?”

“Some of them, yes,” Flynn says. “Not as much as before. There are medicines now, potions, chemicals, that are used to treat the infected, though often they’re still just thrown in the asylum for good measure. The thinking is that the monstrous can be tamed and made civilized with science, so some can pass as ordinary people. And of course, the medicines are very expensive, so the poor still have to succumb, be driven raving mad, or killed. Not to mention, deeply unpleasant and addictive. But I suppose it’s better than the alternative.”

Lucy considers that. Then there’s a distant creak in the house, and – understandably given all this creepy talk – she jumps out of her skin, right into Flynn. He laughs outright, curling his arm around her and pulling her halfway atop his chest, sheltering her into him. “Scared of things that
go bump in the night, Lucy?”

She looks down at him, at his face still close to hers, the unshaven dark stubble on his chin, the mischievous green-hazel eyes dancing with amusement, and experiences a desire to kiss him more profound than anything she has ever felt in her life. It is so strong that it almost makes her bones bend, as if he is the reverse polarity of her soul and they are being almost magnetically drawn together, as if it takes physical effort to resist it. She was going to say something, but she can’t for the life of her think what, and her hands splay on the hard muscle of his shoulder as she tries, for some old, instinctive reason, to put distance between them again. Her fingers burn where they touch him, as if the air has physically sparked, and –

An image of Noah flashes into her head. That first night they slept together, the way she kept telling herself it was fine, it was fine, and then how she sat in the bathroom for two hours afterward, more than passively wanting to die. It was nothing Noah did, exactly. It was just the numbness and disconnect and the knowledge that she hadn’t chosen this, she had fallen and kept falling into this fantasyland, this dreamlike life that she did not even remember embracing. Flynn is nothing like Noah, this is the exact opposite of what it was then – it’s rejecting Rittenhouse, not embracing it. But something goes through her like a cold, paralyzing stab of terror, like a crashing tsunami wave. She pauses, drops her hand, and slides away.

“Lucy?” They’re close enough to each other by now, in whatever sense of the word, that Flynn can, apparently, instantly sense that wall going up. He glances at her with real concern, as if he’s afraid he did something to cause that. “Are you all right?”

“Fine.” Her voice sounds husky, and she clears her throat, donning an unconvincing smile. “I just – fine. You were going to tell me a story about the Raven King, remember?”

“Yes.” He glances at her again, then waits until she settles down in a more comfortable position, half in the crook of his arm, their heads cradled in the pillows. She can hear snow still scratching at the windows, soft and gentle, and it reminds her of the whisper of trees, the strange way her room transformed into a liminal reality during the revenant attack, the forest that inexplicably grew through the ceiling. All the woods belong to him. “Very well. Once upon a time, the Raven King ruled in the land, and his name was Matija Korvin. He was a great magician, a master of men, who raised the Black Army and flew his banner victorious over many a bloody field of battle. But then, one day…”

Lucy doesn’t interrupt, nestling closer to listen. It has the cadence of a long-memorized story, repeated word for word how he learned it as a child, and – she thinks suddenly – must have told it to his own daughter. He slips into Croatian occasionally, sometimes just for a word that he apparently can’t think how to translate, and sometimes for longer stretches. She doesn’t break in and ask him to switch back to English, feeling that this too is part of the fabric of the tale, and she finds the rhythm and accent quite soothing. After a time, she’s not even sure that he remembers she’s still there, as he has slipped half into a trance. She leans against him, eyes starting to droop, as the Raven King has traveled to the wild realm of Faerie and must complete three tasks to prove his skills and return home. Lucy wonders if that’s her, if she has stumbled into her own strange land and prove her worth. Must battle the dragon, defeat the evil sorceress, and become a hero. It seems a little outside her pay grade.

She must fall asleep with the lulling sound of the story in her ears, because the next time she opens her eyes, it’s pitch-dark in the room, the brazier and the candles have burned out, and it’s about forty degrees Fahrenheit. Lucy can feel the cold air on her face when she opens her eyes, and winces. She has managed to become mostly engulfed in Flynn’s side; he’s asleep, snoring softly, and she’s comfortable enough that she doesn’t want to move, but also, she’s very cold. Damn it, Russia.
Moving awkwardly, since she’s on the side by the wall and can’t really get out without climbing over Flynn or the footboard, Lucy slides to the end and swings her legs over, hissing as her bare feet hit the freezing boards. She gropes her way to the brazier by touch, kneels down, and tries to see if there’s still a spark banked somewhere under the coals. This is probably not even remotely as cold as it could be. Why do people live here?

Lucy pokes and prods at the embers, and manages to spur a brief flare. She can just about make out outlines in the darkness, but it’s still dark, and she can’t see if there’s anything in the coal scuttle. She’s definitely not venturing through the house alone to find more, and she lowers her face, trying to blow on the tiny flicker. It gutters, but doesn’t seem inclined to catch.

“Come on,” Lucy mutters. With another seven hours (at least) until sunrise, she would prefer not to have to generate all her own heat until then. She wonders how much snow there is. St. Petersburg is obviously used to it, so it would take a truly massive amount to actually shut it down, but sitting here with nothing to do would get boring quickly. Maybe there will be an airship back to London, which is still where she needs to be going. That, or –

“Lucy?”

She jumps, glancing over her shoulder at the sound of Flynn’s voice filtering out of the darkness, as he’s apparently woken and found her spot empty. “Here,” she says. “I’m trying to restart the damn fire.”

She hears the bed creak, and a moment later, his tall shadow appears above her, materializing into him as he kneels next to her, takes the striking stones, and produces a spark on the first go. He coaxes it to small, glowing life, gets up and finds some fresh coal in the hopper, and manages to get the brazier crackling nearly cheerily. Lucy reaches her cold hands toward it, as he regards her with the expression of a bird who has made a nice nest for his mate and is not about to let her settle for substandard quality. Not looking up, she says, “What time is it, do you think?”

Flynn twitches aside the curtain. “Four o’clock? I can’t be sure. There’s a good foot of snow out there. They’ve been having a run of cold winters here.”

Lucy figures that anywhere else’s winters are probably warm by Russian standards, but she seems to recall reading that St. Petersburg’s aren’t as bone-chillingly bad as Moscow’s. Once her fingers are able to bend normally, she gets up and climbs back into bed, suddenly conscious about expecting him to crawl in next to her. But the sheets are still warm, and the quilts are tousled, and unless he’s going to have another attack of principle about sleeping on the floor, there aren’t any other choices. She lies still, aware of her heart beating in her throat, as he moves to get in, the mattress sinking under his weight. It’s already warmer again with him there.

Lucy wonders if he’ll remember that he was trying to stay away from her earlier, but he doesn’t. She lets herself slowly ease back into her vacated spot against his side, under his arm, head against the joint of his shoulder. She has lost all hesitation about whether he’s any physical threat to her, because she knows he’s not, and that allows her to relax into it. Her free hand comes up to rest on his chest, where she can feel its steady rise and fall, and the echoes of his heartbeat. Her fingers move unconsciously, tracing circles, and she hears his breath catch.

“Lucy –” It sounds like a warning, half to himself and half to her, though she doesn’t know for what. His other hand comes up and catches it, his long, callused fingers folding into her palm in a way that feels more nakedly intimate than an actual kiss. “Lucy... don’t.”

She opens her mouth. Nothing comes out. However gently worded, whatever his reasons, it’s still a rejection, and it shrivels up the small sprig of confidence that had begun to spread inside her. Maybe after the story earlier, he began to think of his wife and daughter again, the way she had
the momentary freakout about Noah, and couldn’t bring himself back to it. Maybe he (understandably) realizes it’s a bad idea to start anything with a soldier on deployment from another world who is either going to get killed or go home. Maybe (it seems impossible after everything, but) he actually doesn’t want her in that way, and she’ll only embarrass herself and make their partnership awkward if she pushes. But –

“Did I – ” Lucy’s voice is small. “I’m sorry, did I – ”


“Okay.” Lucy tries to withdraw her hand from his grip, but he still has hold of it. She feels unaccountably like she’s about to cry. Inanely, she repeats, “I’m sorry.”

Flynn starts to say something else, then doesn’t. Then he leans over and presses his mouth to the side of her head. It’s not exactly a kiss, but something that might clumsily and fleetingly be mistaken for one, and he pulls away at once, before settling back down next to her. Closes his eyes, and even though her chest aches, aches like it’s been turned inside out, Lucy does the same.

They sleep for several more hours in fits and starts, until a finger of fragile pink sun finally begins to edge through the window. That means it’s close to ten o’clock, most of St. Petersburg has probably been up to begin the day in darkness, and they can hear a bustling commerce both below and outside on the street. Flynn sits up and swings out of bed. “We should probably see if the airships are running.”

Lucy reminds herself that she does want to go back to Oxford, and she shouldn’t wonder if he’s trying to get rid of her, distance them again after the too-close pass of their orbits last night. She gets up and gets dressed as well, realizes that her wardrobe is still woefully inadequate for a Russian winter, and pulls on her still-damp dress and Anton’s worn overcoat with a grimace. “Can we at least not be outside for too long?”

“I’ll work on it.” Flynn, like most Slavs, is probably genetically impermeable to cold, but Lucy is a weak-constitutioned Californian. “I want to reconnoiter with the gang. Apparently they get up to too much damn trouble if they’re not supervised.”

With that, and Flynn having lent her his hat and muffler so that Lucy feels even more like a bag lady, but hopefully won’t turn instantly into an icicle, they depart, stepping outside into the chilly Siberian blast with a grimace. The sun is rose and gold and dazzling on the snow, their footsteps crunch and squeak, and Lucy experiences a brief wish for Rittenhouse to just freeze solid out there in the tundra and spare them the unpleasant experience of going after them. That would be very nice, if deeply unlikely.

It takes them a while, with a stop to buy burning-hot black coffee and a sweet bun, but they finally find the rest of the gang, or at least most of it, shacked up in the backup hiding spot a further five hundred yards down the Ditch. At the sight of Lucy, the Sokolovs, who have been sitting on crates, spring to their feet and offer gentlemanly doffs of their hats. “Are having a good night, Lucy?” Anton enquires. “Flynn is not horrible garbage goblin?”

Lucy chokes, even as Flynn shoots the brothers you-watch-your-mouths looks. “No,” she says weakly. “No, he was actually – he was actually great.”

“Oh?” Gennady looks vastly intrigued. “You mean, you have GOOD NIGHT? Or – ow! Raspizdyai! That was what for?”

“You do not ask these questions,” Anton informs him, with a superior look that makes Lucy think
he is definitely the older of the two. “Is extremely impolite. You are poshlaja svenja.”

Gennady thinks it over, decides that he has indeed been mortifyingly forward, and hastens to beg Lucy’s pardons, while she’s fairly sure that she’s never going to be able to look any of the men in the eye ever again. Once Flynn has had a brief conference with them, and Gennady has also offered his overcoat in further penance for his gaffe, Flynn gets to his feet. “Come on, Lucy. I’ll take you to the docks and find a ship headed for England. Not in the cargo hold this time.”

“And what about you?” Lucy asks. “How much longer are you going to stay here?”

“I have to disrupt what Rittenhouse is doing here,” Flynn says. “I haven’t done that yet. I know it’s Hiram Sibley Junior who’s running the railway project, but – to my own surprise – I decided that just killing him wouldn’t work. You go to London this weekend, visit Ada, see if Priscilla is up for our plan. You’d have to warn her that it would be bigger and more powerful than anything she’s tried before, and if it went bad, well – anyway. It’s a risky plan either way, and I wouldn’t agree to it if there were alternatives, but we have to do something. I feel like the revenant won’t stay away much longer, and I don’t like that.”

“All right.” Lucy has the brief and rather adorable impression that he’s concerned for her safety, and it’s made him more willing to experiment with dark magic than he might otherwise be. She is still reluctant to go, however, and tries to hand back the Sokolovs’ overcoats, but they insist that she keep them, as it won’t do to have her cold on the trip home. Then she takes Flynn’s arm when he offers it, they are avidly watched out by a group of half a dozen grown men who clearly are very invested in this (apart perhaps from Karl), and start to walk.

The streets are only half-cleared, the snow still lying thick on roof and wall and stoop, and Lucy starts to get her hopes up that the airships won’t be running. She can’t see any on the horizon, at least. She can’t tell if Flynn is taking a bit of the long way around, since he might be eager to get rid of her, but she finds her grip tightening and tightening on his arm until he looks at her as if wondering as if she’s trying to tear it off. “Lucy?”

“Sorry.” Lucy doesn’t know what else to say, as ever. She tries to think of something, anything, to explain it, but she doesn’t get the chance. That is because at that moment, they are interrupted by the Tunguska event.

That, at least, is what Lucy briefly and seriously thinks it is, notwithstanding the fact that a) said event does not happen until 1908, and b) would have leveled most of the city if it struck there and not in barren, empty Siberian tundra. But there’s a blinding bright flash, a boom, and a burning white fireball falls out of the sky directly in front of her, making her stagger backward into Flynn. He snatches and shields her, covering her and putting his body between her and the blast, and it is several extremely chaotic moments as smoke and steam gout up from the impact crater. Lucy smells ozone and burned flesh, and hears a faint, gutted groaning. Groaning that – although it is completely, completely impossible – sounds familiar.

Another possibly literal bolt of lightning goes through her. She pushes Flynn out of the way and runs down the alley to the site of impact. She can see something – someone – sprawled out there, still not remotely up to getting to their feet after that dramatic of an entrance (the bar has been set now and forever). She kneels down next to them – to him – heart jackhammering. This can’t be. This is a cruel trick. This can’t be.

And yet. She rolls him over. He’s only half-conscious, bleeding from the nose and temple, and his face is streaked with soot. But their eyes meet, and they can do nothing but stare.

Lucy manages it first.
“Rufus?”
In Which Everyone Would Like To Know How This Happened

To say the least, there is not a lot that can prepare you for the sight of your best friend literally falling out of the blue, a hundred and thirty years and a parallel dimension away from where you left him, and his landing spot being a back alley in Steampunk St. Petersburg just yards from you and your – well, Lucy has given up on any easily definable term for Flynn, so never mind that. She remains kneeling next to Rufus, her mouth still open but no sound coming out, as he likewise tries to regather enough wind to speak. He lifts his head an inch, then gives up, falling back into the snow, and she briefly fears that he’s dead. “Rufus?” she says again. “Rufus?”

“Nnrgh.” Rufus seems to be signaling that he in fact still operational, but it’s going to take a long time to get everything back online, and she shouldn’t panic in the interim. At least he can apparently tell that he ended up in the right place, so he takes several well-deserved moments to remain exactly where he goddamn is. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Lucy repeats. It’s not really worth asking him the obvious question at this point, but she slides a hand under his head. “Can you stand up?”

Rufus tries, legs twitching, but to no result. For his part, Flynn – after an understandable moment of total shock – has realized that Lucy knows the magical flying moron, and strides down the alley, boots crunching, to tower over him. “Who the hell is this? What just happened?”

“This is my – this is Rufus.” Lucy waves at him to back off with the looming, as Rufus has clearly had the hell of a day already and she doesn’t want his first impression of Westworld to be an upside-down, bad-tempered Flynn. “I have no idea what happened, but he – he may be hurt.”

Flynn raises an eyebrow, as if to say that if anyone wasn’t hurt after that swan dive from the sky, he would be very surprised. He considers Rufus balefully, as if to make sure he isn’t a cleverly disguised cruise missile (or whatever this world’s equivalent would be) and then realizes, as Lucy does, that this has put a crimp in the plan of packing her aboard the nearest airship back to England. She isn’t sure if that’s a good thing or not, but Rufus is here, needs help, and obviously has a whale of a tale as to how he is. And with Jiya supposedly held captive by Rittenhouse, that means all three of the team may be here, and while Lucy would of course gratefully welcome the presence of her friends again at long last, there is a fairly obvious logistical snafu. The Lifeboat, hidden back in New York, is only configured to take one of them home. And while further individual rocket-ship rides might not be totally out of the question, it is a stretch to expect to be normal after one of those, let alone survive two.

One problem at a time. Lucy pushes that out of her head, and turns to Flynn. “Can you – can you help me with him? We’ll have to go back to the hideout.”

Flynn considers, then shrugs. He leans down, hauls Rufus upright none too gently, and slings him over his shoulders in a fireman’s carry, as Rufus groans feebly but can’t really object to being tossed like a sack of beans. Lucy gives Flynn a be careful look, and goes to ensure that they can get out ahead of what must be a horde of incoming spectators. People must have seen that across St. Petersburg, and if the story spreads, that could also cause difficulties. It would be better to be away from here post-haste.

With Flynn lugging Rufus, Lucy wends her way back through the narrow alleys and stone quays that line the canal; the Neva is frozen solid, and won’t break up until March or April of next year, so the wintertime commerce is starting to set up camp on the river. At the moment, most of them are heading toward the site of the impact, speculating worriedly on what it could be, so Lucy and Flynn have to be careful about staying out of sight. They finally clamber over a low wall and
hurry toward the warehouse, check once more that they haven’t been followed, and push through the door, as Lucy shuts and bars it behind them.

Flynn’s gang, who were expecting the boss back but not Lucy, jump to their feet in confusion, which is doubled at the sight of a semi-conscious man slung over his shoulder. The Sokolovs hurry to get some sacks to set Rufus down on, and as he recovers more of his battered higher faculties, Lucy can see him wondering just what kind of crowd she is running with these days. It’s finally Shitmouth who says, “Who’s the Negro, then?”

“Friend of hers.” Flynn glances at Lucy, with a hard-to-read expression. “At least, I take it from how she greeted him. If you recently heard a very large bang and saw a flash, that was him.”

“We thought an airship might have blown up,” says one of the Taylors. “Or someone had bombed the docks. How’s one man have that effect instead?”

“I sense it’s a fascinating story. But one not for you lot’s ears.” Flynn speaks brusquely, his manner once more that of the take-no-prisoners crime boss, as he turns his head at a sound from outside. “We’re still close to the scene. We should move again.”

“And what, that means I’m off to scout another hideout for us?” Karl has been standing with arms folded and chin outthrust. “We stay low and quiet, they’re not likely to come nosing around here again so soon. They just made an inspection yesterday, a few proper bribes should keep them out for months.”

Flynn looks at him as if to ask if Karl knew the correct St. Petersburg middle bureaucrats to pay off and did so, Karl looks back as if to say that of course he does and did, and interesting though this ongoing power struggle is, Lucy thinks they need to pay more attention to Rufus. She gets a cup of tea from the chipped porcelain samovar, warms it up, and hands it to Rufus, who is able to sip it with only minor assistance. Flynn waves away the gang to give her space, and once they have all withdrawn to the other side of the warehouse, Lucy and Rufus are left with a semblance of privacy. They look at each other, then blurt out at the same time, “I can’t believe you’re here.”

“Yeah.” Rufus grimaces. “It was not easy. I’ll see if I can explain it briefly. Basically, Jiya went missing thanks to some kind of artifact that took her and Wyatt Logan’s wife out of a room at Bethlem Royal Hospital. Mrs. Logan is there, it’s a long story, I don’t know it. I went to confront Connor about it, and – I can’t be sure, but I think he’s still actually on our side, has been tricking Rittenhouse and trying to delay them while pretending to be their fancy CEO. He gave me the equations for the Mothership’s modifications, and the schematics for whatever device he used to talk to Emma here, the Refractory-Glass. I put one together, which was how I communicated with you the other day. When is it, anyway? Date-wise?”

“November 1887,” Lucy says. “I’ve been here for just over a year. So what, you managed to build a working Refractory-Glass receptor from scratch?”

“Well, I had the plans,” Rufus points out. “And as I thought about it, and how Jiya vanished, I realized that I could possibly apply the principle to transmit myself along the same channels. After all, the human body is also essentially highly coded information packets, so if I could find the right frequency, I could basically email myself here. I took the Mothership modifications and meddled around with them so they applied to one person rather than a time machine, kind of like what I did to the Lifeboat the first time, but without the infrastructure. I realized that I already had a connection to wherever you were physically with the Refractory-Glass, so I set up the destination point to track with you.”

“So you were magnetically guided to wherever I was, and I’m supposed to be in Oxford, but instead, I’m in Russia – it’s a long story,” Lucy adds, seeing Rufus’s face. “That’s amazing,
Rufus, that’s dazzling genius, but how did you know it was going to work?”

“I didn’t,” Rufus admits. “If I’d made a mistake in the math or the coding protocols, I would be disconnected wifi, times a thousand, and not exist in any of the branches of the multiverse ever again. But I couldn’t get here any other way, and I – ” He stops, then shrugs, glancing down. “For you and Jiya, I thought it was worth the risk.”

Lucy looks at him, realizes that in the haste and shock and disbelieving explanations, she has had no time to simply take in the fact that he’s here, he’s here, and reaches out to hug him desperately hard, fighting tears. Rufus does the same, they shake silently in each other’s arms, and then sniffle and try to pull themselves together. “Anyway,” he says. “I turned on my receptor to get a signal connected to Westworld, punched in all the information, crossed my fingers and toes and everything else, and stepped into the projector circle. The next thing I know, I’m dive-bombing out of the clear blue yonder, it’s really cold, I can’t breathe, and I see you and some cranky Russian giant staring at me. So I guess I didn’t screw it up.”


“That’s Flynn?” Rufus looks startled. “Wait, the same one that Connor said was causing all the headaches for Rittenhouse here? I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised that you two managed to meet up, but what’s with all the Newsies sidekicks?”

“He’s a crime boss in London. He runs a gang, that’s them, they’re here in Russia because Rittenhouse has an interest in the Trans-Siberian Railway. They’re having it built to provide themselves with a proprietary aether pipeline. We’ve spent a lot of time trying to figure out what they’re doing and how they want to harvest magic from this reality. I was actually on my way back to Oxford – I have a teaching post there – right before you made your dramatic entrance.”

“Have you heard anything about Jiya?” Rufus asks urgently. “Anything at all?”

Lucy hesitates. “Emma came to see me in Oxford last week,” she says at last. “She hinted that Rittenhouse had Jiya prisoner, and unless I cooperated, they’d – well. You know.”

“Rittenhouse has Jiya prisoner?” Rufus looks set to jump to his feet and swim to England himself. “I mean, I realize we can’t exactly work with them, but – what the hell did Emma even want? Just to be horrible and ruin more people’s lives?”

“She wanted help finding a lost magical library,” Lucy says. “The Bibliotheca Corviniana. It belonged to the Raven King, a famous fifteenth-century magician. She thinks it’ll tell her everything she needs to know to complete her world domination.”

“Yay. Emma.” Rufus rolls his eyes heavenward. “Still the worst in every universe, good to know. I feel like I’m probably missing half the story, but we can’t sit around shooting the shit all day. Are you and Flynn friends?”

“We….” Lucy doesn’t know how to answer that. “We’re colleagues, sort of. It’s been a very back-and-forth process. I think we’re working together now, but it could change again.”

Rufus eyes her shrewdly, as he knows her well enough to tell that she’s being purposefully evasive on this front. Still, this is not the opportune moment to press for details, so he doesn’t. “So, Jiya – did Emma say where she was supposed to be? Anything?”

“No. I was going to try to find her, but then I got –” Lucy considers that. “Inadvertently brought over here, by Karl. He’s Flynn’s right-hand man. I think.”

“Which one’s Karl? The sandy weasel with the pornstache?” Rufus glances at the far side of the
warehouse, where the gang appears to be a little too intently absorbed in conversation. “Or one of the other Scorsese rejects? Lucy, obviously, I’m the newcomer here, I don’t know what’s going on or what you’ve been up to, but do you really trust these guys?”

“I trust Flynn,” Lucy says. “And the Sokolovs – those two, the large blond Russian brothers. I think the others like me, or are at least certainly aren’t going to do anything to me. They’re the closest thing I’ve got to allies.”

Rufus continues to look extremely skeptical, but at last, he blows out a breath and nods. “Okay, if you say so. So what’s the plan? Can we get out of here and go save Jiya?”

“I want to,” Lucy promises him. “But after your entrance, we have to see if the airships are even still running. The Russian authorities may have closed down the port, and Rittenhouse definitely has people here as well. Can you even walk yet?”

Rufus makes a valiant attempt to get up, then reels, and Lucy has to catch his arm before he falls. Rufus breathes hard as the world apparently somersaults, and sits down again heavily. “Jiya’s hella resourceful,” he says, as if in an attempt to convince himself that any delay whatsoever in the rescue mission is acceptable. “She’s pulled the wool over Rittenhouse’s eyes and gotten away from them before, she could have done it again.”

“Yes, but we can’t count on that, and we can’t kill you too trying to get to her.” Lucy notices that Rufus’ color is still off, and drains the dregs of the samovar for another cup of tea. Violent interdimensional self-translocation is definitely not flying in business class, which her trip in the Lifeboat was by comparison. “Actually, I’m going to send a telegram to Ada Lovelace. Tell her to tell Oxford that I’ll be back soon, and see if she can get her butler on the case. Woolsey found Flynn’s hideout in like one morning, he could possibly find Jiya too.”

“Ada Lovelace?” Rufus goggles. “You know Ada Lovelace? Didn’t she die in like, the 1850s?”

“Not in this universe, apparently. She’s a grand old dame and very gleefully eccentric.” Lucy smiles at the thought. “We met when I came to London, and we hit it off.”

Rufus looks suitably impressed at the idea, and after a few more minutes, Lucy leaves him to continue his recuperation, heading over to the gang and explaining what she needs to do. It is agreed that Anton and Gennady will escort her to the telegraph office and take stock of the airship situation, and she can feel Flynn’s eyes on their backs as they leave. She’s tempted to glance over her shoulder and see what expression it is, but she isn’t going to be caught mooning after him. She screwed up her courage and asked for what she wanted, and he said no. She doesn’t know why, she’s going to respect his refusal because that’s what decent people do, take her lumps and get on with things, but it still hurts in an entirely different way than before. See. This is exactly why she didn’t want to make a move and muddy the waters with unrequited heartbreak. Should have contented herself that they finally seemed to be on the same page and actually ready to work together, and nothing else.


“That – what, oh, no, that’s very sweet of you, but no.” Lucy glances at the Sokolovs, striding to each side of her like twin towers of six-foot-three Bolshevik brawler with perfect manners, and wonders if she could convince them to come back to England with her. After all, they technically aren’t part of Flynn’s gang; they work on the docks in London, and they don’t seem terribly impressed by his shortcomings in the etiquette department. Rescuing Jiya, if necessary, would take a lot more muscle than she and Rufus have alone, and they clearly like her. Maybe she can start up her own gang. There’s not a whole lot more scandalized that Somerville can be, right?
The streets are crowded, the alley where Rufus crashed in is cordoned off, and police inspectors in high-collared overcoats and fur hats are blowing whistles and barking at the gawking onlookers to back off. It definitely looks like all incoming and outgoing airships and steamships have been halted while they search for the source of the incident, which doesn’t help. The crush slows almost to a standstill at points, so Anton picks Lucy up under his arm like a football and sends Gennady in front of them to bowl open a path. This is very effective, and they finally fight clear of the throng and make it to the port telegraph office. It occurs to Lucy just before they go in that Rittenhouse might be monitoring communications in and out of St. Petersburg, and she stalls. “Wait, what if they’re reporting to someone?”

“Eh?” Anton frowns at her, and Lucy explains that she’s worried they’ll pass her telegram on to some sort of secret listening service. The Sokolovs look at her, then at each other, crack their knuckles, and inform her to wait where she is and to maybe turn her back. They then proceed menacingly inside the telegraph office. Five minutes of muffled banging, thumps, shouts, and crashes later, Anton re-emerges, only slightly out of breath. “All right,” he announces. “Telegraph operator is ready to talk now.”

Lucy raises both eyebrows at him as he offers a hand to help her over the threshold, then over the numerous items of furniture that seem to have become unaccountably dislodged. A very cowed-looking clerk in a cockeyed green visor is sitting by the machine, with Gennady standing guard, and after some fits and starts, since Lucy doesn’t speak Russian and the clerk doesn’t speak English, Anton serves as translator and she composes a brief message to Ada. There’s also the possibility of it being read on the other end, so Lucy can’t go into much detail. She manages to convey that she has accidentally wound up in Russia, she would appreciate Ada informing Oxford that she’s not dead, and apologizing profusely for the inconvenience. As well, if Mr. Woolsey can possibly make a few enquiries about a young female friend of hers? Jiya?

When this is finished and dispatched, Gennady asks if he should take the telegraph operator by his heels and shake him several times to ensure he does not retain any copies for anyone else. It as he is prepared to do this that something falls out of the operator’s pocket, some kind of special cancellation stamp. When Lucy picks it up and turns it over, she can see the name SIBLEY in the grilling. Flynn said that Hiram Sibley Junior is running the railway project for Rittenhouse, and his father, Hiram Sibley Senior, was one of the main pioneers of the telegraph in America. Sibley senior worked with Samuel Morse, inventor of Morse code, and was the first president of Western Union, as well as being very interested in Russian-American telegraphic links. Lucy thought of him back when Flynn mentioned Rittenhouse’s Siberian interests at tea with Ada, and this appears to be proof positive that Sibley junior has in fact seeded St. Petersburg telegraph offices with his spies.

“What?” Anton asks, seeing her face. “What is?”

Lucy shows him the stamp – she doesn’t know exactly what it’s for, but most likely to highlight messages that might warrant Sibley’s personal inspection. Once she has conveyed this to the Sokolovs, they assume thunderous frowns and turn back to the clerk. They interrogate him in rapid-fire Russian, which Lucy of course can’t follow, and when the clerk seems to shirk on offering answers, Anton plucks him out of his chair and holds him up like a punching bag in front of Gennady. This sufficiently alarms the clerk into squawking something, which they make him write down. Anton holds it out to Lucy. “Is address. He says for office of Sibley.”

Lucy’s stomach lurches. This, obviously, would be a major breakthrough, and after a moment of consideration, she decides that they have accomplished enough for now. She jerks her head at the Sokolovs, they smartly step after her, and the clerk has a look of both terror and awe on his face at seeing a tiny woman command this pair of behemoths. They take a back route to the Ditch to avoid the police and the crowds, and hurry into the warehouse, where Flynn jumps away from the
door as if to prove that he wasn’t standing there and waiting for them to return. “There you are,” he says. “Took long enough.”

“Is obviously some problems.” Anton eyes Flynn up and down. “You have not let Lucy’s friend die, we hope?”

“No, he’s over there.” Flynn jerks his head at Rufus, who does not look to be particularly enjoying his hospital bed of burlap sacks in a drafty Russian warehouse, surrounded by heavily armed criminals wanted in at least two countries. Shocking, that. “Did you get the message off?”

“Yes. And there’s this.” Lucy hands him the slip of paper. “The Sokolovs got it out of the telegraph clerk that that’s Hiram Sibley’s office. The family is in the business, he’s probably been helping Rittenhouse tap all the wires in and out of St. Petersburg.”

Flynn scans it quickly, scowling. “Sibley’s been at the Winter Palace most days to meet with the tsar and his engineering advisors. I did think he had to have a base somewhere nearby, but… are you sure about this?”

“I was about to punch clerk VERY HARD,” Gennady puts in. “In UNPLEASANT region for gentleman. Not sure if that make him more truthful, but I HOPE SO.”

Flynn raises an eyebrow at the younger Sokolov, but obviously does not dispute this bare-knuckled method of problem-solving. Finally he says, “Very well, we should check it out. If Sibley’s not there, we might also be able to steal his files or information. I’ll take the Taylors, Gennady, and Karl. The rest of you go and keep out of trouble, except for Anton. You stay here.”


“Because,” Flynn says, “you’re the only one I trust to keep a proper eye on Lucy and her vagabond friend. As soon as he can stand up straight and the heat’s died down, you can take care of getting them aboard an airship back to England.”

“Wait,” Lucy says. “I did send a telegram, I – Rufus just – ” She isn’t sure how much to say in front of Flynn’s gang, since he clearly has not widely shared the truth of her origins, and thus does not need to go blurtting out that she and Rufus are from the next universe over. “He just fell out of the sky, I don’t think he’s going to be able to immediately travel – ”

“Airship to England,” Flynn says to Anton, ignoring her. “Yes?”

Anton pauses, then nods. “Yes.”

“Good.” Flynn strides away, opens a crate, and begins strapping on several extra guns, evidently in case Hiram Sibley is indeed there and objects to having his office robbed. Lucy stands there furiously, then runs after him, grabbing his arm. He looks up at her with his customary sardonic-dick expression. “Yes, Lucy?”

“You can’t just banish me,” Lucy says angrily. “You can’t just return to treating me like a piece of cargo, throwing me on board an airship again, like I have no thoughts or volition of my – ”

“Banish you?” Flynn arches the other eyebrow to its utmost potential. “You remember how you got here in the first place? I’m trying to help you out. I thought you wanted to go back to England.”

“I do.” Lucy’s voice sounds too weak, and she tries again. “I do, but with Rufus – ”

“Nobody asked him to crash the party. Literally.” Flynn shrugs,thumbing open the chamber of a
revolver, checking that it’s loaded, and slinging it into the holster. “Is that the only thing you want, Lucy? Because if not, you should say so.”

Lucy almost screams at him that she said so, she said so as clearly she could stand to do last night, and he already told her what his answer was. How dare he act as if it is her responsibility to fess up and bare her soul to him, when he stopped it, when he said no, and she has been chasing her head in circles and viciously second-guessing herself for risking it at all? The need is still present, it hasn’t gone away. If anything, infuriatingly, it’s gotten even stronger, the realization that while she is presently very angry at him and would happily slap that idiot look off his handsome asshole face, she would just as happily snap and kiss him, and possibly something else, if his entire gang was not standing right here and not even pretending they aren’t hanging onto this for dear life. Lucy’s fists clench. To stop herself from which of the options, she has no idea. Probably both.

After a pause, Flynn gets to his feet, straightening to his full height above her, which puts her nose somewhere in the region of his solar plexus. “You’ll stay here,” he says, in a tone that brooks no argument, “until it’s safe. Then you’re going to leave.”

Somewhere in the confused jumble of lust, wrath, and other deadly sins currently fighting for mastery of Lucy’s brain, it occurs to her to wonder if Flynn has been low-key panicking since she got here. If she’s likewise dropped out of the clear blue sky, not quite as spectacularly as Rufus but to basically the same effect, and he’s been scrambling ever since to accommodate her presence in the middle of his gritty, very-low-class, dangerous, anonymous existence as a spy and saboteur in the streets of St. Petersburg, running from his criminal record and Rittenhouse in one country and trying to blow up their operations in another. He’s had to devote time and effort to keeping her safe, fed, away from the police inspectors, un-frozen during the snowstorm, and otherwise in a functional state long enough to package her back to England in the first place, which by every respect, should be what she wants to do. What more does she want from him, his expression seems to say? When he’s gone to this much damn trouble to get her out of the frying pan, and she obstinately insists on sitting right in the middle of the fire?

They continue to eye each other for another extremely fraught few moments, Flynn staring down his nose at her as Lucy glares at him right back. Then he steps back. “I won’t hear anything more about this,” he says, “or I will have Anton throw you in the cargo hold.”

“Excuse me?” Anton looks mortally affronted. “You throw her in cargo hold yourself! Though if you try, I break your nose. Ignore him, Lucy. You know I never do such thing.”

“I know,” Lucy assures him. She’s tempted to tell him to break Flynn’s nose anyway, because it appears to be the only satisfaction she is going to get out of this, but she also just doesn’t want to have to look at him anymore. “Go on,” she snaps at Flynn. “Run out of here and leave your mess behind. Just like you always do, remember?”

He takes that in, and nods. Then he has the audacity, the sheer, ridiculous, unmitigated gall to grasp her shoulders in both hands, lean down, and kiss her patronizingly on the forehead. “Don’t worry,” he snarks. “We’ll be careful.”

“Right now, I honestly could not care less if you got yourself killed.” Lucy shoves him away from her with both hands. “So don’t strain yourself on my account.”

With a final evil look exchanged between them, Flynn stomps off, slings one last gun into his jacket, and jerks his head at his strike team. The Taylors, Gennady (with an apologetic glance at Lucy), and Karl form up behind him, Karl’s face also something that deserves to be in a museum, and they depart at speed. Once they’re gone, and the other gang members have scuttled out on their orders to make themselves discreet, Lucy’s strength abruptly runs out of her, and she sits down on one of the crates. She leans forward and puts her face in her hands.
“Lucy?” Anton hovers awkwardly at her shoulder. “I make you some tea?”

“No. I just…” Lucy remains where she is. “I’m done. I give up. Just take me back to England whenever the port reopens. I don’t know why I keep deluding myself, over and over, into thinking this has any chance of actually working.”

Anton pauses. Then he pulls up a crate next to her and pats her on the arm with a hand the size of a ham hock, in a clumsy but comforting gesture. “Flynn is horrible garbage goblin,” he says. “As I call him before. When he get back, I take him out and shake him very hard. You are very good lady, Lucy. Very strong. You give people chances when they not deserve. I am sorry how it is.”

“Thanks.” Lucy glances up at him. “I was thinking. Do you and Gennady want to come back to England with me? We’ll probably need to rescue our other friend, her name is Jiya. Rufus and I can’t pull it off by ourselves.”

“Lady needs rescue?” All of Anton’s Prince Charming sensibilities appear to have been activated on the instant. “Yes, of course we go. Flynn can think about poor life choices alone.”

Lucy snorts, feeling a little better. For his part, Anton does not juggle, but he offers to sing her a long Russian folk song, which Lucy graciously allows to hear a few stanzas of. He can’t really sing, but it’s sweet, and when he admits that he can’t remember any more of it, she thanks him and goes over to see how Rufus is doing. He has been watching the entire thing with the expression of an audience member at a blockbuster film, and glances up at Lucy with a look wondering if she’ll explain or he has to ask. Finally he says, “So, that whole married-for-ten-years argument, that was interesting.”

“That’s not what happened there.” Lucy feels her cheeks starting to heat. “And it seems to be how most of our meetings end up. With the arguing, that is.”

“Yeah, I see what you were saying about it going back and forth. Flynn seems like a real winner. I mean, it’s not like you got to pick who else in this world was going to be fighting Rittenhouse, but are you sure he’s worth the hassle?”

Lucy doesn’t answer, fussing unnecessarily with the burlap sacks that are serving Rufus in poor stead as blankets. Then she says, “Whenever the St. Petersburg port opens, we’ll get out of here. I’ll take you to London, I’m pretty sure Ada would be happy to put you up in her house. I’m not sure what I’ll do about Oxford. Maybe finish the rest of the semester, then leave.”

Rufus glances up at the tone in her voice. “Doesn’t sound like you really want to.”

“No,” Lucy says quietly. “No, I don’t want to. I’ve loved it more than anything. The city is magical and beautiful, my students are such interesting and passionate young women and I’ve been able to teach them things that nobody else has even thought about. I’ve gotten to have something like a normal life again, not just endlessly fighting and jumping through time. I’ve gotten to have roots again. A place to stay. Yes, well, I’ve inadvertently scandalized most of the faculty and students, but they got used even to that. But it would be beyond selfish for me to keep doing that, and leave you and Jiya and Ada and Wyatt and Flynn and everyone else to fight Rittenhouse, when what they’re doing here could change all of reality. I can’t sit out.”

Rufus looks at her with hesitant, uncertain sympathy, before he reaches out to take her hand, and they hold tightly. Lucy wonders if she should tell him about the revenant and the possibility of it being Amy, but decides that can come later. They have enough to deal with at present, and she doesn’t feel like Rufus would be all that enthused at the news of a murderous shadow monster stalking her heels. Instead they wait. And wait.
As the rest of the morning drains by and the afternoon goes equally slowly, Lucy – despite her resolve to stay mad at Flynn at least until he gets back – starts to worry. She paces and stares at the door, listening hard every time there are footsteps passing outside, fighting a swoop in her stomach every time they continue on without stopping. The distant sound of wailing klaxons aren’t helping her nerves either, and she isn’t sure if that’s related to the Rufus investigation or some entirely new calamity. Finally she says to Anton, “How long do you think it would take? Just to raid Sibley’s office, and leave?”

“If it was only that, not so long. But if they are caught, have to run for it, shoot way out, maybe longer.” Anton looks anxious as well, though he is clearly trying to keep his chin up for her sake. “Maybe clerk hurry and tell someone that he had to give up address, they have people waiting in case of attack.”

Lucy feels suddenly and unforgivably naïve that she didn’t think of that possibility. After all, she is the one who sent Flynn there, the one who gave him the information and told him that she didn’t give a rat’s ass if he got killed or not. A thick, sludgy feeling of horrible guilt crawls through her gut, making her swallow hard and stop in her tracks. “Oh God, is he – is he going to think I set him up or something? Led him purposely into a trap?”

“Don’t know that is what happened,” Anton points out. “They could just have to take very long way back. Or hide out. Or – ”

At that moment, he is interrupted by the sound of footsteps that are very definitely coming this way, and he snaps into action. He shoves Lucy down on the sacks next to Rufus, heaves several fully loaded crates in front of them as a makeshift barricade, and draws his gun, pointing it warily at the door. Trying to peer out around the crates, Lucy waits, heart in her mouth, as the bar rattles and it swings open. If it’s the police, if it’s Rittenhouse – if it’s somehow worse, if it’s the gang with Flynn or without him and he’s not –

“Down!” a familiar voice says, sounding alarmed. “Bloody hell!”

“Karl?” Anton (and Lucy) stares at the bedraggled remnants of the strike team: Karl himself, the younger Taylor, and Gennady, all of them looking extremely bloody and dirty and grim. The older Taylor and Flynn aren’t there. “What in fucking hellfire – excuse my very bad language, Lucy, please excuse – just happened?”

“I’ll tell you what happened.” Karl wipes his filthy face on his arm, throwing down his spent revolver. “It was a trap from the start, that’s what it was. Guess the telegraph clerk ran off pronto to tell his Rittenhouse bosses to expect company, so that’s what they did. We got to Sibley’s office, went inside, and five minutes later, full house assault. John Taylor’s dead, they had to shoot him six times before they finished him off. We managed to hold our position inside the office for hours, but they called in more reinforcements. They got the boss, they dragged him away. Still alive the last time we saw him, they’ll want to grill him for information. The three of us barely made it out of there with our skins.”

A ghastly, stomach-churning silence falls in the wake of those words. It’s about as bad as it possibly can be – in fact, it’s worse. Rittenhouse has Flynn, they took Flynn prisoner, they’re definitely going to torture him in hopes of making him talk. Even if (as seems likely) he won’t, there is no scenario whatsoever in which they let him go alive. He has caused them too much trouble, and they have been hunting him for too long. If they chose to sell him back to the British government, they could ask for whatever political concessions or special powers they wanted in exchange, when he is the most wanted criminal in the entire United Kingdom and the egg has progressively accrued on the face of Gladstone’s government and the Metropolitan Police as they failed to catch him. Rittenhouse can do anything they want with Flynn, and get everything they want in return. *Catastrophe* barely does this justice. And Lucy – inadvertently, but still – sent him
straight into the jaws of the trap.

“Oh my God,” Lucy says at last, which is impossibly inadequate, but is the only thing she can think of. There’s no choice, there’s no alternate option. “We have to save him.”

As far as predicaments go, Garcia Flynn has been in – he is sure – worse ones than this. But admittedly, just at present, they are not coming to mind.

He has taken a serious pounding, he’s fairly sure he’s been shot at least once by the stabbing pain in his leg, and he is well aware that he is, to put it gently, fucked. He was dragged off by the police and whatever local rented thugs Rittenhouse has acquired, hit a few more times when he kept fighting, and his ear is ringing in a way that means it might have taken considerable damage. Now he is crammed into some tiny, bleak holding cell, and his odds of getting out are very bad. He has a confused impression of seeing at least one member of the gang down – he thinks it was a Taylor – and the rest scattered. He doesn’t know if they got away. He doesn’t know what’s going to happen, if they made it back to Lucy or not, if she –

Lucy. That thought hurts the most of all, and given his present dismal state of repairs, both mental and physical, that is saying a lot. He tries to roll onto his back, grunts as his back registers its extreme objections, and remains where he is, half-sprawled on his side in the darkness, like a dangerous animal thrown in a cage. His cheek is sticky with blood where it presses to the metal, and there’s a rattling sound in his chest where he breathes. Rittenhouse isn’t going to get much sport out of hurting him, at this rate. Well, he’s sure they will anyway, because they’re the worst and they’ve been waiting long enough that they’ll take full advantage. But –

Did Lucy know? Did she send him there on purpose? I honestly could not care less if you got yourself killed. Was that the warning, and he missed it? Flynn is well aware that his behavior, over the general span of their acquaintance and then again today, has been far from exemplary, and perhaps she finally axed the entire ill-fated experiment of their collaboration for good. But why after it was almost working, and why especially after last night? Was it a vindictively cold-blooded move to get revenge on him for turning her down? That would be callous beyond belief, something that Lucy, for all her fierceness, doesn’t seem to intrinsically possess. And it wasn’t – that wasn’t what he – he knows and he doesn’t, it is tangled and twisted and raw, wrapping around him like a strangler snake, and he can’t breathe as it tightens.

Last night, lying next to her in bed, with her soft and warm and nuzzled into his side, looking at him with those big dark eyes as he told her about the Raven King… even now, Flynn’s stomach turns over at the memory. It took every inch of his self-control not to grab her, to roll her over beneath him and bear her down into the mattress, take her until there was no space or separation left, but he has never in his life touched a woman like that and there is no way he is going to start now. Not with her, not in the least. She deserves someone who would come to her with gentleness and care, someone younger and less shop-worn, who could devote himself to nothing but making her happy. Self-evidently, a widowed forty-three-year-old ex-monster hunter crime boss, international fugitive, and ruthless anarchist is not that man. Not with the ghost of a murdered daughter that shrieks in his nightmares, and a quest for vengeance that – well. Was probably always fated to end up like this. So he sabotaged himself, he pushed her away, he set out to viciously prove to himself that she would never want him. In that, at least, he has spectacularly succeeded. This is what he wanted, isn’t it? Burning it all down?

Flynn works his tongue gingerly around his mouth, testing for broken or missing teeth. They seem to be still in place, though they ache like pieces of red-hot iron in his jaw, and this is not an unqualified blessing. He doesn’t see much point in struggling to get out of here. He can’t, clearly, and there will just be more of them on the other side. He has never cared about the odds or the number of enemies before, but now, he is finally too tired to keep fighting. He’s old enough to
know that he can’t take an unlimited pummeling, and he needs to save what strength he does have. For what, he doesn’t know. Dying with dignity?

Some indeterminate time passes. Flynn wanders in and out of consciousness. Sometimes he thinks he sees shadows bending over him, once he swears he feels the brush of Lorena’s hand on his face, the distant echo of Iris’ laugh, and wonders if this is some new torment the revenant has cooked up, if it’s drawing closer in the dark, come to feed on him by insidiously making him forget, in fits and starts, that they were ever gone. To believe, to hope, to want, and then wake up, and relive the loss all over again.

(Lucy. He feels horribly guilty, and he doesn’t think he should want it, given as there is still the possibility that she deliberately betrayed him, but he keeps looking for her among the phantoms, and she isn’t even there.)

After some while, Flynn is aware of the cage being lifted, moved, loaded onto something and wheeled along with bumping jolts. His captors appear to be taking him somewhere. He can hear them talking in an indistinct blend of Russian and English, but his bruised, feverish brain is not up to the task of interpreting both at once. The walls of his prison are solid steel, so he can’t see out, and they are clearly taking no chances with his escape. He has to remain curled up in more or less a ball, since he is a big man and it is a small box. There is a large barred slit overhead for ventilation, and also presumably for them to toss food in from time to time. He wonders if they’re going to do that, or make him beg. They are in for an unhappy surprise if so. If this is the end, he’d rather just get it over with.

Flynn can smell coal smoke, and what sounds like the hiss and click of iron wheels on track. At that, he blurrily realizes where they must in fact be taking him. Whether if it’s a more convenient interrogation point away from prying eyes in the city, or they have something more spectacular planned for him, or want to demonstrate their success in building his railway to the tsar – why not? Out in the winter wilds, out in the depths of nowhere, no one will ever see him again.

“Matija.” The word is a hushed croak, all Flynn can get through his aching throat. He has a sudden memory of when he was a boy – he doesn’t remember exactly how old, seven or eight – passing a fence post with a raven painted on it, $GK$ scratched beneath. The way he had a sense that as long as he stood on that exact spot, the boundaries between the worlds were thin as silk, clear as glass, and he might take another step on the path he had walked a thousand times and find himself lost in Faerie. The way a cloud passed over the sun, and he looked up and saw a flock of ravens winging on the wind. A meaningless coincidence, his father would have insisted. Asher Flynn, born Aleksandr Kovačić, a young idealist who changed his name and moved to the West in hope of making a fortune, then returned home to Šibenik as an angry, disillusioned atheist with a young American wife, a drinking problem, and eyes that always burned like dark coals. Flynn doesn’t remember being so scared of anything in his life as he was of his father’s eyes when they were angry. Not even the grimmest monsters (small wonder he ran away to join the hunters at age fifteen) of the darkest woods could compare.

“Matija,” Flynn whispers again. “Matija Korvin. The woods are yours. The sky is yours. The night is yours, and so too the morning. The hedges are your gateways, the stones your servants. In the earth you plant your staff, in the green you spread your roots. You are the branches upon which your children rest, and the wings on which they fly. I am only a servant, kneeling before the King. I call you from the dark, and I offer you my fealty.”

It’s a very old prayer, and he’s said most of it in Croatian because that’s how he learned it from his grandmother Katja, a formidable and bitter old crone who scared the children away from her house in the village and was constantly suspected (not without reason, Flynn thinks, Iris had to get it from somewhere) of being a witch. She was never impressed with Aleksandr for moving to the
West, nor for bringing home Maria Thompkins, and spent most of her time making her daughter-in-law’s life miserable for not knowing how to cook and speak the language and otherwise instantly absorb the habits of their ancient town on the Adriatic coast. Flynn has complicated memories of her, to say the least. But Katja Kovačić was not about to let her grandson grow up without knowing his culture and his heritage, and the proper prayers to the King, the one he was never supposed to tell the priest about. She gave him that, at least.

“Matija… Korvin.” You’re supposed to call him three times by his full name for the proper effect, Flynn remembers. There is another bump and jolt, and it feels as if his cage has been loaded onto the train. He hears a piercing whistle, feels a gust of frigid air, and knows it is only going to get colder. He is actively struggling to maintain consciousness, and feels the dark tugging at him with alluring, relentless hands. “Matija… Korvin…”

Not a damn thing, so far as he can tell, happens as a result. He feels ludicrous, trusting in old wives’ tales and children’s stories for his deliverance, when he might as well have asked the cage to spring open of its own accord, for all the locks to unbind and the train’s engine to spit bolts and shut down. Technology does not tend to work in the places where you find the marks of the raven. Flynn closes his blood-crusted eyes and lets his head drop onto the floor. He cannot remember a time, recently or perhaps ever, when he has felt so utterly, desolately empty.

Once more, the whistle sounds. The train starts to move. The wheels click on the track, he can sense St. Petersburg dwindling behind them like a dream lost on waking, and so, Garcia Flynn begins the long, last journey to Siberia.
In Which a Daring Rescue Mission Is Launched

Nobody sleeps much for the rest of the night. Gennady, Karl, and Robert Taylor have to be patched up, someone needs to keep watch in case the police find their way here, there is food to be found and tea to be brewed, and after five minutes of uncertainty over who is going to step into Flynn’s shoes and lead the gang in his (temporary) absence, it is somehow decided, word unspoken, that it is Lucy. She isn’t sure how they arrived at that conclusion, just that they have, and the sensible thing to do is not to waste time quibbling. If this hardened bunch of scabrous rogues are willing to take orders from a lady historian half their size, that is entirely to the good, and they had better not make the mistake of underestimating her. Somehow, she doesn’t think that will be a problem. They seem to have an inexplicable, inbuilt loyalty to her already.

If that is the case, Lucy thinks, their first order of business has to be to get out of this absolutely godawful warehouse. So, with Anton Sokolov stoutly at her back as interpreter, fixer, and bodyguard, she ventures out into the darkening streets, he guides her to a suitable establishment used by his Marxist smuggling friends, and Lucy manages to acquire the entire first floor of the house. It’s not much, but it’s a whole hell of a lot better than where they are currently, and when the suspender-wearing Bolshevik they are bartering it from gets a briefly confused look as to who exactly she is and what she is doing here, Anton swoops in with a few quick words of explanation. Whatever he’s said, it seems to do the trick, and the man nods respectfully to Lucy, hands them the keys, and bows himself out.

“What did you tell him?” Lucy asks, when they are back outside and on their way to inform the gang of the new lodging arrangements. “About who I was?”

Anton coughs. “Oh,” he says, rather too determinedly casual. “I just told him you were good friend.”

“Of yours? I’m flattered, but – ”

“Well, I may have not said myself. I may have also not quite said friend.”

“What did you – ” Lucy gives him a warning look. “Who exactly does that man think I am, Anton Sokolov?”

“Since you ask,” Anton says with great dignity, “I tell him you are wife of Flynn.”

“You told him I was Flynn’s w –?” Lucy doesn’t know what’s more darkly amusing, the fact that the cover would almost make sense on the surface, or that the heat death of the universe will most likely occur prior to anything ever actually progressing on that front. Especially given that he’s presently a prisoner of Rittenhouse on his way to God knows where and may well be killed first, a thought that has not ceased to stab her like a hot brand. Karl said they would want to keep him alive in hopes of information, which may also be true, but does not portend any particularly enjoyable experience either. She just wants to find him, and she can’t stop until she does. Garcia Flynn is tall, obnoxious, dangerous, unpredictable, hot-tempered, and smart-mouthed, as well as having a temperament to which the word stubborn can only very inadequately be applied. He is far too fond of shooting things and/or blowing them up, possesses the interpersonal skills of a concussed warthog, and has poured kerosene on his own head and struck the match too many times to count. And yet, somewhere in the middle of all that drama and disaster, Lucy has discovered that the first thing she will do when she gets the idiot back is to finally, finally kiss him. No, slap him. No, kiss. No, definitely slap. He’ll have to earn his way up from there.

She and Anton make their way back to the warehouse, inform everyone of the change in
arrangements, and organize them into groups of twos and threes, thus to drift casually in that
direction and not attract attention by all going at once. It takes another substantial chunk of time to
do this, but finally they are all more or less settled, there are men stampeding everywhere and
putting their dirty boots on things and shouting and farting and jostling and taking up space, and
Lucy feels an urgent need to withdraw herself from the situation. So she checks that Rufus has
been given a proper spot on the sofa, then heads to the small bedroom at the back of the house that
has been considerately reserved for her private use. She lies down on the narrow bed, stares at the
ceiling, and feels a wave of exhaustion so profound that she briefly disconnects from her own
body, floating somewhere just outside it and not in a hurry to get back. This has, to say the least,
been one of the more eventful days in her entire stupidly eventful life.

Despite the muffled racket from the gang, Lucy eventually manages to fall asleep, wakes
sometime in the wee hours when the noise has tapered down a bit, and wonders if it’s worth
getting out of her clothes, or if she’ll just get up again in a few hours and have to put them on
anyway. But if she is going to coordinate and lead a daring rescue mission, she is going to have to
ditch the restrictive corsets and petticoats and long skirts, no matter who it scandalizes. Nineteenth-
century fashion for well-to-do-women is not in the least practical for rushing into Siberia at the
head of a bunch of criminals and plucking your not-husband from a dire and wintry predicament.
She is going to need to improvise.

At that, Lucy wonders why she is so sure that Rittenhouse is taking Flynn to Siberia, given that
they could have just as easily kept him in St. Petersburg for convenient pickup by Emma. She
squints, trying to remember where the idea came from, until she has a blurry recollection of some
dream that fades even as she tries to grasp it. She was watching a flock of ravens flying above a
train, and she just knew where it was going, and that Flynn was on it. This is something less than
a firm scientific basis, and she resolves to thoroughly canvass the city prisons first. Though that is
also likely to be a waste of time. Rittenhouse won’t be throwing their bête noire into any ordinary
lockup. They will have somewhere secret and dark and dreadful for him instead.

Lucy finally struggles out of her corset, since it’s deeply uncomfortable to sleep in, and thinks that
if nothing else, she will not miss this every day. She catches another fitful few hours of shut-eye,
wakes up from another weird raven dream, and thinks it must still be early until she makes out the
clock on the wall and sees that it’s quarter to nine. The sun won’t be up for another hour.

Groggy and sore, Lucy stumbles out of bed and digs in the chest of clothes, until she comes up
with trousers, shirt, jacket, and flannel underwear that will more or less fit her. The latter is a bit
iffy without a thorough wash first, and smells like smoke that no soap is likely to dislodge, but it is
a practical necessity for not freezing, and she keeps her own on underneath. After so long wearing
skirts and tight-fitted bodices, men’s clothes are unfamiliar and delightfully free, and Lucy pulls a
pair of suspenders over her shoulders, reminded of one of the women she dated in grad school.
Once she has butched it up, she puts on three pairs of socks and heads out.

The gang is already up, making coffee in the small kitchen, though they all collectively choke on it
when they see her. Lucy raises a skeptical eyebrow. “Really, guys?”

“You are… you are still looking very nice, Lucy,” Anton says gamely. “Though those clothes
were once belonging to our comrade Sergei. He was short, like you.”

“And what happened to comrade Sergei?”

“Oh, uh. He was hanged for the smuggling and promotion of sedition.” Anton looks apologetic.
“But he died very bravely.”

“Great,” Lucy mutters, wondering if it is a bad omen to be wearing the former wardrobe of the
undersized and unfortunate late Comrade Sergei, but as ever, not having much of a choice. Rufus
is feeling somewhat more peppy this morning, and she detours over to sit next to him. “So, do you want to go back to England?” she asks quietly. “If Jiya might be there, and I know you have no real reason to stick your neck out for Flynn –”

“I’m not going to leave you here by yourself, Lucy.” Rufus looks at her strangely. “Especially when we need to know more about what’s going on before I do something dumb and make it worse. I still know pretty much jack about Westworld, and once we have some solid intelligence, I’ll do something. Until then, I’ll stay with you.”

“Oh.” Lucy supposes that sustained exposure to Garcia Flynn has made her forget what it’s like when people properly think things through and make informed decisions before jumping off a bridge with both feet. She looks at Rufus gratefully. “If you’re sure, but Jiya isn’t any less important. Say the word, and I’ll do everything to find her and tell you where she –”

At that very moment, they are interrupted by a knock on the front door, and the gang immediately goes tense. Silence falls, instantly replacing the breakfast chatter, and everyone reaches warily for one of the multiple weapons that they keep upon their persons. If someone really meant them ill, it’s unlikely they’d bother to knock, and maybe it’s just Anton’s friend coming by like an Airbnb landlord to make sure his guests haven’t totally trashed the place. Lucy thinks it over, waves at the gang to stay where they are and that she will signal if she needs them, and then very carefully proceeds down the front hall. Maybe it’s a lost milkman needing directions, though she will need one of the Sokolovs to translate if so. Or – no, it’s definitely not Flynn, he did not miraculously spring free from his cage and come running back, and she is annoyed with herself for thinking it. She undoes the deadbolt and opens it a crack. “Da?”

“Lucy?” a familiar voice says. “Lucy, dear, it is extremely cold out here and I am remembering in force why nobody sensible ever goes to Russia in winter. As well, I have had a very long airship journey and deeply want some tea. If you would please let us in?”

“Ada?” Lucy pushes the door open in disbelief, thus to reveal none other than Augusta Ada Byron King, Lady Lovelace, in all her five-foot-nothing glory, wearing an ermine-trimmed pelisse with a stylish fur muff and looking as sprightly as ever. Behind her, Mr. Woolsey is loaded down with approximately twelve valises and portmanteaus, which must contain all of Ada’s creature comforts, and a hansom cab is waiting on the street. “Ada?! What are you doing here?”

“Well, dear, you sent me that interesting telegram, and rather than waste time trying to cable you back with everything, I thought it would be easier to show you. Besides, you sounded to be in a small spot of bother, and you will want to see this. Good heavens, why are you dressed like a workman? Tremendously unflattering. Oh, and where is that horrible man of yours? I would like to know exactly where he is before I venture a foot into this residence.”

“Flynn is… missing.” Lucy glances down. “It’s a long story. It happened right after I sent the message to you.”

“Doubtless obliging us to go to a great deal of fuss and bother retrieving him.” Ada sniffs disapprovingly. “Do at least tell me he’s made it worth your while? Gotten to know you? Carnally?”

“Wh – ” Lucy can feel herself turning the color of a tomato. “I – what. No. No, there’s been no… knowing. Especially not like that.” Unfortunately.

“Well, that’s a great pity. If Almighty God made the man that pretty, and then altogether neglected to add a drop of brains, he should at least get some use out of it.” Ada snaps her fingers autocratically, while Mr. Woolsey is still looking utterly pained. “Edward, do wipe that look off your face, not all of us feel obliged to live a tedious life, or be preposterously precious about
talking about it. Take the bags inside, there’s a good man, then go back and help the ladies.”

“Ladies?” Lucy is still noting interestingly that Mr. Woolsey’s first name is apparently Edward, as the beleaguered butler shuffles inside with Ada’s things and sets them down with an expression as if hoping they will not be obliged to remain in contact with working-class floorboards for very long. “It’s not just you?”

“No, I brought your friend, just as you asked. Oh, and Miss Mackenzie, of course. I’ve become rather fond of her and she’s decided to stay in London for the season. Not to mention – ”

The rest of Ada’s sentence is cut off as Lucy practically shoves past her, runs down the slippery front walk, almost does all kinds of horrendously undignified pratfalls, and reaches the door of the carriage, pulling it open and alarming the coachman, who shouts at her in Russian. She likewise pays no attention, looking frantically into the dark velvet interior. “Jiya!?”

“Lucy?!” The voice echoes back to her, just as shocked. Then there’s a frantic rustle of skirts, and – somehow, impossibly – Jiya throws herself into Lucy’s arms, the two of them holding on for dear life, giggling and disbelieving and desperate. Jiya pulls back, stares at Lucy as if to make sure it’s really her, and shakes her head. “What are – what – ”

“How – ” Lucy interrupts, talking over her. “Rufus – Rufus is here, Rufus is inside, he – ”

“Rufus?” Jiya presses a hand to her mouth. “How is – ”

“Just go inside, go see him, we’ll explain everything in a bit – ”

Without further ado, Jiya leaps out of the carriage and runs up the walk. She is dressed as a Victorian lady in flounced velvet skirt and jacket, a black pillbox hat and a fur mantle for traveling, so apparently Ada took it upon herself to get the poor child properly fitted out. It’s only then that Lucy can take stock of the other two occupants of the carriage: Priscilla Mackenzie, looking much more sleek and fashionable with ginger hair stylishly upswept and pearl bobs in her ears, and Wyatt Logan, who looks to be not entirely sure what he’s doing here, but gives her an awkward wave. “Hey. Uh. Morning.”

“Hey,” Lucy says. “Wow, Ada really brought the whole team, huh?”

“I guess so.” Wyatt rubs a hand over his face. He’s unshaven, and there are glints of silver in his stubble that seem premature; he can’t be much older than her, mid-thirties. “Short version, I met your friend there, Jiya, in London. A – uh – ex-prostitute named Bella ran into her at something called the Church Penitentiary Association, apparently knew you and put the word out that she was looking, and I found her after that. We were going to go to Oxford looking for you, but then Woolsey turned up instead and said Russia. So we came along.”

“Thanks.” Lucy still has a thousand more questions about how he met Jiya, what might have happened to her before, and everything else, but she’s relieved to hear that her good deed in saving Bella paid off – not, of course, that that was the only reason she did it. It’s a huge weight off her mind to know that Jiya’s not being held captive and tortured by Rittenhouse, but it reminds her inexorably that Flynn is, and it’s a sobering counterpart to her joy. “How about you come in? It is pretty cold out here.”

Wyatt climbs out, offers Priscilla a hand down like a gentleman, and escorts her up the walk and into the house. Lucy leads the way to find the kitchen completely overstuffed, Jiya and Rufus still tearfully clinging to each other, the gang regarding Ada with awe and a bit of terror, and Mr. Woolsey overloading on the spot as he tries to work out where he can possibly start managing this mess first. Everyone is talking at once, which makes it impossible for Lucy to hear herself think,
and finally she gets up on the table and yells for them to shut up. She instructs Woolsey to make more tea, the gang to cork it, and for Ada to do the explaining first, since she seems to know the most parts of the story. They will then take turns from there.

Ada corroborates what Wyatt said, that Woolsey tracked Jiya down relatively easily at the Church Penitentiary Association, and had her brought to the Lovelace residence. After the receipt of the telegram, a trip to Russia was arranged in haste, and when Lucy asks how they landed, given as the St. Petersburg port is still closed, Ada blinks demurely. “Well, they did seem inclined to be bothersome about that. So I had Mr. Woolsey raise them on the telephone every three minutes until they changed their mind.”

Woolsey, who is looking around in vain for some decent china to pour his fresh-brewed tea into, is forced to settle for the mismatched crockery and tin tankards that the gang has heretofore been using. It seems pointless to ask how Ada and company were able to find where they were staying, as Woolsey is Butler Level Expert and thus does not view being suddenly dropped into the middle of a large foreign city as any reason for dereliction of duty. (Also, he really needs a job as an investigator for the Met.) It took a few hours, but it was achieved, and now here they all are. Rufus is trying to explain to Jiya the scientific principles that he used to get here, the gang’s ears are flapping like bats, and Lucy gives him a look as if to say that he can catch her up on that later. That particular cat, after all, is not yet out of the bag.

With that half of the story concluded, it is Lucy’s turn to explain how everything rapidly went sideways yesterday, the fact that Flynn has ended up in Rittenhouse’s custody as a result, and that they absolutely need to find him and get him back, or they have no shot at stopping anything. She manages to sound relatively clinical and detached about this, but when Wyatt asks if it would really be such a bad thing if Flynn was to remain out of commission, Lucy snaps at him and finds herself unaccountably, briefly choked up. “If you don’t want to help us get him back,” she says, “you can leave.”

“I didn’t say that.” Wyatt raises his hands, even though he did, kind of, say that. “I just want to know if it’s worth risking all of us, for one guy who – don’t jump down my throat, you know it’s true – has caused a lot of trouble for everyone. That’s all.”

Lucy opens her mouth, then shuts it. Wyatt’s not wrong that Flynn has been, to say the least, violent and unpredictable, and he obviously has ulterior motives for wanting him stopped. There has been a confused tangent about Wyatt’s wife Jessica, who was apparently with Jiya when she vanished, and that Jiya had promised to help him find her if Wyatt did the same with Lucy. Wyatt doesn’t know anything else about what Rittenhouse is doing, though he does say that he met briefly with Anthony and Emma when he got back from Oxford the first time. Rufus’s eyes go narrow. “You met Anthony? Anthony Bruhl?”

“Yes.” Wyatt glances over, confused. “How do you know him?”

“Rufus and Jiya are from – home too,” Lucy says, by way of explanation. “So –”

“She said she was back in London, but him too?” Wyatt blinks, as if he didn’t realize there was now an interdimensional freeway in operation (to be fair, neither did anyone else). “Wait, so do you know how to drive the Mothership, then?”

“Yeah,” Rufus says, still eyeing Wyatt shrewdly. “If we ever got hold of it, which I don’t think will happen.”

“What is Mothership?” Anton interrupts. “Is like Motherland?”

“No right now.” Lucy isn’t going to explain the time-travel, alternate-universe part to a bunch of
steampunk gangsters. Not that she thinks they’d suddenly start chanting to burn the witch, but because it is getting them off track. “Show of hands. If you’re going to stay and help me rescue Flynn, say so now. Otherwise, I need to figure out something else.”

There’s a pause. Then everyone, even Wyatt, raises their hands. Karl is the last to do so, but he sighs and puts his hand up anyway, as if he’d probably miss Flynn if the big dumb bastard was actually gone. Rufus and Jiya are going to stick to Lucy like glue, Ada already came this far, Woolsey is an extension of her, Priscilla is apparently up for the adventure, and the gang feels personally impugned by this turn of events and intends to damn well get their boss back, frustrating as he can be. For the first time since they returned with the news that Flynn had been captured, Lucy feels heartened, takes a long breath and lets it out. “Okay then,” she says. “I guess we have to get started.”

The first job is dividing them into groups according to skill set, and getting the ball rolling on everything they will need to do for this not to be a disastrous failure. Lucy thinks about it for a while before deciding that of all of them, Ada may actually have the best chance of finding out where Flynn has been taken. If she storms into the St. Petersburg constabulary and kicks up a fuss, informs them that Flynn broke into her house in London and she wants him transferred to the British authorities for trial, she might be able to turn over enough rocks for a lead. Besides, Ada is a famous and very wealthy old lady whose name, title, and connections all far outstrip a bunch of broke-ass nobodies, the majority of whom are actively criminal. Since Ada doesn’t speak Russian, Anton Sokolov is assigned to her as escort and interpreter, and Ada gives him an approving look.

“And you are?”

“Name is Anton Vasilyevich Sokolov. Brother over there is Gennady. May call me Anton.” Anton, who is almost literally twice Ada’s size, has to bend in half to kiss her hand. “Is great honor to meet you, Lady Lovelace. You are very clever inventor.”

“Oh, I do like this one,” Ada remarks to Lucy. “Very polite. And there are two of them. Have you thought about them instead?”

“No, no,” Gennady puts in. “We are FRIENDS to Lucy, that is all. Besides, Flynn is GARBAGE GOBLIN, but he love her madly. Everyone with EYES IN HEAD see that.”

“Excuse – ?” Lucy turns to look at Gennady, who looks briefly confused that he has said something that somehow isn’t public knowledge. “I – I don’t think so.”

“Ah. Mmm. Hmm.” Gennady evidently wonders if he has once more put his foot in his mouth, but there’s also a look on his face as if he isn’t the one who is wrong here. Hastily changing the subject, he says, “What is it you want rest of us to do, Lucy?”

“I need you and Karl to check that we have enough guns, and that they’re well supplied.” This at least, Lucy doesn’t think will be a problem, but she does not want to arrive at a delicate moment without enough ammunition. “Rufus and Jiya, you might need to work out a way to get us back from wherever we end up. If we end up way off the ranch or in the middle of nowhere, we don’t want to be stranded. Wyatt and the rest of the gang will have to help us shoot our way in. And Priscilla, Flynn and I were wondering if you might be able to contact someone for us. Someone who is, uh, dead.”

“Aye?” Priscilla seems a lot different from the socially disastrous, tongue-tied wallflower that Lucy first met at Ada’s dinner party. There is clear confidence in her eyes, and she no longer tiptoes or stammers. “Who’s that?”

“Matthias Corvinus,” Lucy says, knowing it sounds a little crazy even as she does. “The Raven King. I don’t know if you’ve heard of him, but – ”
“Everyone’s heard of the Raven King.” Priscilla gives Lucy a funny look. “It’s him you’re wanting me to meddle with? Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Well… now that you’re saying it like that, I’m wondering,” Lucy admits. “And maybe this isn’t a good moment for it. One problem at a time. I don’t know if you want to come along on the actual rescue part, it’ll be dangerous, and if you haven’t done anything like that before – ”

“I may stay here with Lady Lovelace,” Priscilla says, “but I grew up in the Highlands, I’ve learned how to handle a musket. You’re liable to need plenty of help.”

Lucy has to concede that this is true, even as she tries to imagine Priscilla shooting anyone and still can’t do it. She briefly contemplates asking the medium to try to contact Amy again, to see if it’s possible, if Amy is coherent, still remembers who she is, but the possibility of silence – or worse – makes her shrink. Sometimes a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and she needs her focus on Flynn right now. The revenant can wait, and besides, doing that might encourage it to come back for round two, remind it that she exists and is a juicy piece of prey. No, not right now.

With that, everyone disperses on their various errands, and Lucy herself, after all the chaos and delegation, is abruptly left with not much to do but pace and wait for them to come back. She hopes the weather holds out, since any more snow will make it dicey, and as Ada said, there is that old saw about not going to Russia in winter. Lucy seems to have assumed effective command of one of London’s major organized crime outfits, and even the fact that they are not in London is only incidental to the trouble it will cause if she’s caught. Then again, she is already in far more trouble any way you slice it, and Ada seems perfectly blithe about strolling openly into this den of scum and villainy (though it’s true that no one can really do anything to her). It’s already been almost a day since Flynn was taken. That is a significant head start, and if they can’t make it up –

Lucy manages to distract herself for a few hours, though she finds herself constantly imagining the worst-case scenario, until the rescue team starts to filter back in. Gennady and Karl are loaded down with a frankly ridiculous amount of ammunition, have brought the rest of the gang’s guns from the warehouse, and it looks as if this is the one arena in which they will not be overmatched. Rufus and Jiya have some sort of rudimentary signal beacon that is supposed to network into Lucy’s Refractory-Glass in Oxford, though they admit that they have no idea if it will actually work or be able to transport anyone in the same alarming way that they both arrived. Rufus is adamant that it’s a last-resort nuclear option anyway, since obviously, violently disassembling and reassembling the atoms of the human body and exposing them to high-intensity quantum energy is not good for it. He likens himself and Jiya to a jigsaw puzzle that was dropped on the floor and then mostly – but possibly not entirely – reassembled. In other words, if they find themselves trapped somewhere, it is by no means the case that they can just teleport home.

Lucy puts that one on the back burner for now, and waits for Ada and Anton’s reappearance, which comes after just long enough to make her actively worry. Apparently Ada has told off no fewer than three high-ranking city officials, threatened to phone the editor at the London Times, and used some very uncouth Russian words for an elderly lady (which Anton, with a guileless expression, steadfastly denies having taught her for the occasion). The end result is that they have learned that a train containing the criminal Garcia Flynn left last night, on a trunk branch of the railway that heads north to the city of Arkhangelsk, on the White Sea. It is the former chief seaport of the Russian Empire, and it was here that John Bellingham, the assassin of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812, first conceived his grudge against the British government while working as an export agent. If someone in Rittenhouse has a very sordid sense of humor, it is definitely a place that they might send Flynn. What they intend to do with him once there, who knows, but probably not to offer him a warm drink and a new job.

“Arkhangelsk?” Lucy looks at Anton and Gennady. “Can we get there in any kind of decent
Anton thinks. “It is long way. Close to thousand miles north. Legend of Arkhangelsk is that it stands on place St. Michael defeated the Devil, and he guards city to prevent Devil’s return. If there is strong protective magic there, your Rittenhouse may want to break it.”

“With what, a human sacrifice?” Lucy honestly does not put it past them, and if they can’t fling open the gates to this branch of the multiverse until they undo its magical shield wall, they might see the exquisite irony in using Flynn to do it. Either way, if they don’t want him offered up as invaluable political prisoner or black-magic sacrificial lamb alike, they really need to get moving. She looks at the Sokolovs. “There won’t be a train running now, will there?”

“No, not usually,” Anton admits. “But that is only minor inconvenience. Everyone who is coming, get guns. And warm coats. It will not be summer vacation to Sochi.”

The end result of a bustle of activity is that Lucy, Rufus, Jiya, Wyatt, the Sokolovs, and most of the gang get bundled up, slung with guns and then some, and step out cautiously into the late afternoon. The horizon has an unfriendly look to it, and the wind smells like more snow, which isn’t the most promising of omens. Ada, Woolsey, and Priscilla are staying behind to hold down the home front (such as it is, given that they just moved in this morning) and Lucy imagines that they will have managed to decorate it with lace doilies and matching teacups and whatever else by the time they get back. That is a comforting thought, just because it suggests the possibility that they do get back and don’t, you know, freeze ignominiously to death an alarmingly short distance away from the Arctic Circle. God, it already is cold. The thought of heading another thousand miles north is not at all appealing.

They trudge to the train station, where the Sokolovs, who have been absolutely indispensable this whole time, scout around until they find one of their friends. However, Alexei Petrovich is justifiably suspicious to hear that they want him to help them commandeer a locomotive, crew, coal, and other things required to make a train run, and it takes close to twenty minutes of low-voiced arguing, with both Anton and Gennady making emphatic gestures, before Alexei reluctantly agrees to help. The compromise appears to be that they won’t involve anyone else in it, will sneak down the track and “borrow” one of the railyard locomotives, and Lucy looks nervously at Anton. “Have either of you actually driven a train before?”

“No,” Anton admits, “but I have piloted airship, cannot be that different. I will get Alexei to give me – what is you call – crash course.”

“Great,” Lucy mutters. It’s not that she’s ungrateful, but the thought of taking a rusty bucket-of-bolts backup locomotive driven by a very amateur engineer into the teeth of an oncoming Siberian snowstorm, trying to rescue someone who may be intended as a human sacrifice and will be heavily guarded anyway, does not exactly inspire boundless confidence. But it appears to be that or sitting back and waving goodbye to Flynn permanently, and they have to move fast before any of Alexei’s superiors ask awkward questions. They uncouple a train car from its brethren train cars, and the Sokolovs vanish up the tracks. Five minutes later, there is a loud whistle blast, everyone jumps, and a locomotive zooms backward like a bullet, crashing into the car and locking with a jerk that nearly knocks everyone off their feet. A soot-faced Anton sticks his head out and gives Lucy a thumbs-up. Glad he figured that out, apparently.

Once the other members of the gang have been likewise given rudimentary instruction as stokers, i.e. standing by the engine boiler and shoveling coal in to make sure they keep going, they clamber into the carriage and take off at high speed, thus adding train-jacking to the list of crimes that the St. Petersburg authorities will want to question them extensively about if they make it back. Lucy hopes that their reduced weight, with just the locomotive and one car, will enable them to make up some time. They only have a finite amount of coal, and can’t necessarily count on
being able to stop and refuel. If they run out or burn too much, they could end up stranded. And if a major snowstorm blocks the track, that means they could very well die.

It’s getting dark as they race past the first set of signals, and the first flakes are starting to drift in the air, not yet settling but not far off from doing so. Rufus, Jiya, and Wyatt are tense and abstracted, not talking much, and Karl and the non-stoking members of the gang are talking among themselves, with occasional wary looks at the newcomers. Lucy hopes it’s not a plan to cut and run if necessary, since while she more or less collectively trusts the gang, she doesn’t entirely trust Karl. He is still in this and going along, but if it ultimately comes to a decision whether to look out for number one, not meaning Flynn, she has a feeling he may do that. She can’t talk to the Sokolovs, who are occupied in driving the train, and there’s not much else to do. This is not exactly a Pullman car of railway comfort, and cold air is whistling in through the cracks in the windows. Nor is there, for that matter, very much food.

Two and a half hours out of St. Petersburg, it really starts to snow. When Lucy sticks her face out, the blowing flakes lash her almost horizontally in the face, and all she can make out of the tracks ahead is from the infernal reddish glare of the boiler. The rails gleam with ice, which could lead to a spectacular derailment or worse, and they’ll just have to hope they are coming in hot enough to avoid that. Sparks spit and lash the darkness, hot embers flying like hellish snow among the real storm, and Lucy feels slightly demonic herself, rushing toward the open gates of the underworld. Whether to enter them, or to escape, she has no idea.

Just then, the door bangs, startling everyone, and a windswept Gennady Sokolov staggers in, face almost completely black with coal. “We think we sight train NOT FAR AHEAD,” he informs them, as everyone jumps to their feet. “Hard to say if it Flynn, but CANNOT BE MANY crazy people on this line at present time of night. So is possible.”

“And can’t be,” Lucy says. “He must have left almost a day ahead of us, there’s no way we could have caught up to them in three hours.”

“Maybe, yes,” Gennady agrees, “but STRANGE THING has been happening ever since we left city. We see mile marker, and then next marker we see, is fifteen or twenty miles more on. We have burned LARGE AMOUNT of coal, to make this speed, but level in tender has not gone down. And there is BIRD flying by the cab window, this whole time. A raven.”

“A raven?” Lucy can’t help but feel that this has to be significant. If there has been unexplained intervention with their journey, and then those dreams earlier, is she being entirely, ludicrously over-optimistic to think that this is deliberate, some kind of actual manifestation of real, wild magic? Is the Raven King, for good or ill, now awake, and if so, did he come because he was called or simply because he chose to? Priscilla’s leery reaction about meddling with him made it clear that if you ask for him, you had better be prepared for him to respond, and in a way that could be either helpful or harmful or worse, an elemental force of nature beyond proper human control. Even if it presently appears to be working in their favor, it still gives her a chill. “How close are we to the other train?”

Gennady vanishes out the door again, climbs to a very precarious lookout position atop the tender, then crawls back down. “It is no more than TWENTY MINUTES ahead,” he reports. “Has slowed. WHOLE FLOCK of ravens circling overhead. We are deep in it now.”

By “it,” Lucy understands that he means the enchantment, as well as the rescue mission, and has to brush off a sensation like creeping insects. Wyatt looks particularly sick, grimacing and pulling faces and struggling to stand up as if there’s a physical weight on his back, and she looks at him in concern. “Are you all right?”

“Yeah,” Wyatt manages, wincing. “I think so. But whatever is going on here, it really does not
like me.”

That seems rather odd to Lucy, but they are now running up fast behind the other train, until she has the sudden and horrible thought that they might not be able to slow down in time and will violently rear-end it, killing Flynn and possibly all of themselves at a blow. The whistle blasts, the brakes scrape fountains of sparks as Anton works madly to slow them down, and the bulky dark outline of the other train is now clearly visible, no more than a thousand yards ahead. The snow lashes Lucy’s face as she leans out as far as she dares, and then sees figures leaping off the sides of the other train, taking up positions for battle on the ground. But they’re moving with a peculiar, deliberate, clunky stiffness that doesn’t look human, and the superheated air from the boiler scorches her throat as she yells, “TOCKERS!”

The next instant, the snow and wind resounds with booms from the tockers’ guns, and Lucy grabs for the tocker dropper slung over her own shoulder, a twin to the one that Karl gave her in the Croft on her first day in London and she never actually got the chance to use. There is no way to precision target, so she braces the stock against her shoulder, pumps in the charge, and still feels it kick down her entire body as she fires. A sizzling blast of blue energy splits the night, but she can’t see what, if anything, she hit. The train is slowing, but it’s still going to ram the other one at more than incidental speed, and she runs back inside the car. “Brace. Brace!”

Everyone takes up emergency crash positions as if on a downing airliner, covers their heads and does their best to wedge their feet against something. They can hear the wheels screaming as Anton tries to kill the last of their momentum, to no avail. A split second, then –

It sounds like the entire world breaking apart, the roar of sundered iron and twisted rails, as their necks snap with whiplash and even the brace does only a limited amount of good. Lucy is thrown into Rufus, who sideswipes Wyatt, and they reach out communally, trying to stop Jiya from flying into a plate-glass window, as her jaw clacks hard enough to make her teeth rattle and she is very lucky that she doesn’t bite her tongue clean off. She has a dazed thought that Anton, in the cab, probably took the worst of it, and can’t even run out to look because they’re still moving, thundering down the track in a barely controlled skid and taking the rear half of the other train with them. If they derail, they’re almost certainly dead.

Miraculously – or perhaps magically – they don’t. But no sooner have they glissaded to a smoking, sparking halt then the nearest window breaks, and Jiya screams as the tockers force their way in, gear wheels clawing, machinery whining, blank metal faces looking melted and demonic in the burning lamplight. Lucy, Karl, and Wyatt get to their guns first, and three shots go off in near-unison, frying the first vanguard. The inside of the smashed-up train car resounds with blue flashes and the smell of burned ozone. Lucy thinks vaguely that she might be bleeding, that she might even have been injured more significantly in the crash, but she has no idea.

It takes ten or fifteen minutes of a sustained firefight, ducking behind splintering train seats and grabbing all the extra charges that Lucy mercifully had the foresight to bring along, to blast away enough tockers to even climb out of the train car. Rufus has apparently decided that if a plunge from the sky after going over ten Niagara Falls in no barrel won’t kill him, nothing will, and charges straight at them, blasting guns in both hands like Rambo. He’s not really hitting a whole lot, but it is confusing them, and Lucy, Jiya, Wyatt, Karl, and the gang manage to jump down onto the snowy ground. She hasn’t seen either of the Sokolovs since the collision. God, they have to be all right, they have to. It’s bad enough that, just as she feared, they may be stuck in the middle of nowhere with two crashed trains that are not going to be running any time soon. And it’s still snowing, it’s still –

Just then, with perfect, eerie synchrony, the flock of ravens swoops in overhead, in a way that isn’t quite clear whether they flew in the normal way, or have suddenly appeared from yet another
thin place in the fabric of the world, and could be gone with the next wingbeat. As they soar over
the tockers, something very odd (ha) starts to happen. The automatons spit bolts, run their
windings frantically fast, marching in circles or twisting their gear wheels around in grotesque
directions to throttle themselves. Lucy suddenly recalls something in Flynn’s story of the Raven
King, about how the mechanics of man don’t work in the presence of his magic. The rescue squad
stands there, guns still upraised but not having to keep firing, as the tockers self-destruct in under
two minutes, falling facefirst into the snow with thuds and booms. It’s like when Wyatt took that
one out for her in Covent Garden, times several dozen.

Lucy, Rufus, and Jiya exchange a stunned but desperately hopeful look, even as Wyatt himself is
clearly in considerable distress. He goes to his knees, then to all fours, uttering a choked sound
and tossing his head as if the presence of the ravens is physically driving him insane. Lucy is
about to see if there is anything she can do for him, when she spots something – someone –
moving on one of the broken carriages ahead. It’s not a tocker. It’s definitely a human.

Lucy’s breath seizes in her throat. She stares wildly at it, but can’t tell who it is, if it is in fact
Flynn or someone else. She is standing in the middle of a minefield of self-destructed robots, two
crashed trains, a flock of eldritch technology-destroying ravens, a heavy snowstorm, and a gang,
as well as her two best friends and two very polite Russian criminals that she is presently very
worried about. But she still takes a step, then another, then starts to run. Something in her leg both
burns and numbs in a way that signifies considerable injury, but she doesn’t take the time to find
out, running toward the dark figure. It’s tall. It’s also moving like it’s hurt. It has to –

The next instant, they literally collide, almost knocking her off her feet, as they grab at each other,
Lucy raises her gun by wild reflex, and he – as it definitely is – knocks it out of her hand. He has a
black eye and a split lip, has a raven feather stuck in his vest for some reason, and looks more than
slightly mad himself, almost losing his balance as his own wounded leg buckles beneath him and
he grabs at her to keep himself upright. This only has the effect of knocking them both off
balance, and Lucy goes down atop him with a crash.

The next instant, Flynn has both arms around her so hard she can’t breathe and she doesn’t care,
the realization burns through her like a lightning bolt, and in that wild moment, neither of them are
thinking straight. It is – if not an actual, literal miracle – then, by any standard, not far off from
one. She grabs his face in both hands, his hand tangles in her hair and drags her head down, and
then, at last, unimaginably, drunkenly, desperately, deliriously, they are kissing. Their mouths
open and drag against each other’s, she bites at his lips, his tongue tastes like soot and smoke and
forces hers open too roughly to be tender, and she doesn’t care in the least. She gets a better grip
on him as they roll over, heads turning, teeth scraping, still entangled, still kissing. That almost
seems too polite a word for this savage, elemental embrace, the way Lucy has lost all sense of
what is hers and what is his and what is the snowing, smoking, sorcerous night. She is engulfed in
him, starving, dreaming, unable beyond all words to be satisfied except with more.

Flynn, of course, is the one to remember himself first. One moment they’re locked together, the
next she feels him go stiff, and he jerks away as if she too has suddenly become red-hot to the
touch. They stare at each other, gasping, eyes glazed, struggling for breath or sense, as he finally
gets himself together enough to croak, “Lucy? What the fuck are you doing here?”

“We came after you.” Lucy still feels naked, stripped, bereft without his mouth on hers, the
electricity that is crackling tangibly in the night, the way she is molded and melted into him. “What
– how did – how are – ”

“There was a feather. A raven feather.” Flynn uses his chin to indicate it, knocked askew by their
embrace but still stuck in his vest. “I don’t know where it came from, I used it to pick the lock of
my cage. Then all of a sudden a bloody train crashed into us, and here you are? What th – ”
“Later.” Lucy feels too shaky to let go of him or to get to her feet. Nothing about her body appears to be working properly. They struggle very unsteadily upright, blood rushing to her head and making her reel. In the latest understatement of the century, this is a huge mess. They’re going to have to spend the night in the crashed train, and try not to freeze. She needs to find out if the Sokolovs are all right, she needs to –

And yet, as they come closer to Jiya, Rufus, and the gang, Flynn stiffens. He stares at Wyatt, who is still on his knees, and stops in his tracks, throwing an arm out to keep Lucy behind him. “Hey!” he barks. “Get away from him!”

Rufus looks up. He seems momentarily relieved to recognize the cranky Russian giant from previous acquaintances, but baffled as to where he has come from and what exactly he has taken objection to. Flynn, however, is deadly serious. “GET AWAY FROM HIM!”

Lucy has a split-second to think that this must be some old monster-hunting instinct, something that Flynn recognizes that the rest of them don’t, and then another second where she thinks he has to be mistaken, it’s just Wyatt, Wyatt – although clearly needing help in all kinds of ways – is not a monster. But something is in fact happening. His eyes are turning yellow, his back is elongating and stretching in a strange way, and his hands are curling, gnarling, twisting into claws. The gang is yelling, backing away, and Rufus grabs Jiya by the hand and pulls her, both of them tripping over a downed tocker, as Flynn lunges for the nearest gun. He raises it, even as Lucy is trying madly to make any sense of the situation, can’t –

And then, she remembers the story Flynn told her in bed the other night, about Matija Korvin and Vlad Dracul. About how Dracul cursed Korvin for throwing him in prison, and how if you stumble into the old places where that curse still lies, you too will be changed, transmogrified, and will become a monster. Wyatt kept saying he wanted a cure. Lucy thought it was for Jessica, but it wasn’t. It was for him. And now, in a place absolutely rich and rotting with Matija Korvin’s magic, it is reacting particularly to Wyatt, to its old enemy, to –

Wyatt is one of Vlad Dracul’s children.

Wyatt is a werewolf.
As the transformation completes, as the creature that was formerly Wyatt Logan hits the ground on all fours and its jacket and trousers tear away, its teeth bared in a frothing snarl. Its eyes burn with a hungry yellow glow, and it sniffs the cold air in hoarse gulps. It may be the first time that Wyatt has ever actually fully transformed, if he’s been on stiff anti-lycanthropy medicine to this point, trying to keep the furry little problem under control in hopes of a more permanent solution. In that, he’s almost surely deluding himself, since while medicine can control the condition, it can’t cure it. Only strong old magic has a chance, and certainly not Matija Korvin’s. Matija’s magic was made to destroy these creatures, scions of his mortal enemy Dracul, and if this is Wyatt’s first complete transformation, this is somehow – impressively – even worse. Older werewolves can regain some sense of themselves over time, but young ones, blind and terrified, given over fully to the monster, have no chance.

It’s Flynn’s first, long-conditioned instinct to shoot, even though he doesn’t have his special heavy revolver with silver bullets and thus might as well be throwing twigs. He also, of course, doesn’t have any wolfsbane, because it’s otherwise known asaconite and is one of the deadliest poisons going, to human or were-creature alike. Flynn’s bad leg is not going to hold up much longer, and there are too many people that he needs to get out of the way. The only one he can really see, however, is Lucy. He still doesn’t know if she set him up to be captured, though the vehemence of their reunion (he does not intend to think about that right now or possibly ever) would suggest not. But there is a werewolf on the loose, he can’t protect her, and it turns his battered, weary, bleary brain almost blank with terror.

There is no time for calculations of risk or sophisticated stratagems. As the werewolf decides on the nearest humans – Lucy’s adventuresome friend Rufus and an unknown lady companion, from the looks of things – as its most convenient targets, Flynn gathers his haunches clumsily beneath him and throws himself into an almighty leap. He hits the werewolf from behind, locking both arms around its neck, and it utters a horrible, strangled squeal as he wrestles it down. They roll madly in the snow, claws slashing at his legs, jaws snapping and slavering as he desperately tries to hold them away. If he gets bitten, he’s fucked too.

Flynn fumbles blindly for a soft target, somewhere on the underside, though he’s fairly sure the beast won’t feel it. He hammers his best attempt at a punch in anyway, which seems to make it mad more than anything. Flynn is a highly trained monster hunter and it’s not the first time he has had to fight one of these things mano-a-mano, but he has also spent the last twenty-four hours locked in a small box, lost a significant amount of blood, and hasn’t exactly been fed or tended to in that time. He has a lurid memory of tangling with the revenant, which he also took on himself rather than let it go after Lucy, as he grabs the werewolf by the ears and drags its head back, trying to expose its throat long enough for someone to get off a shot. It won’t kill it, but it might stun it, and then they can work out something else. “HEY!” he roars. “NOW!”

It is quite hard to see anything in his present predicament (so, similar to his last one in that respect, though the lack of a blood-maddened werewolf is making the box sound not that bad in
He can hear yells and running footsteps, and a blast of blue energy sizzles overhead as someone, possibly Lucy, decides to see if tocker droppers work on werewolves. The answer is that they don’t, but they make their fur very frizzy, send an electrical charge jolting through Flynn that briefly stuns him, and he jerks his head aside in the nick of time as jaws close ferociously where it just was. Sparks sting between his fingers, and he sees double. If the ravens are here to help him, they really should bloody think about doing that right now.

Flynn doesn’t say that aloud, mostly because he can’t for obvious reasons. But the next moment, he hears a rush of wings, and the ravens descend on them in a swarm. They pluck and peck and tear at the werewolf’s muzzle and eyes, as it thrashes madly trying to dislodge them, and Flynn almost loses sight of his opponent in the whirl of black wings. It’s just enough for him to crawl out from beneath the beast, bleeding and breathless, and grab a dismembered iron arm off one of the broken tockers sprawled nearby. As the werewolf turns blindly toward him, Flynn winds up and swings it with all of his strength.

It might not be silver or any other special sort of weapon, but even a werewolf notices when it gets bashed very hard in the skull with a solid piece of metal. Its eyes roll back and it collapses in the snow with a crash, paws splayed and black blood trickling from the gash in its fur. It’s unconscious, at least for a few minutes, and Flynn can’t waste any of that time.

He lunges for the tocker, economically guts it of its piano-wire innards, and strips away the copper insulation to find as much of the exposed silver as he can. It’s sharp enough to cut his already-lacerated hands, but he doesn’t feel it. He used this trick once on an assignment in Montenegro, which held it long enough for him to get to his gun and finish it, but that is a fairly major missing piece in this case. He tangles the wire around the werewolf’s front and back paws, and yanks a winding mechanism out of the chest of another tocker, feeling like a mad scientist cannibalizing corpses for parts. He is, in a way, though these corpses are mechanical, not mortal. But some of the more upscale tockers have fancy silver clockwork, rather than common pewter or bronze, and he feels a brief and absurd relief that Rittenhouse sprang for the nice ones to serve as prison guards on the train, rather than send their own people up into this desolate frozen asshole. Flynn jams the silver clockwork against the werewolf’s throat, holds it in place with more piano wire, and yells again at Karl and the nearest members of his gang that he can see (Karl came to get him? Karl? He may have to give him a pay raise), “HEY!”

To their credit, the men run over, though they are justifiably extremely leery about getting too close to a werewolf, even a semi-conscious one. Following Flynn’s terse instructions, they drag it toward the ruined train, throw it in the most solid half of the crushed coal tender, and heap the heavy parts of the ruined tockers over it. It will serve as a makeshift prison, but not for very long, and does not address the question of either turning Wyatt back into a human or getting them the hell out of here. It is only as a thundering silence falls that Flynn realizes he is in fact bleeding a lot, and sits down heavily in the snow, losing his balance. He doesn’t think any of it is a werewolf bite, but that is not exactly helpful right now.

“Flynn?” Lucy runs over to him, kneeling down with a very worried look on her face. He appreciates her concern, even if he is still mildly stunned by its existence. “Flynn, are you – ”

“Just… give me a minute.” It hurts ferociously when he breathes, like a hot knife jamming under his ribs, and even in his eventful career, that one was too close for comfort. “Where is – are the Sokolovs here? How did you – ”


It’s on the tip of Flynn’s tongue to ask where she thinks he’s going, but given his last day or so, that’s a reasonable request. He duly waits as Lucy and the others return to the smashed-up locomotive of the train that they evidently used to pursue him here (that sounds like a fascinating comparison).
story, but one for later) and pull an unconscious Anton and Gennady Sokolov from the wreckage. At least Flynn thinks they’re only unconscious, given the anxious way that everyone is treating them, which presumably would not be the case if they were already dead and past help. He feels rather numb and detached from the whole thing. Just a few hours ago, he was still locked in that metal cage, en route to Siberia for some horrible and unknown fate. Now he’s sitting in the middle of a snowstorm with two wrecked trains, a werewolf, two dozen broken tockers, the recent manifestation of the Raven King, and Lucy Preston, apparently of her own free will, just kissed him. It’s fair to say he’s a little stunned.

Once the Sokolovs have been carried into the train car out of the wind and Rufus and his lady friend are doing something to them there, Lucy returns to Flynn and crouches down, trying to pull his arm over her shoulders. “Can you stand up?”

“Well.” Flynn doesn’t stop her from doing it, but he also can’t get up the volition to help either. It strikes him that he might have more than a little hypothermia, the way the world turns milky and dreamy, groggy and slow, and if you don’t wake up from that pleasant reverie, you won’t wake up at all. “We need to get the trains off the tracks. This is the Moscow-Arkhangelsk line, there will be another service running through here tomorrow. If it hits those – ”

It’s plain that that would be an epic disaster (so, another one, then), but it’s also not clear how a ragtag group of less than ten people, none of whom are freaks of nature and several of whom are badly wounded, are going to get two wrecked trains off the line. For that matter, it’s not clear how they’re going to get out of here. The locomotive from Flynn’s train might still be somewhat operational, since it was the farthest away from the site of the crash, but the Sokolovs appear to be the closest thing anyone had to engineers, and they’re both unconscious. Flynn, still chivvied by Lucy, finally tries to get to his feet, then grunts and goes down, almost pulling her with him, as his leg gives out. “You go on,” he manages, grimacing. “Go on, just go and – ”

“You think I’m leaving you here?” Lucy looks absolutely ferocious, in what Flynn can dimly make out of her face. “After I came this far? Come on. Come on, one – two – three – ”

She heaves with strength out of all proportion to her size, ignoring the fact that she too has a gimpy leg, and somehow, Flynn rises up like a snowy phoenix, leaning heavily on her as they stagger toward the train. Its broken-out windows are blank and black as blinded eyes, the wind scouring it with an eerie, spine-chilling keen, and the presence of a bound-up werewolf in the coal tender doesn’t exactly provide any impression of a warm or welcoming refuge. Flynn heaves her over the tilted step, she reaches back down for him, and their cold fingers almost slip free. He crawls up, pushes the door open into the compartment where Rufus, the Sokolovs, and the others have taken refuge, and nods at it. “You go in there, I want to try something.”

Lucy looks at him anxiously, but decides to do as he says. She goes into the car, and Flynn, groaning every time he puts weight on his leg and having to grope his way along the crazily tilted walls, makes his way along the track to the locomotive of his train. It may be roughly functional, but the boiler fire has gone completely out, and he sees no way to get it going again. So that’s it, then. They just all get to sit here in the darkness and slowly freeze, or wait for the werewolf to wake up and kill them all.

Flynn gives into a moment of sheer and desolate frustration, shouting curses in all the half-dozen or so languages he knows, banging his hands on the iron plates and achieving nothing except bruising them up some more, and sliding to the floor of the cab, sitting in a crumpled huddle and wishing that he would wink out of existence on the spot. This wish, to his vast annoyance, is not granted, and after another few moments, he crawls forward, fighting the now-agonizing pain in his leg, and lies flat on his face. “Matija,” he mutters. “Matija, you brought us this far. Don’t leave now. Matija Korvin, Gavran Kralj, king of the darkness and the wild, of the night and the stars,
The silence remains deafening. Flynn stares into the abyss that he first discovered the depths of after Lorena and Iris died, after he spent several nights contemplating whether to just take his own gun and finish it off, to go and be with them, at peace, rather than face the hell of trying to exist without them. He came close a few times, but his burning need for revenge on Rittenhouse would not allow him to do it without a fight, to lie down and let them win. A monster hunter who missed the biggest monster of all, who has to make it right, and now –

He doesn’t know what this is, or what he is, any more. He doesn’t know if he even wants to keep fighting, other than that he knows no other way to live. He remains facedown, breathing in pained, wheezing gulps. He knows the Raven King will not come on command, like a dog being called to perform tricks, and you might anger him if you importune too repeatedly or frivolously for his assistance. But Flynn has believed in the man and his legend since before conscious thought, from his most fundamental beginning, and he has seen that power in indisputable action tonight. He knows that Matija’s magic is incompatible with technology, that in all this iron and steel and steam, there might simply be the impossibility of its existence. And yet. And yet.

Nothing tangibly changes, and yet, something does. Flynn has the brief, shadowed sense of someone stepping over him, though when he looks up with pain-bleared eyes, there is still no one else in the cab. Nothing more than a whisper of an old robe, vanishing around a corner. The next moment, he hears a strange rattling from the boiler, like coal being shoveled in, but there is still no heat or light from it. The whir sounds like a drone, like wings, as if the ravens are flying madly inside it, circling, circling, and slowly at first, then faster, the locomotive starts to move.

There is a jerk and a jolt as the momentum is transferred badly down the line of crushed cars, like a tangled wooden train on a string. Flynn doesn’t have the strength to get up and see if it includes the one that Lucy and the others are in, but somehow he does it anyway. One of the rear cars tumbles sidelong off the track with a horrible screech and thunder, sending up sparks as it somersaults into the snow, and he crawls in agony, hand over hand, down the length of the train to the carriage they’re in. He can tell that the coupler is tenuous, that they need to get into the next one, and jerks the door open. “Move!”

Lucy looks up at him, startled and white-faced. “What?”

“We need to get out of this car, it’s going to break loose. There’s an intact one a little further up.” Flynn braces himself on the wall. “Come on, hurry up. Now!”

Rufus, Lucy, Karl, and the others hop to their feet. It is a hair-raising production to heave the unconscious Sokolovs through the narrow door, across the gap between cars with the ground now going by fast beneath, and for Flynn to pull them into the next carriage, but they manage. Rufus and his lady friend crawl across, Flynn grabs their wrists and heaves them as well, and then Karl takes a running start, leaping clear, as the coupler is starting to rattle in an alarming fashion. That leaves just Lucy on the other car, and they have maybe thirty seconds before it breaks off. “JUMP!” Flynn bellows, holding his arms out. “LUCY, JUMP!”

He can see abject terror on her face – it’s not the easiest thing to do, in the dead of night and snow, with a good five feet to clear and the fact that she’ll instantly be dragged under the train wheels and crushed gruesomely to death if she misses. But sparks are starting to fly as the ruined car is dragged free, and she has no time to think about it. She backs up, lowers her head, then breaks into a full sprint, throwing herself into thin air, as he sets his feet and prays.

The next instant, Lucy hits him like a ton of bricks, knocking him backward into the carriage, as he wraps his arms around her and she wraps hers around him and he can feel both of them shaking like leaves, as he buries his face in her freezing hair and can hear her sobbing into his
He staggers back, still holding her, as the other carriage breaks away and likewise flips off the track, spinning down the embankment and blowing up in a spectacular fireball fifty yards below. Flynn kicks the door shut, rams in the bar, and doesn’t let go of Lucy the entire time. He staggers back, then collapses with her on one of the broken seats, the hard, ancient green velvet upholstery feeling almost as comfortable as a featherbed.

Wyatt is trapped in the coal tender, presumably (and hopefully) still unconscious, so that makes all of them, albeit in very bad shape, as they gain speed, rolling into the whirling snow. Flynn’s hands are cut from the wire, his leg badly damaged, and he has a splendid collection of bruises, cuts, contusions, and other decorations from the beating he took while getting captured. Lucy has done something unpleasant to her leg as well, the Sokolovs are still out, Rufus has managed to escape relatively unscathed but was not in tip-top shape to start with, and the rest of the gang has likewise taken weather from the train crash and the fight in the snow against the automatons. Rufus’ lady friend turns out to be named Jiya. Flynn struggles to recall if Lucy mentioned her before or not. He feels like she might have, but cannot pin the precise instance to mind. Everything is turning rather hazy.

Flynn hopes that they don’t barrel through some crossing too fast and cause yet another accident, or anything else of the sort that could occur when a bunch of injured people are trapped in a train essentially careening out of control, but he decides to leave that to the ravens. Lucy is curled up very close against his chest, it’s cold and dark and they have just been through a terrifying experience, and Flynn can’t summon the necessary volition to push her away. He reminds himself to do it later, then – finally, blessedly – passes out.

He has no idea how long it has been when he stirs, then immediately wishes he hadn’t. Everything aches from head to toe, with a nerve-shredding, eye-watering savagery, and he struggles to catch his breath. The inside of the train car is filled with wintry, watery grey-pink light, and they do not appear to have been gruesomely dismembered, whether by a werewolf or by another crash. Flynn struggles to get his thick, cottony tongue around a question – he is dying of thirst, will probably have to go melt some snow – and then through the frosted window, sees the train chugging slowly past a wooden sign, the Cyrillic characters half-obscured by icicles. Архангельск. They’re here.

Flynn sits up, realizes that Lucy is missing, and has a sudden moment of panic, casting around to all sides and almost scrambling to his abused feet before hearing voices from ahead. The train rolls beneath the handsome iron portico of the Arkhangelsk railway terminal, venting blasts of steam, and hits the buffer with a thud that Flynn feels in his teeth. For once, after two days of chaos, the dull, ever-present clack of the train wheels and the hiss and blast of burning coal, there is silence. It rings in his still-ringing ears.

After a few moments, the compartment door unlatches, and Lucy limps in. Someone has fashioned a makeshift splint for her leg out of broken wood and handkerchiefs, which does not look comfortable, but at least it is allowing her to keep going. “We’re in Arkhangelsk,” she informs him, unnecessarily, breath gusting silver in the pearlescent half-light. “Can you walk?”

Flynn thinks about that, isn’t sure he wants to hazard it, and finally Shitmouth and Robert Taylor are called in to assist, hauling him upright and helping him hop the length of the car to the door. There are two platforms in the station, of which they are occupying one, and the other train must be awaiting its departure to Moscow shortly. Lucy goes to find the station master, and since he is the only Russian speaker who is either comos mentis or mobile, Karl has to go with her, which Flynn hates with his entire heart. This time, however, Karl refrains from anything ill-advised, and the station master appears with a look of alarm at multiple injured, scruffy, dirty men (and two women) suddenly descending upon his otherwise peaceful hamlet. “Who are you people? Where on earth did you come from? The service from Moscow does not arrive until much later.”
“We were… unscheduled,” Flynn answers, suddenly wondering what the werewolf situation is, if removal from the affected area of Matija’s magic has reverted Wyatt to human form. He needs to have a good shout at Logan for keeping that secret later, given as it very nearly killed the lot of them, though he grudgingly supposes that Wyatt could have had no way of knowing that that was going to happen. Poor bastard. It’s not a pleasant fate, and anti-lycanthropy medicine may be in short supply around here. They’d better bloody hope he doesn’t wolf out again.

It takes a while, and the requisitioning of several porters to help with all the walking wounded, but they finally get everyone off the train. The answer to the werewolf question is that Wyatt in fact human again, but has a nasty goose egg where Flynn clobbered him with the tocker arm, is naked and half-frozen, shivering and disoriented and confused, and the porters considerately fetch a quilt to wrap him up in and throw censorious looks at everyone else, evidently thinking that they kidnapped him. Flynn wants to explain that he is tied up in piano wire for everyone’s best good, including his own, but that takes too much effort. There’s a British diplomatic office, bank, and guildhouse in Arkhangelsk, due to the long-established Anglo-Russian trade through this port, but given their status as British fugitives-in-chief, that does not seem like a place from which they should expect succor or assistance. Maybe they can assist in getting Lucy (and Rufus and Jiya) back to England. Other than that, who knows. Flynn has given up guessing.

In fits and starts, lurching and staggering, they make their way out of the station. Arkhangelsk is bathed in that eerie pink-grey light like the inside of an oyster; they are too far north for the sun to get more than a few degrees over the horizon. They’re not quite at a high enough latitude to have total polar night, but the days are only a few hours long, and still have another month to go in getting shorter. Flynn devoutly hopes that they will not be here for another month, or even much time at all, but they are too battered to immediately race off again, and if Rittenhouse was bringing him here, there had to be a reason for it, something they need to find out. Despite the lack of sun, the day seems brighter than it is, thanks to the vast streaks of gold that dance and swoop in the sky. Aether in its purest, strongest form. The deposits around here must be unbelievable. That alone would get Rittenhouse’s attention, if they’re mining it.

Anton and Gennady are dispatched to the sailors’ hospital on the waterfront, since they’re more hurt than can be easily cared for, and Lucy wants Flynn to go as well, but he resists. Those places are usually of the rough-and-ready school of medicine that involves swift treatment (or amputation) of grisly wounds, and he doesn’t want them to get any damn ideas about hacking off his leg. Finally, he, Lucy, Rufus, Jiya, and Wyatt (since Flynn can’t think what else to do with him, doesn’t want him close, but also not out of his sight) find a boarding house that caters to the British merchant clientele, with a proprietor who speaks some English and proudly shows them the portrait of Queen Victoria in the hall. As his last memory of this woman is jumping out her drawing room window while her Munshi stabbed him in the arm, Flynn can’t help but choke. Nonetheless, everyone is at the end of their rope and needs to collapse, and fortunately, news of the Buckingham Palace break-in does not seem to have gotten this far north. Wyatt is untangled from the piano wire and sent to the bedsit in the cellar, Rufus and Jiya take one room at the end of the hall, and Flynn and Lucy find themselves in the other. It is more comfortable than their bare-bones overnight setup in St. Petersburg, with handsomely papered walls, thick velvet curtains and a whitewashed fireplace, and a four-poster bed with a counterpane that looks as soft as a cloud. Flynn wants to fall into it and sleep for a hundred years, but he is absolutely filthy, and wonders if he should limp outside and empty several buckets of freezing water over himself first. If he could even make it that far. Just now, it seems unlikely.

After Lucy has shut the door and turned the key with a click, she removes it, puts it on the night table, and they finally turn to look at each other properly, which they both immediately appear to wish they had not done. A slow, dull flush steals up Lucy’s cheeks, she coughs, and then finally says, “So. We, ah. We’re here.”
Since this is obvious and does not require response, Flynn merely grunts. He supposes he should thank her for saving him, but he also wants to know what happened back in St. Petersburg. Either way, he’s not going to be able to do it standing up, so he sinks into the poufy chintz armchair, wondering if the owner’s grandmother decorated this place. They eye each other for another horrendously awkward moment. Then Lucy says, “I’m sorry about what happened at Sibley’s office. About John Taylor. I didn’t – I never meant for that to –”

“Never meant for that to happen to him, but did mean it to happen to me?” Flynn isn’t really in the mood to beat around the bush. “Is that what you wanted?”

“No.” Lucy’s cheeks deepen a few notches in color, but she doesn’t take her gaze off him, cool and even. She’s apologized once, but she isn’t going to grovel or waste time on regretting something that is done and over, and Flynn is forced to respect that. He did just see this woman take on a Siberian snowstorm, a train full of tockers, a werewolf, a fell enchantment, and Christ knows whatever else, and it astonishes him all over again what a sheer force of nature she manages to contain in that slight frame. “I didn’t set you up on purpose. I didn’t know that Rittenhouse was going to be there. I should have, perhaps, but I didn’t.”

“Mmmf.” Flynn’s leg is hurting too much to think of a witty reply. Lucy’s eyes flicker to it, the crusted bullet hole and dried blood, the redness and swelling from – to judge from the thousand veins of fire in it – several hairline fractures, and the purplish-black bruising on his ankle and up the back of his calf. She visibly flinches, and Flynn feels a stupid masculine impulse to tell her that it isn’t that bad, he’s fine. Fortunately, he manages not to.

“You really should have gone to the hospital,” Lucy says. “Your leg’s a mess. I have a few field-medical skills, but I don’t think I can fix that. And after what happened with Wyatt –” She hesitates. “Did you – know? Before?”

“No, I didn’t know before.” However much he may deserve it, Flynn is still rankled at the implication that he would let her run around in close proximity to a dangerous monster, and never utter a word of warning. “I did tell you that Dracul’s children can pass as human, even to someone like me, who used to hunt them for a living. I wondered once or twice if he was under some sort of spell, but I didn’t know for sure until he started changing. Matija Korvin’s magic must have forced him to do so, a sort of allergic reaction.”

“So that’s why he wants a cure,” Lucy says softly. “He came to this reality to retrieve you for Connor Mason, stumbled into a place under Dracul’s curse and was turned into a werewolf, and now he can’t go home unless he finds some way to get rid of it forever. He can’t go back to Earth – ours, our non-magical Earth – as a werewolf, or feel like he can properly find his wife and reunite with her while he’s – he’s this. Is there anything you know that could help him?”

“As I said, there’s medicine to control it, but nothing to cure it permanently.” Flynn, obviously, does not like Wyatt Logan much at all, but even he can admit that this is nothing to be envied. “You were the one researching how to disenchant a revenant. Maybe you saw something useful.”

“All the magic for that was Matija’s,” Lucy counters. “Since as you said, he was the one who made revenants in the first place, in order to fight Dracul’s children. Anything we could find from the Raven King would probably be meant to destroy Wyatt, not save him.”

Despite the pain and grime and other deeply undesirable aspects of this situation, Flynn finds it extremely arousing for Lucy to be standing there calmly talking about the Raven King and his magic and whether or not it is of any use to the monster they have become unexpectedly saddled with. She has learned a lot, he thinks, remembering her in Oxford, scoffing at the idea of anything actually being otherworldly or powerful enough to take seriously. Then he thinks again of her mouth on his, hungry and raw and wet and open, and swallows hard, reminding himself that that
was just a euphoric, spur-of-the-moment reaction, helped along by the dark and the snow and the thick strands of enchantment that hung around them both. He tries to avoid looking at her lips, or entertaining any notion of a repeat. Why is she still so beautiful, hair down and face dirty and dressed in battered old men’s clothes, after the literal night from hell? It dries his throat and skips his heart like a rock pattering along the surface of a lake, over and over, over and over, until it falls. Her face is set and carved and bold and burning in the reflected aether glow through the window. Arkhangelsk. He’s suddenly not so sure it’s Michael.

“Maybe,” Flynn says, after a too-long moment, struggling to remember what they were talking about. Right, Matija, and whether his magic would be any good for Wyatt. “The full moon was recently, we shouldn’t be in immediate danger as long as there isn’t another incident, but we need to get our hands on some of his medicine. I’m not risking another train trip with the possibility of a total transformation. Especially since he has no idea how to control it.”

Lucy looks as if she’s not that eager to risk it herself, all things considered. There is another brief pause. Then she says, “If you won’t go to the hospital, I’m going to find you a doctor. I’ll take Karl. You stay where you are.”

“Karl?” Flynn still doesn’t like that. “There has to be a servant in the house you can send, or you could ask the proprietor. You don’t need to go off alone with that – ”

“Karl’s welcome to try something.” Lucy gives him a slightly feral smile. “We’ll happily see how that works out for him.”

With that, leaving Flynn frankly more shaken than ever, she whirls on her heel and exits the room, as he leans back and blows out a long breath. The proprietor comes up with some tea, which Flynn sips slowly, and he drifts in an uncomfortable haze until Lucy returns. She has indeed brought a doctor, a young, sandy-haired gentleman who sucks in his breath in horror at the sight of Flynn’s leg, enquires of Lucy in broken English if perhaps she would like to leave while he sees to her husband, and is oblivious to the blushes that result on both of them. The doctor sets down his bag, unpacks his things, and gingerly cuts away the ruin of Flynn’s trousers, as if not even sure where to start first. “How did you do this?” he asks in Russian. “Were you run over by a train?”

“Not that far off, actually.” Flynn grimaces. Lucy has taken up a position next to his chair, apparently intending to remain in the name of moral support, and he is about to tell her to go, like the doctor suggested. But he can’t quite do it, and this is going to be awful enough. If she wants to get some grim satisfaction out of seeing that he has in fact suffered for all his bad decisions, she might as well.

*Suffering* is, Flynn has decided ten minutes later, a gentle way to put it. He’s not altogether sure that he is not in fact dead, in hell, and the doctor is a cunningly disguised junior demon getting started on his eternities of torment. He has to first scrub down the leg with warm water and soap, trying to remove some of the calcified layers of grime, before he can get to work. Then he has to fish the bullet out, cauterize, clean, irrigate, and stitch the entry wound, and pack it thoroughly with gauze and bandages, as Lucy is drafted in as an extra pair of hands to cut thread or hold the raw edges of Flynn’s skin closed while the bastard stabs him repeatedly with a needle. Once that is done, the doctor is leery about the multiple fractures in Flynn’s tibia, which he has really managed to mess up, and warns him that unless he stays off his feet for at least a fortnight, he runs the risk of doing permanent damage and being lame for the rest of his life. Flynn is not enthused to hear that, but needs must. It feels like the Raven King could magically swoop in and fix that too, but he’s probably used up his miraculous intervention for several decades.

Flynn is even less enthused about the fact that the doctor decides that they’ll have to fully break the fractures, then re-align and set them cleanly, rather than having them jam together and knit
badly. At that, he decides that his tolerance for letting Lucy get vicarious satisfaction out of his misery is at an end, and turns to her. “Go. I don’t want you to see this.”

“No,” she says. She helps the doctor lay his leg out straight, fix it in place with an iron collar, then returns to him and takes hold of both of his hands. “No, I’m staying.”

Flynn debates about that, and yet doesn’t have the will to force it. This is going to be more hell as it is, and she does seem worried. “Fine. But it’ll be ugly.”

Lucy has a pale, set look on her face as if she’s seen ugly and it doesn’t faze her, as if she has gotten well used to it, and doesn’t answer. The doctor removes his mallet and wedge, finds the displacement of each fracture, and places the wedge against it. He gives Flynn a knotted handkerchief to bite down on, promises that this will be quick but is really going to hurt, and then hits the wedge with the mallet.

Flynn lets out a strangled, roaring gargle, as it feels exactly as you would expect someone deliberately breaking your fucked-up leg with a chisel to feel, and hot red-blackness fizzes at the edges of his vision. Lucy has one hand in his hair, cradling his head against her stomach, her other hand still tangled in his, as he gulps and heaves and tastes bile in the back of his throat, trying not to throw up all over her. The doctor cuts strips of his skin back in order to properly align the broken fragments, drills in a few small steel screws that he assures Flynn will grow into the healing bone, and then sews the skin back into place. If nothing else, Flynn has become almost desensitized to the pain at this point, since his nerves have just up and quit, and he’s practically able to fall asleep from exhaustion as the doctor finishes his work and washes the wound thoroughly with a perhydroxic acid solution. Then he splints the leg, bandages it up until it looks like a mummified white club, and finally gets to his feet. “Well,” he says, taking off his glasses and wiping his face with his arm. “I advise a stiff drink and a long rest.”

“Thank you.” Flynn still feels like he’s about to die, and would not mind at all if he did, but he is able to recognize that the doctor did a very competent job under challenging circumstances, and might in fact have saved him from permanent crippling. “If you want to be paid, I have money. Not right now, but I can find a way to get it to you. However much you’d like.”

The doctor assures him that whenever he can find the money, that is suitable, and to send his wife by again if the wound worsens or develops any complications. Neither Flynn nor Lucy bother correcting him at this point, and he packs his things back into his bag, washes his hands, and removes a small, stoppered black vial from his pocket. “Laudanum,” he says. “You’ll want it. Good day, sir, ma’am.”

With that, as the door shuts behind him, Lucy steps in, slings Flynn’s arm over her shoulder, and helps him hop to the bed. She tugs the covers back and helps him underneath them, undoes his belt and unbuttons his dirty shirt, and he supposes there is some impertinent remark to be made about her tearing his clothes off, but he is weak as water and suspects it would backfire on him anyway. She eases him down onto the pillow, he wonders if it’s worth it to deny the laudanum when she offers it, and then decides that it isn’t. He takes a few foul-tasting droplets, chokes it down and dry-retches as his stomach revolts, but manages not to bring it back up. The world is already fading into a haze, and within moments, he is gone.

Flynn has tormented poppy hallucinations that flash in and out like carnival mirrors, until they finally subside long enough to let him properly pass out again. His waking from this seems destined to be even more unpleasant than his waking on the train, if that’s possible, but at least it doesn’t hurt right now, and he wanders in the opium mists without any sense of time or space or conscious form. Unlike his visions as a prisoner, where he saw the ghosts of Lorena and Iris flitting in and out, nobody is here at all. He is standing in the middle of a grey moor, the wind blowing hard in his face, the boggy ground giving way beneath his feet. He does not remember
when he came here, or how he arrived. Doesn’t know if this is a dream, or if he has somehow been plucked out of bed in Arkhangelsk and carried on the wind.

After an indefinable passage of time, short or long or neither, Flynn becomes slowly aware that he is not, in fact, completely alone. There is someone standing on the far side of the fog, someone waiting for him to come to them. Black leaves twist and scatter, leaves that look like wings. He can hear a distant caw, and he knows who calls.

Slowly, step by step, Flynn crosses the moor. His leg does not pain him; it is of no concern at all. He is not in a place where the limitations of his physical body can touch him. He wades through the peat water, which slops murkily around his ankles, and climbs up on the far side. He can see the edge of a robe, the one that he glimpsed vanishing around the corner and into the train boiler, right before the locomotive began to move. This time, however, it is more solid, not merely an ephemeral scrap or half-seen shadow. It is embroidered in ancient runes that speak the language of stone and sky and field, of stars and moon and tree, and it rises up the body of a tall man, who stands there without a word and casts a shadow as vast as a forest.

Flynn looks up into the pale, carved, handsome face, the eyes as black as onyx beneath thick brows, the long hair somehow untouched by the wind, the mouth like a seam of granite and the iron crown that rises in sharp, elegant points. If he is honest with himself, he should have known this was coming, and he drops smartly to his knees, bowing his head and lifting the robe to kiss. “Matija Korvin,” he says. “Moj gospodaru, moj kralj. Pozdravljam te.”

Garcia Flynn. It is not quite a spoken voice that answers, but something like the sound of far-off thunder, somehow recognizable as words. It is an older dialect of Croatian, antique and formal, but understandable. You called me by the old ways and placed yourself at my service. I have come, I have delivered you from your enemies. Do you now pay the toll?

“Yes.” Flynn can feel the cold droplets on his face, the taste of salt on his lips. “Whatever you ask of me, you may have it. As I swore.”

You make hasty promises, boy. Matija Korvin sounds amused. Are you sure you would give anything I could ask of you, without a single thought or question? You are in my debt. The magic spent for you was grave and strong. I will need it back.

Flynn is aware of a chill that does not come from the wind, that seems to cut him to the bone. He is reminded of the reason why you only call upon the Raven King in the darkest hour, and of his earthly nickname, Matija the Just. He will give you what you need, but he will expect fair recompense, and he will not be swayed by pleading or petty mortal concerns in what he asks. He is old and fey and very strong, and Flynn has to fight a sudden and consuming terror. What if Korvin asks for not something, but someone? Is Flynn willing to defy his own gods, his ancestral master, the flesh and bone of his country’s existence and magic and pride, all the legends ever told and all the songs ever sung, and the debt that he clearly does owe, to be so insane as to withhold the King’s tribute from him? It is said that the Raven King must sometimes find a Raven Queen to rule Faerie with him, and Flynn has seen for himself what Lucy is. What if –

I will tell you when I have set my mind, Matija Korvin says. Then you will bring it to me, and the account will be settled. Call upon me again, and a second payment will be owed. I shall, however, strengthen your leg, as you will need it. You may thank me for this gift.

“Thank you, my lord.” Flynn takes the offered bone-white hand and kisses it, next to the black-stoned ring with a raven carved in its face. “I am your servant.”

Do not forget it. Matija Korvin’s rumble is becoming deeper, farther away, and his body is starting to become one with the mist, as the leaves twist and whirl and leap around his feet, spring from the
moor and become birds taking flight. *We will speak again.*

With that, all at once, he is gone, and Flynn is aware of the grey field falling away, the world turning to darkness. When he slowly stirs back to consciousness, he is aware that he is lying in bed, his leg still hurts but not nearly as badly as before, and he is once more physically back in Arkhangelsk, if indeed he ever really left. He grimaces, pushes himself upright, and looks around. The room is quiet. Lucy isn’t there, but someone has left a tray of food, in case he feels up to eating. He considers, then decides that he does. According to the clock, it is four-thirty PM, and has probably been dark for at least an hour.

Flynn is polishing off the supper, and wondering if he feels up to hauling himself out of bed and to the WC, when the door opens and Lucy returns. She looks cold and windswept, as if she has been out for the day. “I’ve been to visit Anton and Gennady,” she says, by way of explanation. “They’re awake, they should be all right, but they were hurt fairly seriously, they’ll have to stay at least a few days. I managed to find a little medicine for Wyatt, I hope it’s enough. Rufus and Jiya are mostly all right, if banged up and confused. I sent a telegram to Ada in St. Petersburg to tell her that we’re alive and we rescued you, but I had to be very roundabout. Our last entanglement with telegraph operators in St. Petersburg going how it did.”

Flynn nods, thanking her for the explanation, and is yet again impressed at what she has managed to do within a few short and dark hours of being dropped into this place. “Sit down,” he says gruffly. “You’ve been running yourself ragged.”

Lucy looks about to protest, then for once, thinks better of it. She shucks her dirty cap, jacket, and shoes, sits in the chair, and lets out a long sigh, rubbing both hands over her face. Flynn manages to get out of bed and hop awkwardly to the loo, do his business without killing himself, and hop back, aware that the roles have been reversed in terms of who is in the bed and who seems self-conscious about sharing it. Maybe Lucy does not want to cuddle too close to his grimy invalid carcass, for which she cannot be blamed, or maybe she is already regretting the kiss. He should not have been so forward, the way he kissed her back with such starving, forceful insistence, the one thing he knew he would do if he let himself give in. She might feel sullied, assaulted, preyed-upon, though he does get the sense that things are different, socially speaking, for men and women in her world. But he isn’t sure he could bear the shame, the guilt, if so.

It continues to get darker, and Lucy gets up to light the lamps in the room. The window glows with green-gold light from the aurora and the aether streaking in great gouts of color across the night sky, more beautiful than the stars, and Flynn half-feels that he could stare at it forever. Lucy disappears into the bathroom, the water runs for a while as she evidently has a proper wash, and Flynn tries not to chase his head in circles. Should he ask her if she is all right? Apologize for his impropriety? Lucy is clearly a woman who is not affronted or shocked by the things that would cause other well-bred Victorian ladies to swoon, and Flynn doesn’t want to insult her by insinuating that she couldn’t handle it or must have been a fragile flower. But at the same time, he’s increasingly terrified that he did hurt her somehow, inside or out, and she’s been pushing it aside for the sake of taking care of him. He could offer for her to sleep down the hall, with Rufus and Jiya, or on the sofa. No, he should sleep on the sofa. Even if it means limping downstairs to freeze, he probably –

Flynn’s progressively more panicked rounds of self-recrimination are finally interrupted by Lucy opening the door and emerging from the bathroom, pink-cheeked and damp-haired, wearing one of the nightgowns from the wardrobe. She looks at him a little shyly. “There might be some hot water left in the boiler. I don’t think you could have a proper bath with your bandages, but I could find a sponge or a handkerchief.”

Some removal of his exoskeleton of filth sounds nice, even as Flynn is briefly unsure if she’s
implying that she should wash him, and doesn’t respond for fear of choking on his tongue. He finally manages to answer that that would be good, thanks, and hops to the bathroom, waving off her offered assistance. There is a hand towel that he can use to scrub, and he hastily declines her suggestion that she fetch one of the gang from their lodgings a few doors down. He is not having them see him like this, or expected to act as a nursemaid for the boss.

Once the door is shut behind him, Flynn strips off the rest of his ragged clothes, climbs very carefully into the claw-footed tub, and picks up the towel and the bar of rosemary-scented soap. The water is lukewarm rather than hot, but he doesn’t begrudge it to Lucy, and with grunts and curses of pain, he manages to get the most egregious mess off. He has to prop his bandaged leg awkwardly on the rim of the tub to avoid getting it wet, and wonders what exactly Matija did to it, or if it’s a bad idea to go rummaging around trying to find out. He’ll take it not hurting like the son of a bitch for now. Everything else is gravy.

Having finished his makeshift ablutions, Flynn heaves himself painfully out, dries off, and discovers that a folded nightshirt has been left on the shelf. He shrugs into it; it’s slightly too small through the chest and shoulders, and clearly made for a shorter man, so that he feels afraid of inadvertently flashing passersby if he bends over too quickly. Not that anyone is likely to be passing by except Lucy, but flashing her would definitely be mortifying. Among other things.

Flynn opens the door and hobbles out, to discover that Lucy has curled up in the bed in his absence, but seems set to vacate it upon his return. “No,” he says quickly. “No, you can take it. I’ll – ”

“There is no way you’re going to walk downstairs and sleep on the sofa,” Lucy says. “None whatsoever. We’re just cutting that off right there.”

Flynn is miffed that he is apparently predictable, but relieved that he doesn’t have to make the trek down to a cold and empty parlor. Even he doesn’t think he could manage a night on the floor in his present state, so he gimps over and climbs in with a grunt of effort, assisted by Lucy. They end up very close to each other, his hand alongside her thigh and their noses almost brushing, and briefly get lost in the other’s eyes. Her hair has tumbled into her still-flushed face, and his fingers ache with the urge to brush it aside. To run his fingers along the fine bone of her cheek, to cup her ear and draw her mouth to his. But that would take a determination, a conscious effort, a decision that he does not know if he can make, and he refuses to toy with her or jerk her around. Their gazes remain locked, and he can hear her breath hitch in her throat. It is a small, hungry sound, which seems to suggest that she would not necessarily be averse to what he has just imagined (or more), and it is murder on his self-control. How can she, how can she possibly, have done this for him? It is unfathomable. He has done nothing to deserve it. And yet, heart-shatteringly, unbearably, here she still is.

After an anguished moment more, Flynn pries his eyes off her, moves his hand back, and carefully, slowly lies down on his back. He settles his head on the pillow, letting out a jagged sigh, and after a brief hesitation, glancing at him through lowered lashes, Lucy lies down as well, curling herself into his side and nuzzling into the crook of his shoulder, the way they slept that night in St. Petersburg. She doesn’t ask permission, not that it would once occur to him to refuse her, and he wraps his arm instinctively around her. She lowers her head, and rests on his chest. At that, Garcia Flynn’s fragile heart almost breaks altogether. He wants to take this moment and put it in glass, somewhere small and perfect and remote from the rest of the world, from all of time and eternity, and keep it safe. He knows it beyond all dispute, it slashes him like a knife, and only incidentally less painful. He loves, he loves, he loves her, and he can never let her go. Unless she asks, unless she tells him to, and if so, somehow, he will have to find the strength to watch her get into her machine, however she came to this reality in the first place, and leave it
forever.

(He can’t, he can’t, he can’t. His heart and his head flee wildly from even the possibility of imagining it. And yet. He has always known she would not stay. Could not.)

Lucy closes her eyes, the exhaustion swiftly pulling her under. Flynn is just as tired, and yet he feels tempted to stay awake a little longer, to look at her like this, boneless and utterly trusting and fast asleep in his arms. He shifts a bit to be able to hold her with both, tugging her closer against him. When he is absolutely sure that she is soundly out and will not stir, he brushes the lightest, most gentle of kisses against her tangled hair, the soft skin of her temple and her cheek, and hopes they may stay there as an offering. God. His heart shakes.

Something drifts past the window, outside. Something neither snow, nor wind, nor passing traveler of the night. It fills Flynn with something closer to foreboding than relief, something more terror than gratitude. For he knows very well, as he has all along, that it was a raven.
In Which Lucy Makes An Executive Decision

Lucy doesn’t stir a single eyelash until ten o’clock the next morning, which coincidentally is when the sun is finally coming up. Admittedly, “up” is a bit of a misnomer, since it remains low enough to cast long shadows for most of the day, but she becomes aware of the weak glow on her face, peering through a break in the curtains, and grimaces, mumbles, and raises a hand, a cave-dweller suddenly disturbed by news from the overworld. She is extremely comfortable and could sleep another few (or more) hours anyway, but as memory trickles slowly into her rebooted brain, that possibility seems unlikely. Not even like this, engulfed in Flynn’s arms with her head on his shoulder, her legs thrown over his, her –

Wait. What? Not that she objects, but she can’t remember when exactly she ended up in Flynn’s arms, other than a brief and general memory of him crawling in next to her last night (and if she hadn’t insisted, she has the distinct feeling that this idiot would have tried to tough it out on the floorboards with a full-body beating and a badly broken leg). Even with that, she was expecting the same stiffness and distance of their night in St. Petersburg, when he caught himself apparently relaxing too much and hastily tried to separate them. But she has woken up instead with both his arms wrapped around her, practically spanning her twice, and her entire body fitted into the cracks and crevices of his, like a lost hiker sheltering on a mountainside. When she moves as if to pull away, he rumbles in his sleep and unconsciously, reflexively draws her closer. He is warm and solid and very strong, somehow – incredibly – real, after everything they went through to get him, and it momentarily takes her breath away.

Since she doesn’t really want to get up anyway, and since she might as well savor this before he wakes up and wigs out again, Lucy wriggles around to look at him better. There are a few flecks of silver in his stubble and in distinguished touches at his temples, but his hair is thick and dark and just the right length to flip over his forehead. He has faint lines around his eyes, deep grooves around his mouth, and his nose is long. A few scars that look like claw marks stripe the heavy muscle of his upper arm, making her wonder how many were-beasts he’s tangled with apart from Wyatt, and he has clearly lived a hard life. There is a small red cicatrix just under his collarbone that looks like a healed bullet wound, and she hopes he won’t go around catching any more of those. She is overcome by a sudden desire to put her lips to it, to kiss it, to soothe this evidence of old hurts since her ability to help the new ones is so limited. She doesn’t even exactly know why, and she shouldn’t. He said no, before. He said no.

Lucy bites her lip, shifting closer, finding nothing else to do with her left hand apart from settle it on Flynn’s chest, slowly rising and falling to the rhythm of his breathing. Moving it down feels like an invitation to awkwardness and disaster, so she slides it up instead, into the hollow of his breastbone. He doesn’t seem to be sleeping fitfully, so maybe he isn’t in too much pain from his leg, and when she lifts her hand and ghosts her fingers over his forehead, he isn’t running a fever. He was yesterday, so maybe he’s on the mend, though this would be a fast healing by anyone’s standards. Maybe the Raven King stepped in.

At that, Lucy frowns, trying to remember a dream that she’s fairly sure she had last night. Another one about ravens, though this one wasn’t seeing them above the train. This time, she was in a boggy grey field, the wind blowing in her face, and there was someone standing on the far side of the fog. She thought it was a man, but the shadow he cast was one of an endless forest, and ravens kept rising in whirling storms. He did not say a word, or come closer. Merely remained there, in some sort of stasis, as if waiting for a moment, for a sign. Waiting. Waiting.

That, however, reminds Lucy a little too uncomfortably of the forest in her room during the revenant attack, and since it stems from the same magic, perhaps that is understandable. But it also
suddenly makes her wonder if the Raven King, if he is the maker and master of the revenants, might be considerably more dangerous than they are. She already noted Priscilla’s leery reaction to the idea of contacting him, and while she knows that Flynn reveres Matija Korvin, that Korvin is responsible for however they got out of the jam with the train, and whatever else, it makes Lucy feel that further reliance on him might be something to avoid. She doesn’t know what Korvin is, other than a very powerful otherworldly magical being that clearly has not let earthly death stop him from doing his thing, and might in fact have leveled up as a result. She has not taken his magic seriously before, and it got her attacked by the revenant. It is more than time that she takes more than a little caution with it now.

There is, however, still the fact that Emma and Rittenhouse are looking for Korvin’s lost library, and the idea of contacting him directly might also occur to them, rather than muddle fruitlessly around the Balkans in search of it. As far as Lucy knows, Emma hasn’t heard for sure that she herself is in Russia, but the news of Flynn’s capture was definitely sent back to London. Rittenhouse might not yet know that Flynn has escaped, given as the tockers on his train were all destroyed, but someone will have been waiting for him to arrive in Arkhangelsk, realize that he has not (as far they know), and start asking questions and mounting a search. Even if Flynn was in a state to be walking around the city, he shouldn’t do that. Someone here is looking for him. Might have gone to the station master, asked questions. Not to mention, Rufus and Jiya are now here too. If Emma could catch them in the same place, together, she could wipe out the whole team at a stroke, and end all further resistance to Rittenhouse and everything they could achieve across the multiverse. The chance would be too tempting to resist.

These troubling thoughts are starting to cut into Lucy’s enjoyment of the carefree, comfortable moment she woke up in, and she supposes that she can’t loaf around in bed, or in Flynn’s arms, much longer. Her leg is still sore, but her feet have been messed up in some way since she got here, and she’ll find some liniment or bandages to splint it up if she has to do a lot of walking. She pauses, then pets her fingers over his cheek, since she doesn’t know when they’ll wake up like this again and, selfishly, wants to keep it that way for a moment longer. This time, however, he stirs, eyes closed, hand rising out of the quilts to catch hers and curl his fingers around it. “Moja ljubav,” he murmurs, voice thick and hoarse with sleep. “Dobro jutro.”

Lucy’s heart turns over. She doesn’t know exactly what he said, but the tone makes it more than clear that it’s an endearment, and the fact that it was spoken in Croatian means that he – understandably – is not yet awake and thinks, however briefly, that he is back in bed with his wife. She doesn’t get the sense that he has been remotely near any other woman since then, and as much as she tries to tell herself that it’s understandable, that she doesn’t grudge it to him, she turns her head away, so she doesn’t have to see the disappointment in his eyes when he opens them and realizes otherwise. “Good morning,” she says. “It’s – it’s me.”

She’s still halfway in his arms, and she feels them tense. She steadfastly keeps her gaze on the window, waiting until she feels it would be safe to look back at his face. There’s a long pause. Then he says, “Yes.”

It doesn’t sound disappointed. It doesn’t sound – well, like anything. She’s not sure what sort of answer yes is anyway, unless it’s confirming that he has recollected himself and remembered who he was speaking to. He opens his arms as if to make it easier for her to slip out, and Lucy does so, not sure that she’s ever felt more mortified in her life. (That includes the drunken hookups in her acting-out freshman year at UCLA, when she woke up in some dorm room smelling of rancid socks, next to some pasty-ass kid she didn’t know, and had to scramble to remember if they’d used a condom.) She disentangles herself from Flynn and sits upright, on the edge of the bed, to make it clear she’ll put space between them and wasn’t trying to sleazily make a move on him when he was asleep. Her cheeks burn. Silence.
“So,” Flynn says, after an excruciating pause. “How… how are you?”

“Fine?” Lucy can’t tell if he’s taking refuge in inane pleasantries to smooth things over, if he’s asking if she’s physically on the mend, or – or what. “I’ll do. I really should be asking about you. How’s your leg? Is it any better?”

Flynn wiggles it experimentally, which does not cause more curses or grimaces. “Better,” he agrees. “I had a dream that – well, anyway, maybe there was some leftover magic for it. It still feels like someone stuck it with a thousand hot needles, but that’s an improvement.”

“Either way, I don’t want you running around on it,” Lucy orders, sounding like a stern hospital matron to her own ears. “It was broken literally yesterday, and besides, there have to be Rittenhouse people in Arkhangelsk looking for you, if they were sending you here in the first place. You stay in today and rest. I’ll go out and see what I can find.”

Flynn looks briefly inclined to protest, but stops with a wince as he moves his leg again; evidently it’s not *completely* healed, and even his absurd pain tolerance has its limits. Nonetheless, he does not agree to be confined to bed and fed gruel like an invalid, and heave himself up, the too-short nightshirt hiking up his muscled thighs and nearly giving Lucy a look at something she would rather not see. Not that she would find it unattractive, but really, the opposite. She is trying with all her might to mind her manners and maintain the boundary he asked – the kiss was an emotional, spur-of-the-moment, enchantment thing, she can’t count on him wanting to do it again – and she does not need to be taunted like this.

After considerable effort on both of their parts, they get washed and dressed, which almost feels familiar from their room-sharing in Oxford, and head downstairs. Rufus and Jiya are awake, talking cautiously with the landlady, who has cooked an enormous breakfast since it’s the off-season for trade and they are the only guests in the boarding house. “What about your friend, in cellar?” she asks, spooning more eggs onto Rufus’s plate even as he protests that he couldn’t eat another bite. “I bring him also some food? Bacon, sausage?”

“I – yeah, I think he’d probably like some meat,” Rufus says, visibly chewing his cheek. He’s been reluctantly persuaded that Wyatt is safe to be around after he’s been removed from the Raven King’s magic and taken a large dose of medicine, but he also has the look of a man who spent the night jumping at small noises. “Whatever large carnivores eat.”

“We could ask him to come up here,” Lucy says. Wyatt probably feels enough like a dirty animal, tied up and stuffed in the cellar and shunned, brought down scraps from the kitchen table, and while she doesn’t know if it would help, it certainly can’t hurt. “He – it’s all right, you know, he’s not… it’s controllable.”

Rufus, who has had a far too eventful time since his crash-landing in Westworld, gives her the fish-eye. “Lucy, I know I’m new around here, but it feels like rule number one would be don’t get too cozy with the – “ At that moment, he notices the landlady listening avidly, remembers that they haven’t told her what’s up with their extra tenant, and waves his hand. “You know.”

“I’ll see if he wants to come up,” Lucy repeats stubbornly, ignoring the communal wince. She gets up, goes to the cellar door, and after calling down reveals that Wyatt is awake (“was he howling at the moon?” Rufus asks behind her), asks if he wants to join them for breakfast. It takes a while, as evidently Wyatt is no more eager to be around them than Rufus is to have him, but he finally appears, pale and haggard-looking. He glances around at the tense expressions of everyone at the table, then sits carefully at the end. Rufus watches him like a hawk.

“Hey,” Wyatt says, once the silence has gotten excruciating. “I’m – sorry about – you know. The other night.” He glances at Flynn in particular, since the goose egg on his head is still quite purple,
as is the corresponding eye. “Did you have to hit me so hard, though?”

“Did you have to keep a secret like that?” Flynn arches a cutting eyebrow back at him. “You’re lucky I only hit you. If I’d had the right gun with me, I would have shot you.”

Lucy doesn’t really feel that this is getting everyone off on the team-spirited foot that she had hoped for, and clears her throat, trying to break apart Wyatt and Flynn’s staring contest. “We can all agree that nobody was expecting it. So – ”

“Yeah,” Rufus says. “You know, like the Spanish Inquisition. Also a noted bad thing.”

Lucy gives him a look, and Jiya giggles, even as Flynn, the only person at the table who doesn’t get the joke, stares at them like they’re crazy. Even Wyatt has to snort. Once he has been served by the landlady, and she has stepped out of the dining room with some of the dirty dishes, he says, “I just – I thought I could keep it under wraps until I found a way to get rid of it. Yeah, I didn’t tell you, I’m sorry. But do you think anyone would want to help me, or even be seen around me, if I’m like, cool story bro, I’m a werewolf? I asked someone what happened to them. They said they either went insane, got shot by hunters, or did horrible things and turned into scary stories. Funnily enough, none of those options sounded that great.”

“When did it happen?” Flynn asks, ruthlessly practical as ever. “How long has it been?”

“About ten months after I got here.” Wyatt rubs his face. “I was looking into some supposed associate of yours in Romania, I got lost in a thunderstorm, and had to bunk up in some ruined castle. Next thing I know, it’s a fuckin’ horror movie in there, and I…” He trails off. “I don’t remember most of it. I had to visit some crazy old witch and she told me what happened. That I had to get my hands on some special kind of medicine, or it was, you know. What went down the other night. That’s why I kept working for Rittenhouse. I needed the money for it.”

“You stayed in a ruined castle in Romania? At night, in a thunderstorm?” Flynn looks absolutely incredulous, as if Wyatt could not have more eagerly jumped up and down in front of the universe begging it to turn him into a werewolf if he tried. “You couldn’t pay me to do that. All of them are under Dracul’s curse. Some more than others, but everybody knows that.”

“Yeah, well,” Wyatt says, with a very sharp edge. “I’m not from here, am I? I didn’t know that.”

Flynn shakes his head, half in horror at Wyatt’s professional incompetence and half in grudging acknowledgement that he was terribly briefed for this job and it’s not his fault that he was dropped into a magical, dangerous world without so much as a memo. At that, however, Rufus looks up sharply. “Wait. So you – Flynn, you’re up to speed on the whole… thing? About where we’re from, and – all that?”

Flynn shoots an odd, oblique glance at Lucy before he says, “Yes. I’m aware that all of you are from a neighboring reality and have arrived here by different means and methods. I assume the question of how to get you home will be sorted out later.”

“There’s something called the Mothership,” Wyatt says. “It’s how I got here. Rufus said back in St. Petersburg that he knew how to drive it, if we could steal it.”

“It’s the only way we’re all getting out of here,” Rufus says. “The Lifeboat was only modified for one, and it’s back in New York anyway. The Mothership can take six. Plus, we’d leave Rittenhouse without a time machine, which kind of seems like an important strategic move.”

“But Emma could find the Lifeboat, if we left it here in Westworld,” Jiya points out. “She wouldn’t turn a hair in leaving everyone behind to use it for herself. We’d have to find it and
destroy it, or remotely detonate it, or have someone go back in it separately. Maybe you or me, in case something went wrong.”

Lucy looks away. All this talk of how they’re getting home is, of course, very important, but it makes something odd and unhappy squirm like cold lead in her stomach, and she doesn’t even know why. She’s been here a while, maybe it’s natural that she’s ambivalent about leaving. She’s met Ada and the Sokolovs and other people she likes a lot, she’s had her time at Oxford, she’s even managed to enjoy herself between the kidnappings and monster attacks and other events that have consistently occupied her time since she got here. She reminds herself that she wants the Internet and jeans and modern life again, trashy television, proper medicine, not getting side-eyed by misogynists in monocles and top hats every time she dares to venture out of doors alone. (There is plenty to be said about the modern world still being misogynist, but at least not so overtly.) Her time in Westworld has been very interesting, but there’s no reason she can’t go, no reason that she’d feel some sort of inexorable gravity pulling her back, when her life, her existence, her friends, are all in her birth reality. When she can’t give that up for a man who doesn’t want to, who is still in love with his dead wife and devoted to –

Rittenhouse is in her birth reality. Her childhood, her entire life, the Cahills and the youth groups and Noah and the brainwashing. Her mother telling a ten-year-old that she was a princess, Henry Wallace’s face, I’m not your real father, Lucy – a week later, he was in the coffin, pale and stiff with formaldehyde, she wonders now if Rittenhouse killed him, had a hit put out to punish him for spilling the beans, anything that might lead her from her true destiny as –

Lucy can feel the breakfast threatening to come back up, and swallows heavily, bracing her hands on the table. Rufus and Jiya glance at her, concerned. “Lucy?” Rufus says. “Lucy, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine.” She manages a very forced smile, still feeling a little sick. “We really need to find out what Rittenhouse is doing here. What’s the plan?”

It turns out that frankly, they don’t have much of one, but they try to thrash out a few particulars nonetheless. Of their four Russian speakers, two (the Sokolovs) are in the hospital and one (Flynn) can’t walk. As before, that leaves Karl, so if anyone is going to ask questions and pick up rumors, it has to be him. Rufus is, unfortunately, conspicuous as a black man in nineteenth-century far-north Russia, so he’s going to draw a lot of attention if he walks around town. He is also very leery about being paired up with Wyatt, though Wyatt, as a private bounty hunter and ex-soldier, is pretty good at investigative work. “Look,” he says at last, sounding frustrated. “I can’t help that I’m a damn werewolf, but if we run into the Raven King’s magic and I start transforming again, just run really fast in the opposite direction. Otherwise, I have the medicine, it shouldn’t be a problem. I want to get out of here too, so… allies for now, all right?”

Rufus continues to eye him suspiciously, as if to say it’s always idiot white people that die in a horror movie, because their black friends are smart and know not to fuck with things that will kill them. Finally, however, he says, “Okay. So what, pee on the fire hydrant as a warning if you feel it coming on?”

Wyatt gives him a death stare, and Rufus raises his hands. “I only want to make sure we’re clear here. I’ve never worked with a werewolf before, I’m just trying to establish the rules. If we determine that I don’t taste like kibble, then –”

Wyatt growls, sounding not-unlike his lupine self, and Rufus jumps, apparently deciding to can it with the dog references for now. There’s another awkward silence, and then they clear their throat and rise to their feet at the same time, jostling the table. Lucy and Jiya get up as well, as if sensing that interference may possibly be needed on any number of fronts, and go to get wrapped up, since they’ll be the other half of the recon team. As they’re pulling on coats, fur hats, and mufflers, Jiya says quietly, “So, what exactly is it with you and Flynn?”
“What?” Lucy was under the impression that she was managing to be generally circumspect about looking at him (or not looking at him) during breakfast. “What about Flynn?”

Jiya gives her a look. They haven’t exactly had girl talk about anything in a long time, especially not boyfriends, since there hasn’t been anyone in Lucy’s life remotely fitting that description. But Jiya and Rufus know Lucy well, and Rufus might have filled her in on some of the things that he observed while recovering in the warehouse. At last Jiya says, “You were more determined than I’ve ever seen you to get him back, and I’ve seen you be determined about a lot of things. You were stuck to him like glue that entire night on the train. And now you’re looking at him, like – well – ”

“Like what?” Lucy’s voice sounds briefly high and unnatural to her ears, and she tries to modulate it. “How exactly do you think I’m looking at him?”

“Like you…” Jiya looks as if she can’t decide whether to say this out loud, when she has a feeling Lucy already knows damn well what she’s going to say and is being deliberately obtuse. “Like you’re completely gone over him, and have no idea what to do about it.”

That, Lucy is forced to grimly admit, is an unfortunately accurate précis of her present situation. Even so, she feels some instinctive need to modify it, to push back on it, to make it sound somehow less consuming and terrifying than it is. “It’s not that,” she says quickly. “Not exactly. I just – all right, I guess I have a little bit of a crush on him. It’s been a long time, and he – he understands me. But it’s not – ”

“Crush, huh?” Jiya winds a long knitted scarf around her neck, pulls her dark braid out, and ties it. “So that’s what you do for all your crushes? Come on, Lucy. Is that why you were sitting there looking like you were being boiled alive when we were talking about how to get home?”

“I wasn’t,” Lucy says weakly. “Of course I want to go home with you.”

Jiya eyes her for a moment longer, then shrugs, pulls on her mittens, and steps to the door. “Well then,” she says. “We’re not going to have much daylight, we shouldn’t waste it.”

Grateful for the abrupt change of subject, Lucy follows her out, winces as the full blast of the cold hits her in the face like a fist, and can feel it even through her multiple layers of heavy clothing. She and Jiya trundle through the several inches of fresh spindrift, glancing back to make sure they know where the boarding house is, as Wyatt and Rufus emerge on their heels and they split in opposite directions down the street. Lucy swings by the gang’s accommodation to chivvy Karl off his ass and out into the cold, which he does with a deeply resentful look at her, and then tries to guess where Rittenhouse might have been expecting to stash Flynn. Not that they can storm it with just her and Jiya, and the last thing they need is another Sibley’s-office fiasco, but they have to start somewhere.

The day remains a low, chilly shade of blue as Lucy and Jiya search through the warehouses on the waterfront and some of the outbuildings around the railway station. The port is locked in with ice, an eerie white carapace spreading out to the horizon, and all the ships are in dry-dock to avoid being crushed, making Lucy think of Shackleton and the Endurance. That, of course, was at the literally polar opposite side of the earth, but it has the same wild winter ferocity, the sense of a place only incidentally lived upon by humans, where the might of nature could rise up and flick these insects off its back at any time. The tip of her nose has gone numb, she hopes she doesn’t get frostbite, and while it’s not as cold here as the interior of Siberia, at Yakutsk or some other place where you can throw boiling water out the window and it freezes instantly, it’s more than damn cold enough, and Lucy is feeling cramped and sluggish. “This is pointless,” she says, breath gusting in white billows. “Rittenhouse has some other safe house. They’re not – ”
At that moment, they’re cut off by the crunch of footsteps from just around the corner, and Lucy throws out her arm, pushing Jiya back against the wall, as she draws her gun with the other. It’s too cold to run automatons regularly around here, since their joints and gears would freeze up, which means that the approaching entity is likely human. It could just be a confused merchant or whatever, but as the man appears, face just visible under a fur hat, Lucy recognizes one of the thugs who was with Emma in Mr. Li’s opium den, back in London. They stare at each other, it hits in the same moment, and then he goes for his gun.

He’s fast, but he has to get it out from under several layers, and Lucy, who has hers already out and ready for action, is faster. She nails him right in the kneecap, and he goes down with a crash, spraying snow. He’s still fumbling, trying to get his gun one-handed, so she strides over and kicks it away, spinning the chamber of the revolver and pointing the barrel dead at his head. “I wouldn’t.”

“What the h – ” The Rittenhouse goon grabs at his bad leg, groaning with pain. “What the hell are you doing here, you crazy bitch? You’re supposed to be in England!”

“Yeah, well, doesn’t look like I am, am I?” Lucy is tempted to shoot him again for the crazy bitch part, but she is savagely enjoying having the drop on Rittenhouse for once, and she needs a lot of answers. Not that she thinks this one will provide them without acute persuasion, and she isn’t someone who will torture a suspect into talking, but there are other ways. “Sorry to mess up Emma’s evil plans. And you were here, what, to get the sacrificial altar ready? Kill a few black cockerels first?”

“I don’t know what Emma’s doing.” The goon tries to find something, to no avail, to wrap around his shattered knee. “Just go and – ”

“I think you do.” Lucy keeps the gun trained on him. “Why are you in Arkhangelsk? Is Emma supposed to join you here? What did you have planned for Flynn?”

“Go to hell, I’m not – ”

At that, again, something very weird happens. There’s a shift in the air, a faint smell like wet earth and starlight (she didn’t know that starlight had a smell, but it does), and then another man steps into sight from behind the brick wall. He is handsome, black-haired, and very pale, almost the same color as the milky sky, and is wearing a long black fur coat. His brows are thick, his strong nose reminiscent of a raven’s beak, and it might be Lucy’s imagination, but he doesn’t seem to leave footprints in the snow. Despite the cold, he isn’t wearing a hat or gloves, and comes to a stalking halt in front of the whimpering Rittenhouse agent. “You. Thomas Brent?”

Both the agent – Thomas Brent, apparently – and Lucy gape at him. He’s spoken in English, but with a strong Slavic accent, and with a conscious cadence as if thinking hard about it. Something about his voice makes you want to kneel down in front of him, and Lucy finds her legs starting to bend unconsciously, before she stops. Jiya shoots a look at her in complete bafflement, and Lucy shakes her head, mouthing, I have no idea. The mysterious black-haired, black-dressed newcomer stares down at Brent, who winces for seemingly more reasons than his smashed knee. Then the man says, “I recognize you. You were the one that the woman sent to search the dark places in Slavonia. You were searching for my books.”

Brent stares blankly at him, drop-jawed, as a sudden realization hits Lucy. This is probably a very bad idea, but she can’t help it. Shocked, she blurts out, “Matija Korvin?”

“You know of me.” He turns his head, cocking it as a bird does to look at her, as the full force of his uncanny eyes train on her. They are just as black as the rest of him, with no visible pupil or iris. “I know you as well, Lucy Preston. Perhaps you are surprised to see me here, in this mortal
ken, in a form that can be perceived by your eyes. I have been less obvious until this moment.”

“You helped us the other night, on the train,” Lucy says. “With the ravens destroying the tockers, and – and making the locomotive move. Thank you.”

Matija Korvin seems amused that she thinks he wants her gratitude. The edges of his form blur slightly when she looks at him directly, as she remembers Flynn telling her that they believe the Raven King never really died, only took up a throne in Faerie instead, and now lives forever beyond the gates of the human world. Sometimes he still returns to wander his old domains, and to assist those who call upon him, but he must always go back. “I know this man,” he says, turning that stare back on Brent, who now looks thoroughly unnerved. “His mistress wants my library. She has many plans for it, apparently. Is that so, creature?”

“Y – yes?” Thomas Brent might not be great at making life choices, judging by his employment as Rittenhouse bruiser, but even he is smart enough not to lie to a terrifying fell being. “Look, man, I don’t know anything about this magic shit, I just do what Emma tells me. I knew there were some books she wanted me to find, some raven guy, but – ”

“Silence.” Matija does not raise his voice, exactly, but it’s distant and rumbling and inexorable as a thunderstorm, and Brent shudders. “Do not profane yourself by speaking of what your filthy tongue and your rodent brain cannot begin to comprehend. You greedy, vicious, short-sighted mortal, ruled by your baser impulses like the rest of them. I should kill you, Thomas Brent, since the lady is too gracious to do it. But I suspect first that she has some questions. Is that not what I interrupted you in, Lucy Preston?”

“Ah – yes, you did.” Lucy does want Brent to talk, but she is also oddly wary of getting too close to Korvin himself. The air feels still colder around him, and she has that brief sense of the forest, as if the revenant is drawing close again. Lucy isn’t sure what the protocol here is exactly. Finally she says, “So, we were on the subject of what you were doing here in Arkhangelsk.”

“I don’t – ” Brent’s gaze flickers fearfully between her and Korvin. “My leg, I can’t – ”

Korvin utters an exasperated noise and waves his hand, and Brent howls as the shattered pieces of bone snap back into place with an audible, wet pop. “There,” the Raven King says. “You humans and your much-troubled legs. I was unaware that the leg had any bearing on the ability of the mouth to speak. Now answer her, or I will break it again, and others.”

“We – ” Brent licks his lips, breathing fast and shallow. “There’s something here called the Angel’s Gate. Emma sent me to find it. It’s the place where we can establish a permanent passage back to our world, once we have enough aether, and once we worked out how to stabilize the singularity. She thought it and the rest would be in the library, that’s why she wants it. That way, we wouldn’t have to risk taking the Mothership back and forth every time, and with the railway in operation, we’d have a constant pipeline for. . .” He hesitates. “For magic.”

“Oh?” Lucy recalls what Anton told her, the legend of Arkhangelsk standing on the spot where the Devil was defeated, and her thought that there might be some kind of shield wall between the branches of the multiverse. Apparently, that is essentially it, but this is where Rittenhouse intends to permanently jam that door open, to drain away this world’s magic into ours. “So that is what you wanted Flynn for? The sacrifice to open the gate?”

“Emma doesn’t know how to open it for sure.” Brent has turned almost as pale as Korvin himself, though Lucy can’t tell why. Maybe shock, or cold, or something else. “I was supposed to help figure that out. She said that most of this old kind of magic would take a human sacrifice, and Flynn’s a pain in the ass. Once we finally got him, yeah, I was gonna see if killing him would finally do something useful for us and – ”
Lucy stares down at him. She is aware of her blood beating in her ears, rushing in her head, in a way that almost frightens her – not least because she wants to pull out her gun and finish Brent off on the spot, interrogation or no interrogation. It is briefly all she has space for inside her, the knowledge that this man would have killed Flynn as part of some attempted black-magic ritual for Rittenhouse’s ultimate power if he got the chance, and it takes her a very long moment to recover herself. At last she says, “Where is Angel’s Gate?”

Brent hesitates. Korvin clicks his fingers. Something snaps in Brent’s leg with a crunching sound, and he gags. “Ah! Dammit! Solovetsky, dammit! Solovetsky Monastery! On the island! About a hundred and fifty miles west of here, in the White Sea! I was trying to figure out how to get there with everything frozen up, so – ”

Lucy is dimly familiar with that name from somewhere. She thinks Solovetsky might have been the prototype for the gulag system; it was a place of exile for the enemies of the tsars beforehand, as well as religious objectors to Russian orthodoxy, and many writers were imprisoned there after the Russian Revolution. The monastery has a spirited history of independence and idiosyncrasy, and in this reality, the monks must also be magicians, the guardians of untold mystical secrets, including a gateway between worlds. However, as Brent says, getting a hundred and fifty miles out into the frozen White Sea at this time of year is not a walk in Hyde Park. Lucy thinks briefly, and wildly optimistically, that this logistical difficulty might also stymie Emma, but that would be extremely foolish to assume. She’ll probably ice skate out there if she has to.

“Anything else?” Lucy asks. “Anything else at all?”

“No.” Brent gulps. “No, come on, that’s all I know. I swear, I swear. Come on, just – ”

Lucy eyes him coolly and pitilessly, unmoved by his pleading. Nobody stirs, until Korvin clicks his fingers again. Brent convulses, as fine black cracks spread up his face, like a piece of porcelain dropped on the floor. Then he smashes like glass, and a flock of ravens come soaring out of him, screeching and cawing, as his body crumbles to dust. In an instant more, there’s nothing but a heap of grey ash in the snow in front of Korvin, who bends over and regards it dispassionately. Then he straightens up and turns to Lucy. “My apologies for that mess,” he says, with grave, old-fashioned courtesy. “But it was a maggot, not a man. He should have known better than to be discourteous to you.”

“Ah – thanks?” Lucy was prepared to kill Brent herself for a moment there, but it’s still slightly disconcerting to see him literally dusted. “Your – Your Highness, this has been very informative, but maybe we should – ”

“Why do you hasten away?” Korvin has the air of an immortal to whom time is only a vague and mildly irritating concept, like the distant buzzing of a fly. “There is more that we could speak of, Lucy Preston. You are an impressive woman, and clearly most powerful. For a human,” he adds, as if she shouldn’t go getting too carried away. “Yet you grieve. You wear heartbreak like a shadow on your brow. Why is this?”

“I – ” Lucy isn’t sure if the goddamn Raven King just asked about the dismal state of her love life, but that was what it sounded like. “It’s nothing. I’m fine.”

“Is it a man who turns you the color of woe?” She has to admit that he has an unusual, poetic way with words, though that probably comes from being a very well-read, four-hundred-year-old magician. “You should wear a crown of roses, not of thorns. I could fashion you one, like so.”

With that, Matija holds out his palm, and a delicate silver tiara materializes in, bedecked with fine, tiny pearls and a diamond as clear as cut ice. Lucy has an urge to put it on, as reflexive as the insistence to kneel earlier, which startles her. She is aware, however, that that would be a bad idea,
and if she did so, it would be very difficult to take it off again. She is aware that she is being enchanted, and it is a strange, dissociating, giddy feeling. “It’s beautiful,” she says, having to work harder for words than usual, “but no, no thank you.”

“Is it the warmth of human flesh you wish?” Matija raises a hand, as if to set it alongside her cheek, but not quite, and she can feel the chill radiating off it. “Yes, I forget. I could make it so for you. My last wife died many years ago. I was quite fond of her and did what I could, but she never took to Faerie, not entirely. You, though. I think you would. You would be a dread and lovely queen, and no man would ever mistreat you there, or speak you ill, or give you anything less than what you deserved. Certainly not this one who seems so ignorant of what he has, so determined to stubbornly spurn you, as Garcia Flynn. He owes me a debt, you know. I have recently been to remind him of it. Shall I ask for you as my payment?”

“What?” Lucy has been struggling to stay awake, as her eyelids are starting to feel heavy and she can hear the distant, unaccountable sound of bells. That, however, jolts her back to consciousness. “What do you mean, your payment?”

“I have done great magic for him.” At close range, Korvin’s eyes are matte black, with no reflection or light in their depths at all. “He owes me something of equal value in return. Those are the laws. Those have always been the laws. I think it would be an arrangement not to the dissatisfaction of either of us. Shall I ask for you?”

“I . . .” Lucy’s head is still fuddled with the scent and weight of magic, like heavy incense, but at that, she manages to shake it. “I – no. No, thank you. That’s very generous, but no.”

Korvin does not answer for a long moment, looking her up and down. She has the sense he is not used to being refused, which indeed probably doesn’t happen when you’re a demi-god prayed to for centuries by your people, their patron saint and their legendary hero. Nor does he seem very pleased by it. “Neither of you can break the laws,” he says. “You would be most unwise to try. You would be a most powerful Raven Queen, Lucy Preston. It is a great destiny I offer you, a choice given to few. I will ask again soon. Perhaps you will have reconsidered. I urge you so.”

With that, with no further ado or pyrotechnics or movement whatsoever, he isn’t there anymore. Lucy feels as if she’s had a bucket of cold water dumped on her head (in this already-too-damn-cold place), staggers, and blinks very hard. She glances around, sees that she is still standing in the rundown warehouse, and she takes a few anxious steps. “Jiya? Jiya!”

In a few more moments, she finds Jiya, who seems strangely unclear on what has just happened or where exactly Lucy was. She can vaguely recall that there was someone else there, and that she saw him, but can’t put it exactly to words. “Was it – did we just meet some sort of major Westworld cryptid? Is that what happened?”

“In a few more moments, she finds Jiya, who seems strangely unclear on what has just happened or where exactly Lucy was. She can vaguely recall that there was someone else there, and that she saw him, but can’t put it exactly to words. “Was it – did we just meet some sort of major Westworld cryptid? Is that what happened?”

“Honestly, I think that’s probably the best way to put it.” Lucy rubs at her eyes again, trying to chase off the remaining haze. “Did you hear the part about Angel’s Gate?”

“I . . . think so?” Jiya frowns. “It was . . . somewhere?”

“Solovetsky,” Lucy says. “Solovetsky Island. That’s where Rittenhouse wants to go, that’s where they want to set up their permanent wormhole and magic supply route to our world. Emma doesn’t know how to open it – yet – but she’s probably not far off. That’s what Flynn was for, a test human sacrifice. We need to figure out how to get there.”

Jiya frowns at her. “Where did you learn all that?”

“From the Rittenhouse agent,” Lucy says, which is true enough. “You were there, do you not
“It’s just really fuzzy,” Jiya says. “Who was that man in black? Was there a man in black?”

“That was the Raven King.” Lucy debates how much to explain. It occurs to her too late that she didn’t ask him about the revenant, about how to free Amy, while they were face-to-face, and yet she can’t help but feel that that information would definitely not have come for free. “He’s a famous magician, kind of a big deal around here. I found out a little about him, but Flynn told me more. You don’t think I still have any of his magic on me, do you? The last thing we need is to go back and set Wyatt off again.”

“I guess not?” Jiya says, in a tone of voice indicating that this is way past anything that even she understands. Almost any kind of science or math, she can get, but magic was never on the curriculum at Caltech. “Lucy, you’re feeling okay, right?”

“I’m fine.” Lucy is surprised by the question, since Jiya is the one who doesn’t seem to remember anything that just happened right in front of her. “Look, at least we have something to report, and it’s still freezing. Let’s go back.”

They trudge through the frozen snow to the main promenade, as Lucy looks out at the ice sheet of the White Sea and tries to think how they are ever going to get to Solovetsky Island. She has definitely been put off the idea of calling on the Raven King again, since what he said about the debt Flynn owes has considerably rattled her. That is definitely not something that Korvin is going to just graciously put aside and forget about, and it sounds very much as if he knows exactly what he wants to settle it. Lucy said no once, but is she going to be able to do it again? Fucking off out of reality to go be an awesome fairy queen and live forever in a magical land is not a terrible fate (you know, if the alternative was coming home to Trump, maybe she should seriously consider it). And yet, Lucy knows it’s not what she, at her deepest and most fundamental level, really wants. It’s not something she appears likely to get. But it still is.

The sun has edged very low on the horizon, even though it’s only midafternoon, by the time Lucy and Jiya, huffing and puffing with cold and exertion, plod back up the steps of the boarding house and knock to be let in. The landlady opens the door, and the air inside is almost scalding in comparison, so Lucy strips off her wraps too quickly and then feels her body complaining vehemently that it doesn’t know what temperature to be. She is somehow both shivering and sweating at the same time as she walks into the kitchen, which is a very stupid state of affairs, and stops short at the sight of Flynn sitting at the table, bent over a stack of books. “Shouldn’t you still be in bed?”

“I told you that I wasn’t staying stuck in there like some weakling.” He answers without looking up, turning the page and frowning at whatever he sees on the other side. “I haven’t been walking, like a good boy. What did you find out?”

“Several things,” Lucy says. “Apparently you were supposed to be sacrificed to see if it would open something called Angel’s Gate. Rittenhouse wants to use it to move aether into my world. It’s on Solovetsky Island, and I have no idea how to get there. And...” She hesitates. “And I met the Raven King.”

“What?” It’s only at that last one that Flynn looks up, with a rather wild expression. He pushes back his chair and jumps up, bad leg or not, as if to run toward her. “You – are you – you’re not, he didn’t – ?”

“I’m fine.” Lucy debates whether to mention the rest of it, as she herself is increasingly unsure if it happened, and it is starting to turn jumbled and unclear in her head. “He appeared while we were. . . talking to the Rittenhouse agent I caught. He helped get him to talk. That was how I found out
about Angel’s Gate. He said something about a debt you owed him.”

Flynn has an expression of total and badly managed panic on his face at that. He raises a hand as if to run it through his hair, stops, starts to say something, and likewise can’t get it out. “You didn’t . . .” He seems to be forgetting all the words he knows, in any number of languages. “Did he ask if you. . .”

Lucy wants to say that he did, but she can’t remember, and she’s a little thrown by his apparent horror, since this doesn’t seem to be where she recalls leaving things off with them. “I decided against it,” she says. “Whatever he was asking.”

This appears to do nothing for Flynn’s ambient terror level. He mutters a curse under his breath and turns away, almost losing his balance on his bad leg, and has to grab for the table to steady himself. Back to her, he says, as if needing to put it into words to see how unbelievable it sounds, “You rejected the Raven King.”

“Would you rather that I didn’t?” Lucy takes an angry step. If he’s going to tell her that he wished she did vanish into Faerie forever and never saw him again, she’s going to – she doesn’t know, but there will be a lot of slapping involved, which he is possibly fortunate to have evaded. It hasn’t felt sporting to hit him when he’s been in such decrepit shape, but still. “Did you want me to say yes? Or just – go?”

Her voice chokes on the last word, she can’t quite get it out, and she thinks just then that if he says yes, if he does say anything remotely in that vein, it will in fact break her heart, and she doesn’t know what to do with that. It’s not a crush, it’s not a passing fancy, it’s not something casual and commonplace and easily replaceable. As she stands there, staring daggers at Flynn and strongly tempted to kill him – which you’d think would be the correct moment for this realization, and yet, that is Garcia Flynn for you – Lucy feels it settle into her like the snow itself, as cold and frightening and unshakable, elemental, unbearable. Oh shit, she thinks. Oh, shit.

At last, slowly, Flynn turns around and meets her eyes. “I don’t,” he says, as if still struggling to remember how to words. “I don’t – I don’t want you to go. Lucy, how – Lucy, I don’t, I can’t – that’s not why I’m here.”

“Oh?” Lucy takes another step. They’re almost nose to nose despite the height difference. “Then why are you here?”

Flynn opens his mouth. The look on his face is hard to categorize, aside from a blend of shock, confusion, alarm, and consternation, none of which feel like a prelude to an impassioned love declaration. He raises his hand to cup her cheek, as if it’s too hard to say it aloud and he is going to struggle with all his might to demonstrate it instead. That’s not a kiss, right? It can’t be a kiss. But the look in his eyes is heartbroken and tender and more devoted than Lucy thought was possible for one human man, and she rises on her toes, opening her mouth, closing her eyes, ready, so beyond ready to give herself to him, if he will have her, and –

Just then, the kitchen door bangs, a snowy Wyatt and Rufus barge in, and Lucy and Flynn spring apart as if they’ve been electrocuted. It’s good to see that Wyatt is in fact un-wolfed, but Lucy practically wants to throttle him herself for the interruption – even as she is, ridiculously, almost relieved. If it was then, if it was real, if it was what she thought it was just then. . . she doesn’t know if her heart could bear it. She knows it, she knows it, and it’s possibly the first time in her life that she’s been absolutely sure, and she is terrified. She’s in love with Flynn. She’s in love with him. She feels sick at the idea of leaving this reality because it means leaving him and never seeing him again. That every step they get closer to beating Rittenhouse, if they can even flatter themselves that they will, means one step closer to permanent goodbye.
“Well,” Rufus says. “I’m really not sure how much use that was, because we didn’t learn anything. Aside from the fact that it’s freezing, which was obvious. Lucy?”

“Yeah?” She struggles to recollect herself. “What, Rufus?”

“Did you find anywhere about where we’re supposed to go, or do, or – or what?”

“Yes.” Lucy doesn’t know for sure what’s waiting out there in the dark, in the frozen sea, in the night and the wild, and yet. *All the woods belong to him.* She might not know *what*, but she does know *who*, and it gives her a chill beyond all sense or speech. “Solovetsky Island.”
In Which Everyone Gets Into Trouble

Darkness seems to come even sooner than usual that evening. Maybe it’s just a natural result of the ever-shortening days, but it is full dark by the end of the afternoon, the moon is waning, and the aurora borealis, shot through with aetheric gold, is a rich green-blue. It turns out that Karl has indeed asked a few questions, and learned that there is a major aether-mining outpost just north of here, where dragnets and conductor aerials and refinery towers catch the aether as it is galvanized as a byproduct of the Northern Lights, and convert it into the golden dust in which form it is normally used. It is then barreled up, neutralized, and taken to the Arkhangelsk port by a cog railway, where it is shipped on steamers or air freighters across Europe. The tsars charge an eye-watering price for the finest quality of the stuff, keep back plenty for themselves, and the rest of Europe resents them for it, but they also can’t not pay, if they want to keep up in the magic arms race. It is indeed rather like nuclear weapons; nobody uses it offensively or at least openly, but they all want to have as much as possible, in case anyone else does it first. Russia economically strong-arming its competitors in this regard is thus nothing new.

“How do you manage all this?” Lucy asks. “Is there actually a Ministry of Magic? Who is in charge of detecting unauthorized magic use, and is there any way we could report Rittenhouse to them for breaking the rules?”

Flynn lets out a mirthless laugh, as if to say he’d love to see the day when Rittenhouse actually got in trouble with the law. “There’s a Magisterium in each country,” he explains. “They’re the government body that deals with aether, investigates any legal or illegal usages, issues licenses to magicians, and sponsors research for new projects. The other half of their job is, of course, strictly secret. There’s a thriving espionage industry, they all want to know what their rivals are doing, anything new they are developing, what they are teaching in their universities, that sort of thing. They hire various people to do that for them. Pay’s not bad.”

“How’s that?” This sounds absolutely fascinating to Lucy (and to judge from their expressions, Wyatt, Rufus, and Jiya also desperately want to know if they can get a job as international magical spies, just because it sounds so cool). “Have you done that too?”

Flynn shrugs. “Couldn’t tell you if I had, could I?”

The other four exchange slightly envious looks, and Rufus lets out a sigh as if some guys get to have all the fun. “So,” he says. “Yes or no on the can-we-bust-Rittenhouse question?”

“I suppose those of us who don’t have… records could try.” Flynn looks as if he is not going to do any such foolish thing, thank you very much. “But I’d be very surprised if it worked. I’m sure Emma has taken plenty of care to cultivate the English Magisterium, and possibly others. They’re not going to listen to some nobodies running in off the street and telling them to seize their best patrons. They’d likely have been told that you were the threat, and take you instead.”

“Yeah, that’s the trick.” Rufus spoons up his beef stew. “They’re always the official ones, they’re protected with the system, and we’re the ragtag loners. So what you’re saying is, walking in and asking the official people to arrest them isn’t going to work. The institutional justice system fails us all again, shocking. So if we want to stop Rittenhouse from taking control of Angel’s Gate and thus the multiverse, our literally only option is to go out there and – do what? We don’t know how to open it, which I don’t think we want to do, or make sure it stays shut. We’re a bunch of magical ignoramuses, remember?”

“Yes, I’m aware.” Flynn drums his fingers restlessly on the table. “Your world seems very limited in that regard.”
“Since Rittenhouse is trying to turn a fire hose of magic on it, we’d better hope it stays that way,” Rufus retorts. “Even if it would be fun for a while, we’d definitely end up screwed, so yeah. Though if it turns Trump into actual Voldemort, does that mean someone would Harry him? Because that might be worth it.”

Flynn looks at him utterly blankly, and Lucy lays a hand on his arm, as if to say she’ll explain later (maybe). She can feel him go tense under her touch, however, and swiftly removes it, trying to act as if she didn’t. There’s a pause, as they all rack their brains to negligible effect. Then Jiya says, “I’m taking it that this Raven King is out as an option?”

“Yes,” Flynn, Lucy, and Wyatt say in unison, thus all agreeing on the first thing they have since they met. “He is definitely out.”

“Lucy and I met him earlier,” Jiya points out. “At least Lucy definitely did, I think so, but I can’t be sure. He got the Rittenhouse agent to tell us about Angel’s Gate, he’s supposed to be the magical hotshot. Are you sure – ”

“What if Matija Korvin wants us to open it too?” Wyatt interrupts. “What if he also sees the attraction in having access to more worlds to rule over? He might.”

Flynn gives him a strange, defensive look. It’s clear to Lucy that even if he panicked over the idea of the Raven King having approached her in person, he still – obviously – cannot separate himself overnight from the reverence and awe and adoration and fear that he holds the King in, that he grew up with and was shaped by from his earliest boyhood. “Matija Korvin is not Rittenhouse,” Flynn says, voice brittle. “He doesn’t want to take over all the realities and crush them beneath his iron fist. Besides, if he could open it, or wanted to, he would have done that already. Or if there was some magical safeguard preventing him from doing it directly, he would have found a human agent. His name was Matija the Just, it was always a trade for a trade, keeping the scales balanced. He doesn’t act or ask unless acted upon or asked first.”

“Yeah, okay,” Wyatt allows. “But you’re afraid of him.”

“I’d be foolish if I wasn’t, and since if he returned, you’d be the one turning into a wolf again, you should be too.” Flynn is clearly not about to bring up the Raven King asking about Lucy’s Facebook relationship status in front of the others, so she decides she won’t either. It sounds a little melodramatic, anyway. “And Korvin would kill you if he realized you were one of Dracul’s children. They’re – well, they were, Dracul’s dead, as I had to tell Lucy – mortal enemies.”

“Dracula being dead is a very good thing,” Rufus comments. “I vote he stays that way. But I’m with Jiya, I thought the Raven King was someone who had helped us out before. Why is he suddenly off-limits?”

“Because his magic isn’t given for free,” Flynn says. “If you call him and he answers, you have to pay back something in equal value to what he gave you. He’s already reminded me that I’m running a considerable account, and I’d rather avoid getting in any further. It looks as if our choice is to try to get to Angel’s Gate ourselves, and either blow it up or otherwise make it impassable for Rittenhouse. And if we do that, we need to find some way to actually get there.”

“Jiya and I still have that thing we were working on in St. Petersburg,” Rufus says. “The device to open a door from one place to another. Kind of like a mini version of the gate itself. We could mess around with that and try to get a fix on Solovetsky, so we could just portal there?”

“Bad idea,” Flynn says. “The monastery also has a large magic library, and if the monks are guarding Angel’s Gate itself, it will be well defended against any supernatural intrusion. We’ll
have to get there in one of the old-fashioned ways. There might be an ice driver, or a private airship. They have to make supply runs to the remote, outlying areas in winter, someone has to have a working vehicle. They can give it to us, or I’ll take it.”

Rufus rolls his eyes. “Yeah, I forgot. Major crime bosses don’t usually nicely ask for things.”

“Is that what you thought would work here?” Flynn shoots back. “Good manners?”

Rufus doesn’t answer, but he does throw a brief sidelong look at Lucy, as if to say, Really? This one? Lucy avoids his gaze, since she still has no idea what to do with it being this one, and is half-hoping that she’ll wake up tomorrow and realize it was all a bizarre and embarrassing mistake. She has never been in love before, not like this, and not with someone who seems so unavailable in every single way. There were the freshman-year hookups, a few short-lived boyfriends, and then Noah, handpicked to be her future husband and life partner by her family’s cult. After that, it was saving the world with Rufus and Jiya, which didn’t exactly leave any time for OKCupid. Lucy has never felt this way, this strongly and transcendently and breathlessly affected by anyone, and for it to be Flynn? Abrasive, emotionally shut-off, vengeful, violent, insanely driven Flynn, a widower and bereaved father several years older than her and chief of an organized crime ring, a man from another reality who isn’t exactly going to come home and move into the spare bedroom… not even to mention the part where a powerful immortal being seems to think that she constitutes acceptable collateral for his magical debt. Why, Lucy thinks, why did it have to be him? Why couldn’t it be someone she remotely had a chance with? To have met Flynn and fallen for him, despite all odds and better judgment to the contrary, and then just knowing that any way it ends, it’s going to suck? It’s not fair. It’s not fair.

“Lucy?” Jiya touches her elbow. “Are you okay?”

“What?” Lucy shakes herself and forces another one of those increasingly plastic-feeling smiles. “Yes. Fine. So we’re stuck shaking down the local dogsledding enthusiasts and anyone who might own one of those hot air balloons from the Golden Compass? We’ll start tomorrow.”

They finish dinner in something of an awkward silence, Flynn limps out in defiance of Lucy’s protests to visit the gang down the street and catch up on anything else they might have learned, and she goes upstairs alone. Her own leg could use some TLC, so she soaks it in a basin of warm water, twists open a tin of some pungent-smelling liniment, and rubs it into the swelling. It feels like she pulled a ligament pretty badly, and maybe snapped some cartilage, but she can hold it together with spit and masking tape for now. She keeps looking out the window. It’s dark, it feels later than it is, and Brent could have more colleagues running around Arkhangelsk. Even if it’s just a few steps down to the gang’s boarding house, should Flynn really be out there alone?

Lucy reminds herself that she’s being ridiculous, that even injured he’s better equipped to take care of himself than 99% of any world, and she was hoping that she’d suddenly wake up and get over him. She has just finished rubbing the ointment into her leg when the door rattles, a snowy Flynn hobbles in, and looks surprised to see her in her nightclothes, skirt hitched up over her knees. He instinctively averts his gaze, which Lucy feels more frustrated than flattered by, and turns his back to her as he strips off his jacket and waistcoat. “It’s damn cold out there.”

“I could have told you that.” Lucy doesn’t quite succeed in keeping the edge out of her voice. “Since it was cold when I went out, and probably is even colder after dark. I trust the gang is fine? Evidently it was very important that you went to visit them right now.”

Flynn grunts in answer, pulling off his icy shoes and grimacing at the effort. Lucy also feels like pointing out that this was to be expected, but she has abruptly lost her heart for further baited salvos. She sits there mutely on the bed instead, gooseflesh raising on her arms from the chill he has brought into the room with him; it cuts through the fine cloth of the nightgown and makes a
shiver run through her. Her hair is down, her bare leg glistening with the ointment, as she feels small and vulnerable and exposed and wounded in every way. He sits down heavily in the armchair and winces again, and they sit there vigorously avoiding each other’s eyes for another thirty seconds. Then Lucy says evenly, “So what are we doing about the Raven King?”

“I don’t… I don’t know.” Flynn bends forward as if to unwrap his bandages, thinks better of it, leans back, and stares at the ceiling instead. “I can’t fight him, obviously. He’s far stronger than me, he has powers I can’t even imagine, and there’s no way we could meet on equal ground. Besides, you’re not a thing, an object, to be handed over to pay my debt. I’m not going to do that. You make your own choices, you’re not some bartering chip for me.”

Despite everything, Lucy is touched at the fact that upon finding himself placed in a situation where he could fight another man (well, faerie king) for her, where he could puff out his chest and pose like a rival stag and get fired up about staking his big macho claim to her, Flynn has instead immediately backed out of that and reinforced her right to determine her own destiny. In fact, it once more tears at her heart that he is this way, that he refuses to consider her as anything less than the person whose opinion would matter the most. Of course, that could be because he doesn’t feel strongly enough about her to risk taking on his ancient god and ancestral hero on her behalf, but Lucy forces that slimy thought away. She is struggling to make peace with this, to accept it, and to be grateful it is less complicated. (Ha.)

“Thank you,” she says instead, after a choked moment. “But we still need to do something. I didn’t get the impression that he was thrilled with my refusal.”

Again, that look of total panic flickers over Flynn’s face, even as he rubs both hands over it in an attempt to hide it. “I have to pay him one way or the other. Those are the laws, I knew that, I always knew it. If this is my fault, if I’m the one who called him and then he came…”

“What else were you supposed to do?” Lucy realizes it’s a definite pickle now, but Flynn was in an even worse one when he implored for Korvin’s assistance, and she can’t regret the fact that it saved his life. “Let yourself be taken here and killed at Angel’s Gate?”

“No,” Flynn admits. “No, I wasn’t going to let that happen, if I could avoid it. But this is my fault, Lucy. Unless…” He trails off. “I suppose it wouldn’t be a bad life, if it was what you wanted. More than that. You’d – you’d be that same sort of legend, you’d be the Raven Queen. I just…”

“What?” Lucy knows he was going to say something earlier, before they were interrupted by Wyatt and Rufus, and she has a feeling that they might finally be dancing close to it. “What do you want, Flynn? Is there a reason he asked for me to settle the debt?”

Flynn grimaces, seemingly at a physical loss for words. Then he says, as deliberately offhand as possible, “I didn’t want you to take the offer, no. But if you did – ”

“And?” Lucy wonders if she’s being unfair, pushing him to say something first when she’s done more than her fair share of acrobatic dodges. And yet she is so tired of guessing, of groping in the dark, of thinking one thing and then another, and if anything is going to come out of this, anything at all, she’d settle for one damn straight answer. “Do you want me to stay here instead, then? With – with you?”

Something raw and agonized flickers through Flynn’s eyes at the last two words. He can’t quite get himself around an answer, looking down at his hands as if they are the most fascinating things he has seen in his life. He seems to think that if he opens his mouth, a whole flock of ravens might fly out of him too, and Lucy struggles with the overwhelming desire to just shake it out of him. How was this man ever married? He can’t talk to women to save his life. His wife must have just seen him, decided that was it and she was having this one, and took the lead in their relationship
after that. He looks like he might have an aneurysm trying to force it out.

At last, since he’s clearly decided that words are dumb and doomed to fail, Flynn gets up, limps over to her, and kneels down next to the bed, which still means that their faces are almost level. She turns to face him, heart pounding short and dry in her mouth, fluttering like a riot of butterflies in her stomach, as he looks up at her. “Lucy. You – you know that we – this. It’s not – I’m not.” He stops, screwing up his courage, as she braces herself for what he’s about to say, and doesn’t know if she can take it impassively or not. “I’m not good enough for you.”

“What?” Since she was convinced that the next words were going to be him gently letting her down about not feeling the same way, Lucy feels as if she’s had the rug pulled out from under her instead, and doesn’t know if it’s an improvement or not. “What are you talking about?”

“This. Me.” Flynn waves a hand bitterly at himself. “You deserve so much more. You deserve the kind of great, powerful, magical life that Matija Korvin could give you. You could be a real queen, you could have everyone revere your name, pray to you in the same way. Be a legend, a goddess. Next to that, what can I offer you? I’m too old, too broken, too…” He stops. “You’ve seen me. You know what I am. I’m… you deserve someone worthy of you, and I’m not.”

Lucy opens her mouth very wide, keeps it that way, and finds that absolutely nothing feels like coming out. She reaches out for his hands, which easily cover hers, and for once, for once, he doesn’t pull away from her, continuing to regard her with that intense, impassioned, painful stare. “Are you – ” Her voice is croaky. “Are you saying that if it was a choice, if I wanted – if I didn’t want Korvin’s offer – ”

“Shh.” Flynn’s voice is soft and unbearably broken. “Don’t say anything too fast.”

“It was – I can’t deny it had potential, but I don’t want to be the Raven Queen off in some wild corner of Faerie, all right? I’m just – Lucy. I’m a regular human woman, I’m a historian, I’m ordinary, I – ”

“No,” Flynn says. “No, you’re so much more than that.”

The air is fraught as they continue to look at each other, her hands still caught in his, as she can hear the ragged whisper of their breathing. His eyes shine too brightly, and he closes them hard, as if to stop any telltale tears. “Lucy – ”

To hell with it, Lucy thinks. To hell with it. She’ll repent later, if she has to. Ask forgiveness or forgetfulness, anything else to pay the price. She pulls her hands out of his, cradles his face instead, lowers her mouth to his, and kisses him.

For a long, silent, impossible moment, it remains that way, their lips resting lightly, timidly against each other’s, utterly different from their wild, ferocious union in the snow. Then Flynn lets out a sound like a sob, his hand floats up, and cups the back of her head, pulling her closer to him as his mouth opens, the grim seam of granite cracks, and he kisses her with impossible, unbearable gentleness. His other hand caresses the line of her neck, comes up under her ear, traces the shell with the thumb, as Lucy’s hands slide into his hair and hold him still closer. They turn their heads, making small, soft noises, lips browsing and musing, sharing breaths and then closing the gap to each other again, the spaces between stars. She can taste salt on his lips, and thinks he must be tasting hers as well. She can barely see through her tears.

After a moment, she shifts, leaning back and pulling him onto the bed with her, and he clambers up clumsily, on all fours above her, weight braced awkwardly on his elbows. He scoops her up with one arm and rolls them over, so he’s on his back and she’s on top of him, and he is still faintly cold, but Lucy does not care. She straddles him, knees sliding to each side of his hips as her
nightgown rides up, and the rough cloth of his trousers scrapes against her bare skin. He pulls her around so he’s propped up on the pillows and she’s in his lap, which makes the angle easier, and then takes hold of her head with both hands, cupping it as delicately as an eggshell. He closes his eyes again, as if still in holy dread, and then kisses her temple, her eyebrow, her eye, her forehead, the bridge of her nose, her other eye and eyebrow, and other temple. It is light as snowflakes, slow as time, heart-shatteringly tender, as she utters a faint whimper and he puts a finger to her mouth. Kisses his way across again: cheek, along each side of the nose, her nose itself, the other cheek, the corner of her mouth. Jaw, underside, chin, and the same again until he reaches her ear. He takes the lobe between his teeth, then kisses the spot behind it.

Lucy shudders, making a faint, desperate sound of utter and unspeakable need. She squirms, trying to get closer to him, but he won’t allow it, still holding her head and musing worshipful little kisses down each side of her neck. It occurs to her dimly that he seems to have had a lot of time to imagine what he would do with her in his arms, but she is melting too fast to keep her wits. As she is opening her mouth in some breathless plea, he finally kisses her properly again, and she practically collapses against him.

They stroke and pet and caress the other’s faces, still kissing, as Lucy slides up firmly on his hips and is left in no doubt of just how much he does in fact want her. She gulps in the back of her throat, grinding up against him, pressing his hardness between her aching legs, and he growls in return, his grip tightening on her in a delightfully possessive way. They are rearranging their positions, about to slide back down on the bed together and – she doesn’t know what, but she’s beyond ready to give herself to him, and is thinking likewise that he may let her have anything she wants – when Lucy opens her eyes, and sees the Raven King standing in the corner.

She lets out a startled little shriek, letting go of Flynn as if he’s suddenly turned red-hot, and he frowns at her, eyes hazy with pleasure and confusion. “Lucy?”

“He – ” Lucy sits upright, pointing. “Look. He’s – he’s there. Matija Korvin.”

Flynn looks right at the place where Korvin is standing, and frowns. “He is?”

“Can’t you see him?” Lucy was willing to overlook it with Jiya earlier, since there was some understandable confusion, but Korvin is standing less than six feet from Flynn, with an arched eyebrow and an amused expression on that handsome, carved face, and it would be very hard to miss him. “He’s watching us.”

Flynn looks from the corner, to her, then back to the corner, frowning. It’s clear he is not about to discount the fact that she sees something he doesn’t, and makes a move as if to put his arm in front of her. “Moj gospodaru,” he says, formally addressing what is, for him, thin air, on her word that the King is here. “You are, of course, welcome in your servants’ house. If there is something you wish, speak, and it will be offered.”

“Is there?” Matija Korvin answers. His shadow flickers of its own accord on the wall, spreading branches. “You are still my servant, Garcia Flynn, are you not?”

When it’s plain that Flynn hasn’t heard this, Lucy turns to him and whispers what Korvin said. A deep line draws itself between Flynn’s brows, and he doesn’t answer at once. Then he says, “If you wish to speak to me, moj kralj, reveal yourself. It is unfair to force Lucy in between.”

Nothing tangibly changes, to Lucy’s eye. But there is a flutter in the air, as if the stir of unseen wing beats, and by the way Flynn’s face changes, she knows that he is now seeing Korvin in his full dark glory, standing in the corner of the bedroom as regally as if it is his throne room in Faerie. His throat moves as he swallows. “Matija,” he says, gets clumsily off the bed, and kneels. “This is an unexpected visit.”
“Surely not? There is still the matter of our bargain.” Korvin offers his hand to be kissed, which Flynn wisely does. “And I come to see you are diverting yourself with the woman I have asked as my payment. You have grown up believing in me, Garcia Flynn. You have seen the places under my command, known not to transgress my images and my symbols, learned the stories and the songs. You knew there was a price when you called me. Do you now refuse to pay it?”

“Lucy is not a price.” Flynn shifts to put the bulk of his body in front of her, as if Korvin might suddenly lunge. “You can’t say you admire her strength and spirit, and then try to trap her with an enchantment. If you want a human servant, take me. It is my bargain. I should pay the price.”

“I have servants aplenty.” Korvin’s eyes remain mild, his tone unchanged, but it is cold enough in the room that the mirror is frosting over. “Including you, already. Lucy is different. The throne of the Raven Queen has long sat empty, lacking a worthy occupant. Why do you hold her back?”

“I can’t – ” Flynn searches for the words, stops, starts again. “I can’t give her to you for anything. You ask only what can be paid. Is that not so?”

“It is,” Korvin agrees. “But she is yours. You are no fool, Garcia Flynn, despite all appearances. You know when a woman belongs to you, in body and heart and soul, and with that so – ”

“No,” Flynn says. The tone in his voice gives Lucy an unfathomable chill. He is pleading, he is outright begging, trying to bargain with the Raven King not to, to please not take her away, that he can’t, he can’t, he can’t. “I lost Lorena already, I – please, please, you are the Just, not the Cruel. Matija, please, I’ll pay anything else you want. I have worshiped you. I have worshiped you. You cannot – ”

“All gods are cruel,” Matija says, almost simply. “Some more than most. I am not outstandingly so, and yet, it is not my concern what human lives you have lived, or what human losses you have taken. I wish for the woman to be my queen. Refuse me, and you break all laws of magic, all the boundaries on which the world is set. That seems, to me, the more selfish action.”

“No.” Flynn’s voice is a hoarse whisper. “Ask for something else.”

Matija Korvin regards him with depthless black eyes. He seems almost impressed, though it’s impossible to read him, that someone has dared to outright reject him, to put their foot down and simply refuse to pay his asked price. “I can ask the entire world of you,” he says. “I could ask for a tribute a year. If you do not settle with me now, you indebt yourself more than one human could possibly pay in one lifetime. When you die, you will have to serve two hundred years in my court, before it can be forgiven in full. I do not threaten you, I warn you. I did not make the laws of the old magic. Do you wish that, Garcia Flynn? It would be unwise.”

Flynn does not answer, a muscle going in his cheek. For her part, Lucy thinks Matija isn’t lying – he doesn’t really have a reason to, and he wasn’t the first magician, he just learned what was already there. But still, this is off the ranch, and suddenly, she finds her tongue. “Then the old magic isn’t fair,” she says vehemently. “It’s barbaric. How can one magical favor for one man, on one night, add up to two hundred years of servitude? There’s no way that’s an equal trade.”

“It is not malice. It is science.” Matija makes an impatient sound. “You, Lucy Preston, you have traveled through time and space and worlds, you know that it is not equal in all moments and all places. The more time passes here with the debt unpaid, the more time accumulates in Faerie, and must be recompensed in kind. That is why men these days who call themselves magicians prefer to use aether, which has no left-over consequences, no hidden catches. It is mere chemistry and parlor tricks, sane and sterile. You asked for the old magic, Garcia Flynn, and you were given it. The old magic is not so kind.”
“Yes,” Flynn says. “But –”

“I grow weary of your excuses.” The lights flicker, and Matija seems to grow still taller, head crowned with stars and scraping against the ceiling. The distant shadows of trees, pale Siberian larch, rise through the floorboards and crowd in around the bed. “They ill-become a faithful servant. You have the right to ask of me what you wish. I have the right to ask it of you in return. There are others summoning me tonight, you know. They are in St. Petersburg with your friends. I can see them even now. They are holding the old woman and the servant with guns, while the strange young woman calls into the dark for me. Pay me, or I must go to them. I do not want to, but I must. The laws of Faerie bind me too, but they will be broken. So –”

Flynn and Lucy stare at him in horror. Lucy’s briefly unsure what he means, until a terrible thought occurs to her. “Is it Brent’s mistress? The woman who wanted your library?”

Matija stares back at her with an utterly opaque expression. Then, once, he nods.

“No.” Lucy realizes suddenly what he’s saying: that Emma has arrived in St. Petersburg, has found their hideout, and is holding Ada and Woolsey hostage in order to force Priscilla to contact Matija for her. “No, you can’t tell her where to find the –”

Just then, several things happen at once. She jumps to her feet, as if preparing to run into Faerie herself to cut this off, as Flynn makes an awful sound and jumps up after her as well. Then there’s a thunderclap, a wash of dark wind, the trees rattle like fingerbones, and Matija Korvin vanishes. As in the aftermath of the revenant attack, the world rushes back down into its proper place and the roof slams on top of the walls. They lie there gasping, as Lucy realizes that Flynn is holding onto both of her forearms hard enough to bruise, and can’t quite want to tell him to let go. But as the magnitude of the problem settles over her, she tugs free, jumps up, and looks around frantically. “Matija? MATIJA! MATIJA KORVIN!”

Silence. He keeps turning up uninvited, and now he won’t come when he’s called. Typical, typical faerie. Lucy doesn’t really think she’s eager to see him again either. But if the alternative is having him materialize in St. Petersburg with Emma, and possibly telling her everything she needs to know about his lost library and Angel’s Gate and whatever else, she’s willing to take the risk. If the magical rules are broken, then Matija might not even be able to demand fair payment from Emma in return, and why he warned Flynn and Lucy that he did not want to go to her, that they had to pay now to prevent it from happening. Lucy still doesn’t want to spend an eternity in Faerie, but if the other choice is letting Rittenhouse win –

“MATIJA!” Lucy yells. “Come back. Come back, I’ll take – I’ll accept! I’ll accept the crown!”

It tears at her throat, it feels like it’s scorching her entire soul, and she doesn’t, she can’t look at Flynn as she says it, or she won’t be able to do it. But the room remains silent, still, devoid of all-powerful elder gods, and she stares at it with a growing pit of horror in her stomach. Can Emma order Matija to kill Ada and Woolsey on the spot? (To be fair, Emma could just do it herself.) Or Priscilla, or – or – ? There is no way to get back to St. Petersburg until at least tomorrow night, and they can’t leave Arkhangelsk anyway. They cannot do anything for the others. Whatever Emma is doing now, whatever she might be getting from the Raven King, they can’t stop it.

She whirls around to see Flynn looking as if he might faint, as if he might have caused this somehow, as if he should have shut up and said nothing and not tried to defy Korvin at all. “Lucy,” he says hoarsely. “Lucy, did you… if you wanted to go, I… I shouldn’t have…”

“I didn’t want to.” Lucy remains where she is. “I don’t want to. But if this is the cost – if Rittenhouse –”
Flynn closes his eyes hard, then opens them, staring bleakly at the ceiling. “This is my fault,” he says. “This is all my fault. I’m the one who brought him into this and then didn’t pay the price. There are thousands, there are bloody thousands, of stories about people who think they can cheat the faeries, and it always ends up the same way. We have to do something. We have to figure out how to get to Solovetsky now.”

With that, he rises to his feet, limps to the door, and lets himself out, shutting it behind him, as Lucy looks after him. It seems impossible to believe that just a few minutes ago, they were in each other’s arms, they were kissing, they were letting down their walls and their defenses – he let her in, she let him in, and it might have been about to be in more ways than one. He wanted her then beyond any dispute, but does he regret what he did? Is he starting to think it wasn’t worth it, now that he knows the consequences, or does he already? Nobody could have guessed that the price of refusing the Raven King would literally be the world, and yet perhaps they should have. She always knew this was doomed. She knew.

“Matija Korvin,” Lucy whispers one more time, helplessly. If he does appear, she will go with him. She doesn’t want to, but she will, if it forestalls this. “Matija Korvin.”

Nothing. She doesn’t know the prayer. The law has been broken. He isn’t coming back.

Slowly, her feet and heart and soul like lead, Lucy turns, and goes.

Nobody sleeps much for the rest of the night. Someone is sent out to fetch the gang, which arrives blinking and grouchy and confused, and a little past midnight, there’s a knock on the door and Anton and Gennady Sokolov stagger in, both still looking heavily battered, but stoutly insisting that they have heard trouble is afoot and they are not going to sit in hospital like dumb sheep. As he watches Lucy hug them, Flynn feels a lump of ice congealing in his stomach, matched only by the knife twisting in his chest. He knows, or at least is fairly sure, that it’s only friendship, but he would not have any license to complain if it wasn’t. Earlier – she was in his arms, he was kissing her, he was kissing her, and then – he should have shut his damn mouth and let Lucy go if she pleased, but in that moment, he just couldn’t –

The story is relayed, leaving out a few sensitive personal parts, and everyone is appropriately horrified to hear that Emma and Rittenhouse have gotten hold of Ada and Woolsey, and that Priscilla has been forced to contact the Raven King for them. “So what?” Wyatt says. “You didn’t pay him whatever price he asked, so he’s gonna go tell Rittenhouse how to take over the world? Excuse me if I’m missing something here, but wouldn’t it have been much easier for you guys to just, you know, do that?”

“It’s complicated.” Lucy steadfastly keeps her gaze forward when Flynn looks at her sidelong. “He didn’t ask for something, he asked for someone. Me. And I didn’t – I didn’t want to go.”

Wyatt, Rufus, and Jiya all open their mouths, then shut them in equal unison. It’s Rufus who finally says, “Raven McRaven Creeperson wanted you? Why?”

“To be the Raven Queen, evidently.” There’s a faint flush stealing up Lucy’s cheeks, but she manages to keep her tone level. “I said no, and it… escalated.”

“Great.” Wyatt blows out a frustrated breath. Of all of them, he is also not fond of Korvin, for obvious reasons. “So now we’re screwed and –”

“Don’t you dare blame Lucy.” Flynn’s voice is a growl. “This isn’t her fault.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Wyatt snaps. “It’s yours.”
Flynn starts into an enraged reply, bites his tongue hard, and decides that as much as he wants to part Wyatt’s idiot head from his shoulders, furry or otherwise, this isn’t going to help them. Finally he says, “If we assume that Emma now knows how to open Angel’s Gate, we need to get to Solovetsky and be prepared to fight her there. Does anyone have any ideas?”

“We met man in hospital,” Anton Sokolov says. “Is Pole, named Sieroszewski. Has been in Siberian exile for some time, is member of Polish socialist party. Friends of Bolsheviks, so in our network.”

“Wacław Sieroszewski?” Lucy says, looking surprised. “What’s he doing here?”

“You know him?” Anton is equally surprised. “Old friend?”

“Not exactly,” Lucy says, as Flynn imagine that this must also be someone from her reality. “But he – well, he will write several books and novels on his experiences in exile, he’s a major anthropologist and ethnographer of the Yakutian Siberian people. He’s in Arkhangelsk?”

“Yes,” Anton says. “He travels around country for his studies, he has sledge that can run on ice. Could take it out into White Sea, to Solovetskoye. We go to find him, ask to borrow sledge?”

“You think he’ll just up and loan it to you?” Flynn is skeptical. “No questions asked?”

“We are on same side,” Anton points out. “Poles do not like Russian Empire either, he is socialist, we are socialist. We can tell him it is for cause of overthrowing tyranny, yes?”

Everyone exchanges looks. They don’t have much time to quibble over any viable option, so it is quickly agreed that Anton and Gennady will hurry out and attempt to intercept the explorer before he leaves. It’s the early hours of morning by now, though sunrise is still hours away, as they sit tensely, avoiding each other’s gazes. Wyatt looks uncomfortable, as there must be enough traces of the Raven King’s magic in the house to unsettle him, even if not to force a full transformation, and Rufus keeps edging away from him. Finally, there’s a banging and thumping at the door, it opens, and the Sokolovs return with a third man, sporting an impressive handlebar mustache, round glasses, and heavy fur coat. “My name is Wacław Sieroszewski,” he says, speaking Russian with a noted Polish accent. “You wanted to borrow my sledge?”

“Yes.” Flynn rises to his feet, attempting to look cool and in command. “I assume my associates explained to you that we needed to take it out to Solovetsky Island. We can arrange to pay you for your trouble later, but it would be best to let us have it.”

Sieroszewski hesitates. “You can have it,” he says at last, “but it takes skill to pilot, and I doubt there is time to teach you. Besides, I prefer to ensure that I did get it back. I’ll drive it, but if I take out all the cargo, there is only space for five passengers. Some of you have to stay behind.”

Once Flynn translates this for the benefit of the English-speakers, there are apprehensive looks exchanged. Nobody really wants to sit here alone and worry about the others, but they also see the value in having a lookout and a first line of defense posted in Arkhangelsk. Jiya finally agrees to stay behind with Flynn’s gang, though with several askance looks as if to be sure these guys are safe. They do have to take Rufus, in case there’s weird timey-wimey stuff going on at Angel’s Gate that he needs to advise on, and Flynn, Lucy, Wyatt, and Anton vote for the other spots. Gennady gallantly volunteers to stay with Jiya to serve as her Russian interpreter and general watchdog, and Lucy assures her friend that she will be in good hands with the younger Sokolov. Gennady himself was also the more beat-up in the train crash, so it can’t hurt to keep him away (hopefully) from major action. If Emma rolls in here with Ada, Woolsey, and Priscilla in tow, they will try to rescue them. In return, they really hope everyone else will try not to die.
It is thus arranged that Flynn, Lucy, Wyatt, Rufus, and Anton start pulling on their heavy winter clothes for a very, very frosty journey, while Jiya, Gennady, Karl, and the gang start discussing their plan of defense. After terse, understated goodbyes, since nobody wants to act as if this might be the last time they see each other, they take two large flasks of tea, the remnants of last night’s supper, and as many guns as each of them can strap on. Then they tramp out after Sieroszewski (they need to find something shorter to call him) into the frigid blue stillness before the dawn.

The cold hits Flynn in the chest before they have gone a dozen paces. His splintered leg aches like the Devil’s pitchfork, and he supposes that if he is in fact going to bail out, this is his last chance to do it. But there is no likelihood whatsoever that he is letting Lucy go without him, and he stubbornly tells himself that his leg will probably go numb soon and then he won’t know the difference. The sun is a bloody streak on the edge of the eastern horizon, casting weird crimson shadows, as they make their way single file through the dark, quiet buildings of Arkhangelsk, down to where Sieroszewski’s sledge is parked by the waterfront.

Flynn’s first impression is that it looks like a large brass version of Father Christmas’s sleigh, though lower-slung and set on long runners that look like something used by the Lapps, the Sami people of the far north; they’re just over the gulf and a few hundred miles east of Finland. However, instead of being drawn by reindeer, it is powered by steam, with a small combustion chamber and a formidably complicated array of levers, knobs, treadles, and foot pumps. At that, Flynn thinks it’s a good thing that Sieroszewski volunteered to drive it, since they would likely end up crashing it before they got out of sight of the port. There is one seat for the pilot, a jump seat at the rear, and two cramped cargo compartments, as Flynn and Wyatt help heave out the sacks and barrels and crates. It’s clearly not designed to take passengers any far distance, and this is not going to be a comfortable journey, but there is no helping that.

Sieroszewski gets into the pilot seat, Anton is stationed on the jump seat with a rifle to defend against any Rittenhouse agents that might appear on their tail (or, as they get farther out on the ice, polar bears) and Wyatt and Rufus clamber into the forward cargo compartment, leaving Flynn and Lucy to squeeze into the rear. There are a few tanned reindeer pelts and shaggy bear skins, which smell distinctly gamey, but they use one to line the floor and wrap the others around themselves. When the wooden hatch is closed above, it leaves them with only a few inches above their heads, the walls pressing in to every side, and Flynn sees a shudder run through Lucy. Half apologetically, she says, “I don’t – I don’t really like small spaces.”

There are a few holes for ventilation, but Flynn doesn’t think that’s going to do much to alleviate the sensation of being trapped, and it reminds him unpleasantly of the metal cage on the train. He has to swallow hard as well, shifting his position to allow Lucy to snuggle more closely alongside him and pulling the thick bearskin over both of them. There are bumps and jolts from above, and the sledge gurgles and grumbles to life beneath them. The boiler spits for a few minutes as it warms up, there’s a grating sensation as they reverse, and then as they start to pick up steam, it smooths out. Flynn manages to look over his shoulder, peers through the slats, and sees Arkhangelsk receding on the shore behind them. They are now out on the sea, and there is no turning back.

They ride in silence for some minutes. Well, it seems inaccurate to call it silence, since the boiler is banging and hissing, the runners scrape and slide, and Sieroszewski and Anton are shouting various comments in Russian to each other, mainly about the condition of the ice and the heading of their travel. (No polar bears yet, which is obviously a good thing.) Then, since Flynn can tell from Lucy’s face and her ever-tightening death grip on his arm that she really can’t bear this much longer, he reaches up and unlatches the hatch, pushing it aside just enough to let in a blast of cold air and a sight of the fading stars. “It’s all right,” he says, gruffly, awkwardly, not knowing if it is. “Take a deep breath.”
“I’m – I’m sorry.” Lucy rubs a mitten hand over her face, still looking faintly nauseous. “I know it’s colder this way.”

“It’s all right,” Flynn says again. “It was giving me a few unhappy memories too.”

Lucy darts a glance at him, then away. She is well bundled up in a large furry hood, and the light is still low, so it’s hard to make out the expression on her face. Finally she says, “Do you think I should have gone with Korvin?”

A fist clenches around Flynn’s throat. He has no idea how to answer that without saying far more than seems safe, everything he might just blurt out like a breaking dam, and which he came far too close to spilling earlier. It tugs at his own guilt, his overwhelming sense that this is his fault somehow, and he has no ability to make it right. “No.” It is the only place he can think to start an answer. “No, that never should have been asked of you. It was my bargain. I should have paid the price, not you. But that’s the way the fae are, how their magic works, just as he said. Everyone knows you can never trust a seelie.”

Lucy gives him a sidelong look, as if to say what is just folklore in her world is a pressing concern of pragmatic conduct for his. “But Matija’s human. Or he was.”

“Yes, but he’s not now.” Flynn feels a sense almost of betrayal at speaking it, the fact that he outright defied the Raven King earlier and may yet do it again. “He’s lived in Faerie for almost four hundred years. He’s changed, he’s transcended, he has become entirely absorbed by their existence and their rules. As I said, I can’t fight him. But it was selfish of me to try to stop you from going, it was incredibly selfish, and if that’s what opens the door for Emma – ”

There’s a long pause. Then Lucy says, in a too-calm voice, “Emma has Ada. She has her prisoner, she’s using her to coerce Priscilla. If she – ”

She stops again, until Flynn almost thinks she won’t say anything else. Then Lucy continues, “Emma killed my mother. Her name was Carol. It was – it was very complicated. She was devoted to Rittenhouse, she raised me in it, she kept hoping that I’d change my mind and rejoin them even – even after Amy. Anyway, Emma got tired of being held back by it, and killed her and Noah, the man I was supposed to marry. It was in Paris. 1789. I found them in the alley.”

Flynn opens his mouth, then shuts it. He knew that Lucy had some sort of deeply personal grudge against Rittenhouse, given what she said when they were arguing over the revenant back in Oxford, but he doesn’t quite know that he saw this coming. He fights the urge to ask about this Noah, if Lucy loved him the way that Flynn himself loved Lorena, if that is the heartbreak and the loss that she is struggling to avenge and thinks can never be replaced. At last, all he can say is, “I’m sorry.”

Lucy looks at him again, eyes big and dark in the frame of her hood. Either reading his mind, or feeling an urge to vindicate herself, she says, “With Noah, it was – it was even more complicated. Rittenhouse chose us to marry each other. I didn’t – I didn’t love him. I cared about him, in a way, but I… I don’t know. He was kind, he tried to protect me, but he was still one of them, he didn’t understand why I would turn on them. Not like his loyalty saved him in the end.”

“Emma killed my family too.” Flynn stares at the far wall of the hold. “Not directly, but I know she gave the order. After I started to get suspicious of the jobs she wanted to offer me, and found out what Rittenhouse was. It was four nights later, my – my wife thought she heard our little girl cough, and got up to check on her. Then it – when I heard the floorboards creak, and I just knew something was wrong, and jumped up, grabbed my gun, and….”

He trails off. His memory of this night isn’t clear, is blasted and fragmented, but he knows that he
relived it in full when the revenant was attacking him, after he pulled it off Lucy, and he’s sometimes afraid that he’s going to consciously remember it again. “I heard Iris screaming,” he says, almost dully. “Screaming for me. You heard it at the tea party, with Priscilla. I fought to reach her, I fought so hard, but by the time I reached her, she – she wasn’t. Lorena had fallen over her, she was trying to protect her. For a split second, I thought Lorena was still alive when I saw them, and then I came closer, and I realized there was no way she could be.”

He can feel a faint shudder run through Lucy, doesn’t know if it is in sympathy for this gruesome tale or because she wishes he would stop telling her. But under the pelts and furs, he feels her grope to take his hand, and they squeeze hard, at a mutual loss for words. At last, almost clinically, he continues, “I barely got out of there alive myself. They told everyone that I did it, that I snapped, murdered my wife and daughter, and ran away for a new life as a criminal. It was to do anything I could to destroy Rittenhouse. It always was. But I’ve done terrible things, become someone else. I can’t bring that darkness into a home, into any home. If by some miracle they were saved, if I saw them again, I couldn’t be a husband and father. I’d have to walk away.”

“You what?” Lucy looks at him in confusion and distress, her grip tightening in his. “How could you fight so hard all this time, after everything we’ve been through, and just…?”

“I don’t know.” Flynn lets his head fall back with a thunk against the slats. “But I couldn’t go back. Lucy, earlier – with what happened between us. I don’t want you to think that I’d – that I’d take advantage of you, or… anything like that. I know whatever this is, it’s difficult, and I don’t… I just don’t want to hurt you any more, ever. And I’m sorry for what I’ve done that’s hurt you in the past. I had my reasons, but I did, and I’m sorry. I want you to know that.”

Lucy continues to look at him, eyes a little wet, mouth a little unsteady. “Okay,” she says at last, barely above a whisper. “Thank you.”

Flynn wants to tell her how beautiful she is, even in the low, cramped space of the cargo hold, sleepless and worn and buried in furs and blankets. He wants to tell her that he’d defy Korvin for her again, or anyone, anything at all, but knows that this might not be able to save her, or them, and he doesn’t. He shifts instead, pulling her against him, and she nestles close, burying her face in his neck. He thinks she might let out a muffled sob, but he can’t be sure. His chest aches for far more reasons than just the cold. It is not only the broken pieces of his leg that stab him.

The sledge continues to thrum on its way, as the sun comes out and transforms the frozen sea into a world of polished, dazzling glass, bright enough for Flynn to squint against the glare. The sky is cold and blue as a calved iceberg, cloudless and endless, until it feels as if they have entered an eternal hall of mirrors and there is no telling which reflection is the truth. They have to stop at midday for Sieroszewski to refill the steam chamber with melted ice, sitting in the blinding white with their eyes screwed up and gnawing at strips of the walrus jerky he keeps on hand for snacks. It is tough and very pungent, and they wash it down with shared sips from the flasks of tea. Then, since they still have another seventy-five miles to go and only a few more hours of sunlight to do it in, they pile back into the sledge, Wyatt switching out with Anton on the lookout seat, and head off again.

Flynn finds it harder to stay awake on this leg, somewhat warmer and definitely feeling the effects of last night, and Lucy nods off on his shoulder, as he wonders nervously if she should be sleeping too deeply in this cold. It’s at least lukewarm in the shared space of the hold, but he still nudges her occasionally, as she starts awake and then inexorably drifts off again. Especially as the sun starts spilling down the ice floes and the air gets distinctly colder, he wraps her tightly against him in the furs and keeps checking to be sure she’s breathing. He would rather stay awake, and keep an eye on her, rather than fall asleep and possibly endanger both of them.

Twilight is falling fast by the time Sieroszewski shouts from above, Flynn gently wakes Lucy with
a touch on her cheek, and they straighten up stiffly to see the distant silhouette of Solovetsky Island in front of them. Its eponymous monastery dates from the fifteenth century, was a stronghold of the Old Believers in the Russian wars of religion, and was shelled by the British Navy during the Crimean War; it has served as a stout frontier fortress as much as a place of learning and retreat. It is enclosed in massive stone walls, anchored by towers capped with funneled wooden turrets. Aetheric lanterns burn eerie gold on the gatehouse and the surrounds, and it contains two cathedrals in its precincts, as well as its famous library and a forest of tall onion spires, surmounted by the double-branched Orthodox cross. It is a small city in the middle of nowhere, and yet somewhere in its depths, it hides the gate to everywhere.

Sieroszewski pumps the treadles, dialing back their speed, as the sledge pulls up in the narrow inlet before the monastery. The auroras are especially bright overhead, casting a gemstone glow, and everyone is stiff and shivering. Bells sound from the dark labyrinth of the churches, breaking the stillness like hammers, as they bump up against the frozen earthen bank. Flynn jumps overboard first, grimaces as it jolts up his leg, and reaches back to help Lucy down. She stays close to him, tucked under his chin, as Wyatt, Rufus, and Anton climb off, and they all survey the not-entirely-welcoming prospect of the monastery. They can’t be sure if Emma is coming here right away, if she’s already here, if she has managed to convince or coerce Korvin into working with her, or what they are going to find inside. After all, one should not expect to stand before Angel’s Gate, and remain unchanged.

Flynn peels off a fur mitten with his teeth, since he can’t properly hold his gun with it on, and takes hold of it inside his jacket, ready to draw at a moment’s notice. With the other hand, he takes Lucy’s as she fumbles for it, and squeezes hard. They glance at each other, clearly don’t see much point in asking aloud if they are ready for this, and take a deep breath.

Sieroszewski says that he will wait in the gatehouse until midnight, or until it becomes clear that he should go, and they nod in thanks, Anton and Flynn reaching over to shake his hand. Then, one by one, as the shadows fall over them, they begin to climb.
The gate of the monastery is tall and dark, towering over everyone’s heads, and for several minutes, their knocks go completely unanswered. If this place saw off a full British Navy bombardment with no more than a few scuff marks, it is not liable to be very fussed about five ragtag rebels, and Lucy doubts there is any chance of blasting their way in if the monks don’t open the damn door. They obviously have to get in one way or the other, and she’s just wondering who they might have to send up the walls with a rope, when the lookout window cracks open a bare inch. A forbidding-sounding Russian voice says, “Da?”

Flynn and Anton start into whatever cover story they have concocted, while Wyatt, Rufus, and Lucy try not to get in the way. It takes a while, as the monk on guard is clearly not impressed by their feeble bullshittery skills, but it finally seems to be the case that they have claimed to be pilgrims visiting the shrine of St. Zosima, the founder of the monastery. It is admittedly a strange hour for them to arrive, but they are hoping they can enter and be allowed to venerate the relics. Perhaps if there is a service of Perpetual Adoration being kept in the cathedrals, they might be permitted to join in…?

This is a shrewd choice on Flynn and Anton’s part, since the monks can’t really refuse pilgrims or deny them access to holy places of prayer, and the bar rattles back and they’re admitted into the monastery precincts. Lucy visited Mont-Saint-Michel in France once, and this reminds her a little of that, with dark, winding streets leading to the church above, though Mont-Saint-Michel is much smaller and steeper (and older). This is wider and flatter, and the narrow, muddy road wanders between the various outbuildings, dormitories, refectories, and scriptoria. The monk’s lantern bobs like a will-o-the-wisp, leading the way into an unknown world, and Lucy stays very close alongside Flynn, their hands clasped together in their furry mittens. There’s a fresh patina of snow on the slanted roofs and piled up on the pathways, icicles bearding the eaves and fine traceries of frost etching the windowpanes. Feels like Arendelle, Lucy thinks absurdly. She wonders if she should break out into a stirring rendition of *Let It Go*. 

After a few minutes of chilly walking, they reach Transfiguration Cathedral, which sits at the center of the monastery complex and presides majestically over it, with whitewashed walls and golden-domed towers. They push aside the heavy door and step inside the dim foyer, which whiffs of the ubiquitous old-church scent of lacquer, incense, dust, and candle wax, and rows and rows of offerings burn beneath the gilded screens of Orthodox icons, in eerie, shimmering islands of flame. The sonorous drone of chanting echoes from the nave, and the old-wood arches rise elegantly overhead. It is a solemn and beautiful and medieval place, feeling several hundred years behind even 1887, and almost the instant they come to a halt, Lucy resumes her barnacled position against Flynn, wrapping her arms around his waist and tucking her head under his chin. He hesitates briefly, then enfolds her shoulders, pulling her against him. She has the unaccountable, unsettling sense that they might be suddenly, violently torn apart from each other at any moment, and that as long as they stay here, together, unmoving, the world will remain in balance and nothing bad can happen. It’s not true, but it feels that way.

Flynn and Anton speak to the monk for a few more moments, evidently assuring him that they can manage from here, but he steps off and returns with a salver of water, nodding at them to dip their fingers in. This is accomplished without incident, except for Wyatt. When the water touches his skin, there’s a puff of steam, he hisses, and snatches it back, red blisters starting to rise on his hand, as the monk eyes him suspiciously. “This place is guardian against magics of demons,” he says. “What are you, that you cannot touch holy water?”

Wyatt sucks his burned fingers, giving Flynn a baleful look as if he *could* have offered a heads-up
beforehand, but Flynn shrugs. “He had a too-close shave in Romania recently. Nothing stuck, but
it has made him a bit more sensitive than before. We need to speak to the hegumen, or the
archimandrite. We have not only come to venerate Zosima.”

It’s unsure how good the monk’s English is, so Flynn repeats it in Russian, while Lucy looks
around the interior of the cathedral, on guard for anything that looks like Rittenhouse. All she can
see are ordinary Russian peasants, hard-working islanders from the small village of Solovetsky
that surrounds and supports the monastery, kneeling for the evening offices and praying with
devoutly bent heads. Should she circulate, trying to see if someone is hiding beneath a heavy cap,
or would that be too much? Why would Rittenhouse bother disguising themselves, anyway?
They’d probably just storm in here and light the place up.

Behind her, Flynn and the monk are still haggling, Anton has lit a candle under one of the icons,
and Wyatt and Rufus continue to look wary (especially Wyatt). Finally, the monk – albeit slightly
annoyed at being tricked – grudgingly agrees to conduct them to the hegumen, which Lucy thinks
is the Orthodox term for abbot. They step out of the cathedral and into the labyrinth of buildings
that outlie it, covered by red-roofed cloisters. More lanterns burn along the walkway, they pass a
group of more chanting monks, and finally reach a heavy wooden door, where their guide knocks,
calls out something, and then pushes it open.

The hegumen is seated at his desk inside, poring through a stack of papers, but he looks up in
surprise at his unexpected visitors. Flynn and Anton once more take over the talking, while the
monk lurks in the corner and throws narrow looks at Wyatt. Finally he says to Lucy, apparently in
an attempt to be polite, “There is guest house for woman pilgrim. Is nearby. Can take you while
business is done with men.”

“Ah – no thank you.” Lucy isn’t going to be voluntarily separated from them under any
circumstances, and despite the long, cold journey, she’s buzzing with anxious adrenaline and
doesn’t feel very sleepy. If they do have to spend the night here, she’s not sure what the
monastery’s policy is on cohabitation – probably not very liberal, for obvious reasons – and
figures she’ll just have to tell them that she’s married to Flynn. They saw the two of them hanging
onto each other when they came in, they probably think it’s the case already. “I’ll wait.”

The monk considers, then nods. Lucy is just wondering how long this is going to take, when the
hegumen lets out a startled sound. “Ворота Ангела? Gate of the Angel? That is what you said?”

“Yes.” Flynn answers him in English, folding his arms across his chest in a way that, combined
with his height and long overcoat, makes him look even larger and more menacing than usual.
“We need to see it. Now.”

“How do you know about…?” The hegumen eyes them warily from beneath his tall black hat,
gaze flickering around the dim study as if in search of a weapon. “Who sent you?”

“We know because some very dangerous people told us where it is, and they’re undoubtedly on
their way.” Flynn takes another step, the floorboards creaking under his weight. “We know what
it is, we know it’s here. The monks of Solovetsky are its guardians and caretakers. Well, you need
to do that now. Where is it?”

The hegumen doesn’t answer, still clearly trying to frantically assess the situation and figure out
where this went wrong. “There is something wrong with you,” he says at last. “That one, he could
not touch holy water, and now –”

“Now!” Flynn slams both fists down on the hegumen’s desk, making his papers, books, and lamp
jump a foot (and, for that matter, the man himself). “You take us there, or I will show you what
we are. Trust me, the others are worse. So –”
Just then the monk, evidently feeling up for a go, has the very unwise idea to leap onto Flynn’s back, which looks like a Mazda Miata running into a concrete wall. Flynn whirls around, peels him off, and punches him just hard enough to knock him on his ass, which is admittedly a thing of beauty in its expert, instant calculation of violence. Anton gives him a very apologetic look, as roughing up clerics must also rank on his list of ungentlemanly behavior, but when he offers the monk a hand up, he doesn’t let go. “I am afraid I also insist,” he says. “Is easier for everyone.”

After a very tense moment, the hegumen finally jerks his head and gets to his feet, with a black look at everyone warning that if they turn into bats or toads when they enter the chamber, he is not to be blamed for it. He takes a ring of keys off his belt, opens a door set into the back wall of his office, and leads them through a narrow, low passage, to another door, and then another after that, reminding Lucy of a set of nesting dolls. She supposes the metaphor is apt in this case, since it is Russia, and wonders if the monks have anything more than wood and iron protecting this incredibly dangerous place. Maybe the protection is in the secrecy, or maybe they have some monks who know karate (the mental image makes her utter a brief, demented snort) or maybe there are other, unseen magical defenses. She does feel a faint sting on her skin, not painful but enough to be constantly aware of, and her hair stands up as if in the wake of static electricity, fingers sparking when she brushes the wall. It’s narrow enough that they have to walk single file, and Flynn and Anton are bent almost double. The hegumen could be leading them to the pit of crocodiles instead of the gate, or however they deal with invaders.

He’s not. The roof raises up again, the passage broadens out, and they step into a large-ish room, built of seamless dark stone that looks like polished onyx. The ceiling is arched, high enough that Lucy can’t see it, and she has a brief and unsettling impression that it does not exist. Torches line the walls, burning the strange, clear white-gold of aether, and the entire place reeks of the burnt-ozone scent that she has come to associate with magic. And yet, she can’t see anything else, any item of furniture or anything that looks remotely like a gate. The floor is totally empty, and aside from the teeth-jarring hum in her head, it’s silent.

“You are very unwise to come here,” the hegumen says, making everyone jump. “It is old place, sacred place. Strange things happen here, people are changed. Otherwheres are glimpsed like passing cloud, entire fabric of world is bent and torn. You have seen it, for whatever mad purpose you asked. Now we should go.”

“You’re welcome to.” Flynn starts forward, even as Lucy reflexively grabs his arm, not sure if he should step into the empty space alone. But nothing happens as he paces the floor back and forth, back and forth, as if trying to trigger a hidden catch or force the gate to materialize. It doesn’t. This is the way in to all the multiverses, so perhaps they should be glad that it is securely shut. “Have you shown anyone else where to find this place recently? Told them about it?”

The hegumen shakes his head. “Only brothers of monastery know. All take a vow of silence.”

“Somebody talked.” Flynn comes to a halt in the exact middle of the floor, staring the hegumen dead in the eye. “Somebody told Rittenhouse where to find it. Do you know that name?”

“I do not. Please. It is best we go.”

The hegumen is clearly getting agitated, which you can’t really blame him for with a lot of grubby interlopers poking around a secret magical gate and having already assaulted one of his monks. But just then Rufus calls, “Hey, Russian-speakers among us? I think I found something.”

Flynn and Anton glance around to see that Rufus is inspecting a tall carving on the far side of the room, a life-size bas-relief of an angel with outstretched wings, carrying a flaming sword and striking down a large serpent with a hideous, horned head. This is clearly the Archangel Michael
vs. the Devil, and it is framed by an arch of Cyrillic writing that every monster/horror/sci-fi movie in existence would tell you not to be an idiot and thus not read out loud. When the dread creature comes barging out of the crypt and starts wreaking havoc, it’s basically the epitome of “what the fuck did you think was going to happen?”, and to say the least, they need to avoid creating any more problems for themselves. The hegumen himself looks as if his best bet might be to get out of here before the eldritch hordes are unleashed. “May God have mercy on your souls. If you meddle with this, all of us could be dead by – ”

And then, there is a distant humming from outside, one that does not come from the gate or the room or anything else. A brief blue light shines through the high windows, and Lucy hears a distinctive whir and pop that she knows well, she knows very well, and yet, she hasn’t heard it in months. That was the sound of an arriving time machine. The arriving Mothership. At least she’s ninety-nine percent sure it was, and if so, if Emma just landed on the lawn and is imminently about to be storming in here –

“Give me a boost!” Lucy orders Wyatt, the nearest useful man, with a rather frantic expression. “I need to see if that – I think that was Rittenhouse!”

Everyone looks around sharply at that, and Wyatt hoists her up far enough for Lucy to get hold of the casement and pull herself up to look. The window glass is old and smoky, but it is enough to make out the sight of a large white plasteel orb on the ground outside, blue lights still glowing, as the door opens and several dark figures tramp out. One of them has to be Emma. There are also two shapes that are women, judging from their skirts – Ada and Priscilla? The rest are clearly Emma’s backup muscle. Where’s Woolsey? Did Emma shoot him to prove she wasn’t playing around? Is she intending to use Ada as the sacrifice, and Priscilla as her personal liaison with Matija? Did he – what did he – oh god. Oh God.

“It’s Rittenhouse,” Lucy says, lips going numb. “It’s Rittenhouse, they’re here, they have Ada and Priscilla with them. Emma and three henchmen. They’ll be coming in any minute, listen to me – ”

She whirls on the hegumen. “Listen to me, they will shoot anyone in their way. They will hurt anyone in the cathedral, any of the monks who try to stop them. These are the people we were warning you about, the ones who want to open the gate. If you have anything, any kind of magical defense, now is the time to use it. They cannot get in here.”

The hegumen stares back at her for a moment longer, then nods once, very stiffly. He whirls on his heel, robe flying, and runs out, the door booming shut behind him with a terribly ominous sound. Wyatt puts Lucy down, and she looks around at the men, trying not to panic. Flynn and Anton have already drawn their guns, and Rufus looks briefly blank with terror. Then he shakes himself, rubbing both hands over his face. “Is the Mothership here?” he asks. “Is that what you saw? If we could somehow get out of here and grab it, we could go home and leave Rittenhouse stranded, Emma wouldn’t have a – ”

“There’s no guarantee that she wouldn’t figure out how to open Angel’s Gate anyway, and then she could go anywhere she wanted, she wouldn’t need the Mothership!” Lucy can hear her blood thundering in her ears. It’s happening, it’s happening, they’re coming, and she does not know how to stop it. She doesn’t know if it’s worse to wait for it, or if they should rush out and try to meet it on their terms. But they can’t leave, they can’t under any circumstances risk Emma getting in here unopposed. Should they try to open the gate anyway? No. No, that’s suicide.

Lucy pauses, agonized, then steps over to take a position next to Flynn, drawing one of her own guns out of her jacket. Whatever is about to happen, she wants to be with him, and the two of them exchange a long, helpless look, fraught with words unspoken, with everything they have not gotten the time to fully make clear. Their free hands reach out and grab hold, as they continue to point their guns at the door with the other. Wyatt draws his own weapons, stepping in front of
Rufus. “I’ll keep you alive for as long as I can,” he says. “You’re the only one of us who has any shot at figuring that thing out, either way. Just don’t let me die for nothing, okay?”

“Come on.” Rufus manages the ghost of a laugh. “You’re a werewolf. No way you die that easy.”

Wyatt’s jaw clenches, but he doesn’t answer. Anton moves closest to the door, in what will be the first line of fire once Rittenhouse bursts in, and Lucy wonders if he’s going there since he’s already injured, figures that he’s the most expendable, and can at least slow down the attack for everyone else. Her heart rattles desperately in her chest, as if she is about to watch everyone she loves die in front of her. If Emma will keep her alive long enough to watch Ada sacrificed last, then subject her to whatever really horrible fate she has cooked up. Maybe hand her over to Matija, which at this point sounds far better than anything she could hope for otherwise. She could be the Raven Queen, she supposes. Live forever and find some way to –

Just then, there’s the sound of several gunshots from beyond the door, not immediately outside but not far away, and everyone goes very tense. Anton crosses himself, then raises his rifle and points it, and Lucy clutches harder onto Flynn’s hand. They can hear shouts and bangs, running footsteps, and a few whooshes and roars of uncertain provenance. The tension is unbearable, like standing on a beach and watching a tsunami rush in with no attempt to run away and take shelter, against all imaginable instinct and necessity. If this is it, if this is the end, Lucy is glad to go down fighting, and with friends. Even Rufus is here, somehow. They always figured they might well die together. At least she saw Jiya too. At least they’ll know.

There’s a split-second of silence, and then the door bursts open with a crash. Anton fires, it’s hard to tell what or who he hit, and after a brief and wild scuffle, they see that Emma is wrestling Ada in front of her as a human shield, while the other Rittenhouse goon has to fight for all he’s worth to frog-march Priscilla after them. The monks might have managed to take out the two other goons, or they could just be delayed with fighting. Emma’s hair is coming loose, tumbling in her eyes, as she snarls, “Cooperate, you old bitch, or I promise, this isn’t going to be –”

At that, she sees the party waiting for her, guns cocked and bristling, and stops short. Something that might be genuine surprise crosses her face, but it’s gone in the next instant, and her usual sardonic expression takes its place. “You know, I should have guessed that the welcome wagon was going to get here first. Fine, makes my job easier. How are you doing, Lucy? We didn’t get a chance to talk again after Oxford.”

“Shut up.” Lucy points her gun at Emma, as Emma jerks Ada in front of her to warn her not to think about it. “Shut up.”

“Lucy?” Ada has a black eye and blood running down her face from a gash on her cheek. “Lucy, dear, is that you? I’m sorry, I’m terribly sorry. We should have found a way to warn you.”

“I – we knew.” Lucy’s chest feels leaden. “Are you – Ada, are you –”

“I’m alive, for the moment.” Ada strives vainly for her usual brisk tone, but it shakes. “I’m afraid the same cannot be said for – for poor Mr. Woolsey.”

Woolsey. Lucy suspected it from the moment she saw only Ada and Priscilla come out of the Mothership, but having it confirmed twists unbearably into her chest, a reminder of yet another person that Emma has killed, just because she wanted to. It takes every ounce of her self-control not to charge screaming at Emma right there, even as she sees actual red burning behind her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she says numbly. “Ada, I’m the one who’s sorry.”

“He – he worked for me for twenty years. He was the very best butler I ever had, and dare I say, a good friend.” Ada is struggling to keep her composure. “He fought trying to protect me and Miss
Mackenzie. Afterward, we were taken out and placed in that strange conveyance and brought
here. Lucy, dear, shoot this awful woman. I don’t even care what happens to me.”

Lucy raises her gun, though she cannot fathom how she could do this, possibly kill Ada herself
even in the name of taking down Emma. She might be about to try anyway, see if she could make
the shot from this angle and in this bad light, and then looks wildly at Flynn. They obviously
cannot let Emma pass, so if it means they both do it, shoot together and then never have to know
which of them it was –

And yet, as they are on the very brink, Lucy feels a horribly familiar cold, sinking, nauseous
sensation. Catches sight of something sinuous and grey, blurred and twisted and moving too slow
and too fast at once, and has a flashback to a ghastly eyeless face and unhinging jaws, the
maelstrom of terrible memories and ash burning in her mouth. There is almost limitless prey in this
room for it, and all of a sudden, she knows why Emma brought it. Revenants can move between
worlds, after all. Liminal creatures, liminal spaces, crossing between one plane of existence and
another. If it touches Angel’s Gate, it can pass through. Cause some kind of chain reaction and
force it open, properly or otherwise. They cannot – they cannot – let it in.

“STOP IT!” Lucy can hear herself yelling crazily, as the revenant uncoils and then lunges like a
striking cobra, knocking Wyatt and Anton aside like bowling pins. If it’s Amy, if it’s Amy – she
could possibly reach it, she can possibly do something, and the situation is grave enough that
there’s no choice. She breaks into a sprint, has a moment to think that she is not going to enjoy this
in the goddamn least, and throws herself headlong at the monster.

Last time, it was the revenant who jumped her. This time, Lucy thinks grimly, oh how the turn
tables. She hits it with an impact that looks like smoke but jars through her like solid steel, and
they roll around, thrashing and kicking, as the revenant tries to wind itself around her body like a
python. It feels like when Flynn fought Wyatt as a werewolf, but the revenant is much more
insubstantial, oily and elusive, as Lucy rakes her fingernails at it, trying to get a solid hold. She can
hear screaming in her head, can see the bloody room with no trace of Amy, all the other terrible
memories that want to boil up and overtake her, but she viciously fights them down. Bullets pop
and bang over her head; it sounds like Flynn and Emma are shooting at each other. She has a
vague impression of Ada crawling on hands and knees toward Anton, who hauls her up and puts
her behind him, and Priscilla trying to tackle the Rittenhouse goon, who backhands her
ferociously into the wall. Priscilla’s head slumps in a way that means she’s unconscious (or her
neck is broken, but not now), and the goon wheels on Wyatt.

Lucy’s hands are full with the revenant, but she can see something strange happening. Wyatt’s
body contorting as if he might be about to change, and prays desperately that he can keep it back.
Unless Wyatt has learned in less than a week to control himself as a werewolf, this the last thing
they need, and while he might well kill Emma and the goon, he’d also kill everyone else. Rufus is
still flattened against the wall with the angel carving, clearly prepared to use himself to stop
anyone or anything trying to get through it, and that’s all Lucy can make out before the revenant
snaps at her, trying to devour her with its nebulous jaws. She tears at it, tasting ash again, vision
reeling. Come on – come on –

“Amy?” Lucy pants desperately, trying to recollect whatever broken, maddened fragment of her
sister might still be in there. “Amy! Amy! It’s me, it’s me! It’s me!”

This isn’t working. There’s no sense that the revenant recognizes her – or, for that matter, if it
actually is Amy. She never found out if Emma was lying about that, trying to entice Lucy into
helping her, or – well, it doesn’t really matter now. It takes Matija’s magic to disenchant a
revenant, since he originally made them, and the revenant seems to sense the presence of Wyatt,
one of Vlad Dracul’s children, the creature it was supposed to hunt. It elongates, reaching out like
a pseudopod, as Wyatt shoots at it and the bullet ricochets and almost hits Lucy. “It doesn’t work!” she manages to shout, retching ash. “You can’t kill it that way!”

Wyatt shouts back something that sounds like “I noticed!”, even as there is now enough smoke and broken stone in the room that Lucy can’t see straight. She digs her fingers into the revenant’s jaws, trying to pry them off where they have gotten latched in her shoulder, and musters up all her strength to flip them over, hitting it hard against the stone. It has more of a human shape now, its smoky, amorphous tendrils pulling in around its core and trying to protect itself. She recalls Flynn telling her that this revenant is very old and very strong, has been in one human body too long and might be interested in acquiring another, and thinks that if that’s the case, it can’t be Amy. Much as she might want it to, much as she idealistically hung her hat from the possibility, it can’t be. But Flynn also said they are drawn to people with whom they had a connection in life, unfinished business. Jesus, it can’t – it can’t be Carol?

Just as Lucy is thinking bitterly that it would in fact be exactly like her mother to reincarnate as a homicidal smoke demon from beyond the grave, to continue to hunt her down and never give her a moment’s peace, she manages to tear the revenant’s jaws off, leaving a withered grey wound in her shoulder. Several of the aetheric lanterns have smashed in the chaos, and golden motes float over the revenant, making its face ripple like a body trapped beneath frozen ice. The smoke coheres more closely to the skull, shaping into a crude simulacrum of flesh, and in that, Lucy can see that it’s not her mother. It’s not Amy, either. It’s not a woman. It’s –

She should have expected this, perhaps. Should have guessed. But she didn’t, and the shock lancing through her makes her fingers fall open. It looks more like a man, but a badly shaped, deformed, decomposing nightmare of one. The aether continues to shirr and flow over it, creating the illusion of humanity, as the revenant gets to its feet, which it now possesses. A silence falls among the gunshots and the fighting, as everyone swivels to stare.

Rufus is the only other one to recognize it instantly. Lucy hears his sharp, savage intake of breath. A muttered, “Oh my God.”

The revenant is, in fact, someone very old, with unfinished business with Lucy. Perhaps the longest-lasting unfinished business, the oldest, the original.

The revenant is David Rittenhouse.

For the most eternal moment in all the time that Lucy has ever experienced, nobody says anything. They’re flattened around the room in various stages of shock, as her eyes desperately flash to Flynn. He is still alive, though the spreading stain of blood on his arm and side show that he’s been shot at least twice. Emma is breathing hard, looks like she’s taken a hit or two as well, and nobody can immediately move to interfere as the homunculus straightens up, adjusting its glasses with an almost-human prissiness. Lucy can only stare. She and Rufus and Jiya went to 1780, the year that Rittenhouse was founded, and tracked David down. He was horrifically creepy, he had already imparted his ideas to his twelve-year-old son John, and that was before Lucy knew that he was her ancestor. Things escalated, and she herself shot Rittenhouse. Watched him die in front of her. But John had gotten away, and if she was truly to put an end to the line, she would have to chase him down and kill him, and she couldn’t.

“Lucy,” the specter says, in a cracked echo of its old voice. A twisted smile pulls up its lips. “Why, it is you. Keen of you to come here, was it not?”

Everyone exchanges confused, horrified looks. Even Emma seems taken aback by the revenant’s transformation into the founding father of her organization, though doubtless she did know it was him. Probably felt it was only fitting to use Westworld’s magic to preserve his essence and spirit, use him as a weapon of terror against their enemies, and be responsible for opening Angel’s Gate
to the ultimate victory and realization of his vision. Rufus looks stunned, Wyatt looks around wildly, and Flynn seems nightmarishly transfixed. He opens his mouth as if to ask who the hell this is, but perhaps he saw a picture somewhere in all his research, or otherwise, he just knows. His voice comes out as a hoarse rasp. “David Rittenhouse?”

“Very clever.” The ex-revenant regards him with bloody red eyes, a satisfied little smile. However creepy Rittenhouse was in life, this demonic version of him is a hundred times worse. “You must be Garcia Flynn. You have caused great difficulties for us. We will deal with you shortly. Soon I will be able to return fully to my body, not this shapeless, monstrous thing in which I am trapped. Once we open Angel’s Gate, all will be set in order.”

Flynn jerks up his gun, though it’s clear that this is going to do nothing to harm Rittenhouse in his present form, and he seems to run out of strength halfway through the movement, stopping with a hiss. Nobody says anything as Rittenhouse paces a slow, unhurried circuit across the floor, stopping in front of Anton and Ada. “This one looks like a good servant,” he says, regarding Anton critically. “The woman is too old for breeding. Does she have other uses?”

“I beg your pardon, you – ” Ada tries to get to her feet, then collapses. “I don’t know what you are, you disgusting creature, but you can ooze back down whatever miserable hole you crawled out of, and leave the rest of us alone. So – ”

Rittenhouse glances at her archly, as if to say he’s not going to the bother of killing her for now, and sweeps over to Priscilla’s unconscious form, slumped on the floor. “This one has talent. I see it. A useful tool for us, indeed. There is also the interfering Negro from before – ” half a glance at Rufus – “and some new sidekick. You smell like werewolf. We’ll dispose of you.”

Wyatt opens and shuts his mouth, even as Lucy wishes that he could in fact transform and hurt the revenant where the rest of them are powerless to do so. Not that she knows if that would work, but they are very definitely in the grasping-at-straws portion of the proceedings. Rittenhouse seems to be growing stronger the longer he stands in the aether, which swirls and flickers around him in golden currents as he draws it in, and his form is more solid and proportionate, less see-through and distorted. “And you, my dear,” he says, addressing Emma. “You have served me most loyally and bravely. You can be queen of any of the realms you wish. So long as you, of course, carry out my orders.”

For once, even Emma still seems at a loss for words, staring back at this thing as if not entirely sure if it was the right decision to unleash him on the multiverse. But that does not presage any sudden defection or change of heart on her part, and she firms her chin and nods. “Yes, my lord. You can count on me, as ever.”

“Excellent.” Rittenhouse smiles, revealing smoky teeth and a tongue that looks forked, and Lucy looks madly at the carving on the wall. If it’s supposed to keep the Devil out, it really should get started, and yet it is still dark and inert. Is that good, is it closed? Or is it –

“Oh, yes.” The demon turns on her. “And last and most important of all, how could I forget. My own bloodline, my last living heir, my princess. There is a great fate in store for you. Emma would have you dead, but I will not permit the senseless squandering of my precious flesh and blood, even if you did kill me once in your misguidance and your fear. You can live. You too can be a great ruler. You have always been the key to all of this, Lucy. We all know it.”

There is a moment of horrible silence as this has a chance to sink in. Lucy hears Flynn suck in his breath like he’s been stabbed, and when she spins around, he looks like it too. His eyes skate madly between her and the demon. “Wh – ?” He can’t quite get it out. “You’re the – ? Lucy, this monster, it’s – it’s lying.”
“No.” Lucy wants more than anything to tell him that it is, that it’s not true, but she can’t. Her chest aches in far more of a way than anything the revenant could do to her. “I – I told you Rittenhouse was my family, growing up. I’m – after my mother died, I’m… I’m the last living heir, the direct descendant. I rejected it, I rejected it long ago, I – ”

“How long?” Flynn interrupts, voice almost breaking. “How long have you known this?”

“Since – ” If there is any worse conversation to have with the man you love, in front of a roomful of your friends and mortal enemies alike, Lucy doesn’t want to know about it. “Since long before I met you. Maybe I should have told you, but I didn’t – Garcia, I didn’t want – ”

He doesn’t answer, staring at her as if he has never seen her before. Lucy wants to tell him that it doesn’t matter, that she’s still herself, that she has nothing except a distant and unavoidable genetic connection with the monstrosity standing next to her, that she has fought against it for years, and there is no chance of her suddenly being tempted back by an opportune offer of all-powerful world domination. But she knows that it does matter, that he is realizing what he has fallen for, the legacy that she unavoidably embodies, that she herself is the sole heiress and continuation of absolutely everything that he hates, that has caused him such pain and loss and grief. His mouth moves as if trying to say something, but he can’t.

“Garcia…” Lucy takes a step, as if to go to him even in full sight of everyone, but he flinches back. “Garcia, please. Please.”

He still doesn’t answer. Moves his hand up to clutch his wounded arm, blood dripping between his fingers, and backs away, as if he is no longer certain who his allies are, but that he has no doubt about his enemies. Lucy doesn’t think that includes her, not exactly, but even the thought is enough to break her heart. The silence continues, awful, impossible, towering, tremendous. Nobody seems to know what to do. Finally Emma says, “The gate, my lord. Angel’s Gate is right here. If we can open it, if you can open it, then – ”

Rufus takes a step, spreading his arms in front of it. This is a very brave but very stupid thing to do, given as he is bare-handed, David Rittenhouse is basically the Devil, and Emma, even wounded, still has a gun. Wyatt starts to move, and Rittenhouse flicks a hand at him, sending an invisible shockwave of energy slamming into him and knocking him off his feet, somersaulting across the room and crashing into the far wall. “Poor show for a werewolf,” he says, sniffing disapprovingly. “Then again, if you’ve weakened yourself with those medicines and never learned what you really were, no wonder.”

Wyatt spits blood, trying to push himself onto his knees, as Lucy feels completely paralyzed. Her instinct to go to Flynn would probably make him physically recoil from her, she can’t stand that, and she needs to think of something, anything to stop Emma and Rittenhouse from getting to that gate. It is the last, mad bargain she has, the wildest trump card, and she has no notion if it’s going to work, but so be it. The price is just what she will have to pay, make it her bargain, not Flynn’s. Then she can settle, and it can be done. “Matija Korvin.” Her chest is tight, her heart is smashed, her throat is choked, and she can barely get it out. “Matija Korvin! Matija Korvin!”

Rittenhouse snaps around, looking at her narrowly, as Emma’s head jerks up as well. “The Raven King?” she says. “You’re calling on him? He told me that the revenant could open the gate, he’s on my side now. I made Priscilla do it, I – ”

A cold wind sighs through the room, from no discernible source or origin. The shadows of ravens dance on the walls, and all at once, startling Rufus away from it, the carving of the Archangel Michael comes to life, flooding with eerie blue glow. The next instant, the stone bursts aside in a flock of screeching ravens that come pouring out and out like Hitchcock’s The Birds, and in the white-hot glare that follows, throwing brilliance across the dark stone room, a tall crowned figure
comes stalking out. He moves with slow, deliberate strides, utterly unhurried, inexorable as time or gravity, elemental as the tides. This is not the dark young man that Lucy met in Arkhangelsk, with the fur coat and the strange cold hands. This is Matija Korvin in his full and terrible splendor, King of the Night and Wild, and his eyes are depthless galaxies, his hair streaming like flames. He is at once six and ten feet tall.

There’s a choked whine from behind Lucy as Wyatt starts to be forced into the change, but Korvin flicks a hand in the same careless way, and he falls back down – unconscious, but at least not transforming posthaste into a werewolf. He will probably agree that is the better end of the deal, if he ever wakes up, and for his part, David Rittenhouse seems thrown. Then he shrugs, seems to decide that very well, this is going to take a proper fight, and winds up, unloading a blast with the full might of his considerable power.

Korvin flashes up a hand, deflecting it, and it spatters away onto the stones. Rittenhouse is made from his magic, after all, and however strong he is, Korvin is still stronger. He makes another gesture, there is a soundless flash and then a boom, and Rittenhouse spins backward, a smoking hole in his chest. It closes at once, grey smoke knitting away the wound, and he counterattacks, the competing blows meeting in midair with a sound like an earthquake. The entire ground shakes, the very world shakes. Someone, or everyone, is not walking away from this.

Head ringing, cheek bleeding from where she was caught by the pulverized stone chips, Lucy crawls toward Flynn, even as Rittenhouse and Korvin are going after each other hammer-and-tongs. If you can ignore the spectacular sorcerer’s duel between two of the most powerful fell entities of all time, all she can see is Flynn, fallen against the far wall and looking like he’s losing blood. No. No, she just saved him, she did. She knows he’s angry, she knows he feels far more betrayed than when he thought she might have set him up at Sibley’s office, but she doesn’t care, she doesn’t care. She has to get to him. She has to.

Korvin raises both hands, with a ferocious expression that makes Lucy think he very much took it personally that Rittenhouse was trying to steal his library and exploit his magic, and conjures up a whirling black ball of energy that David Rittenhouse himself has to work very hard to deflect. There are sparks and fountains of explosions going off crazily, and yet, with another heave, Lucy reaches Flynn’s side. He stares at her like he briefly thought she was going to stab him, and her broken heart can barely stand it, but she fumbles for his bloody hand, even as he won’t take hers. “Garcia,” she whispers. “Garcia, please.”

He keeps his head turned away, but she can see a shudder of unbearable pain pass over him, and not merely from his physical injuries. At last, in a grating rasp, he says, “Lucy.”

It’s not anger, exactly. It’s something deeper than that, a statement of simple fact and a soul-crushing agony all at once. She fumbles for him, putting her hand to his cheek, turning his head toward her, as he doesn’t try to stop her. He just looks back at her with the eyes of a drowned creature, utterly at the end of his rope, not sure he can summon up the wherewithal to fight it, or her, or anything. Half a heartbroken smile crosses his face, almost despite himself. He found out she’s the heir of Slytherin – sorry, Rittenhouse – less than five minutes ago, and yet he is still helplessly enchanted by her. She can’t stand it, the weight in her chest, her soul, that tilts so inexorably toward his. She loves him. She loves him more than anyone she has ever known, or ever will. She loves him until it burns.

Flynn raises his own hand as if to touch her cheek, to give in, to forgive her, and that, then, is when Lucy catches the movement out of the corner of her eye. Flynn and Emma have both told her that their grudge against the other is bitterly personal, and now, with Flynn down, weakened, wounded, and distracted by Lucy, Emma must finally see her chance. As David Rittenhouse and Matija Korvin are still dueling it out in the background, she pulls a dagger, and lunges.
“NO!” Lucy doesn’t even remember saying it as a conscious thing, more of an instinctive, all-consuming scream. She lurches to her feet and throws herself bodily, blindly in the way, both hands upraised, and feels the biting kiss of the knife scrape off them. Then there’s an odd, burning sensation in her torso – not quite pain, exactly, but with a racing, nauseous flood that means it’s about to turn into it, and badly. She can feel wetness spreading over her dress, as her face and Emma’s are very close and she can see the small freckles under Emma’s eyes. For a moment, it’s almost, and quite bizarrely, peaceful. Then it finally registers with Lucy’s brain that she’s just been stabbed, and as Emma jerks the blade out, she goes to her knees almost in slow motion. Her entire chest is on fire, and she can’t breathe.

“NO.” It’s a different voice this time, not hers, not even screaming, just a mad, futile, disbelieving denial, as she falls backwards into Flynn’s arms. He scrambles to find the wound, to put pressure on it, as if that is going to help. She can see the whites of his eyes, the realization that his worst nightmare is once more happening directly in front of them – he saw Lorena and Iris die at Emma’s orders, and now he is watching Lucy die at her hand. “Lucy,” he begs. “Lucy, no, moja ljubav, no, no, no. You’re all right, you’re fine. Lucy. Lucy!”

As Lucy dimly registers that whatever moja ljubav means – and she has a sudden feeling that she does in fact know – he was saying it to her the other morning, and not the ghost of Lorena, there’s a boom that rattles the entire room. Matija Korvin raises his hands over his head, puts them together, then throws them out. It hits David Rittenhouse full-on and explodes him into a shower of cinders, leaving an awful smell of scorched, rotten meat. Lucy squints, trying to focus, trying to see if he’s really gone, if he’s going to come back, but her vision is starting to go black and she jerks and gulps in Flynn’s arms, gasping vainly. Nobody seems able to move or speak. Even the Raven King himself seems briefly stunned. Then he looks at her. “You are hurt.”

“I…” Lucy can’t get enough breath to speak. It comes to her in a dreamy, detached way what her choice is, and despite everything, she is not ready to die yet. She is not ready to go, to give up, to give in, to be at peace, even if some other part of her sorely wants to be. “I accept,” she manages, tasting blood. “Your offer. To be. The Raven Queen.”

Despite himself, Matija Korvin looks very surprised. He regards her with those depthless eyes, takes in the way Flynn is cradling her desperately in his arms. Something flickers across his face, what must be the first hint of humanity in over four hundred years, buried very deep beneath the beautiful, remorseless fae. Then he says, “You both owe me the debt now. If it is so, if you wish it, you may both come. After all, are you not my servant, Garcia Flynn? As ever?”

“I want to go with Lucy.” Flynn’s voice is barely a whisper. “I don’t care about anything else.”

Korvin considers a moment more. Then he steps away from the smoking ashes of David Rittenhouse, sweeps toward Lucy, and lifts her out of Flynn’s arms almost gently, hoisting her with no effort or sound against his chest. He offers a hand to Flynn as well, pulls him to his feet, and then turns toward the wall with the angel carving. It is still open and glowing with white-hot light, and whatever, wherever lies beyond, it is not Solovetsky. It is not this earth, or another.

There are words that Lucy needs to say, warnings she needs to give. She needs to say goodbye to Rufus and Ada, if she is never going to see them again. She needs to tell them to kill Emma, to steal the Mothership, to stop the gate from being opened again – even if David Rittenhouse himself has been destroyed, there is doubtless another way. She needs to ask if Wyatt and Priscilla are going to be all right. She needs to tell Anton Sokolov that he has been as true and steadfast a friend as she has known in any time or place, and she hopes that he is happy. But she has no breath for any of that, or strength. The glow is brighter. Once more, she smells starlight.

Matija Korvin beckons to Flynn, and after a brief, dumbstruck moment, Flynn steps up next to the King. His eyes lock with Lucy’s, and she feels somehow better about whatever is going to happen.
next, since – as was all she asked all along – they are together, they are facing it as one. Lucy can feel a sigh of warm wind on her face. Beyond, it is not winter. Beyond, it is a midsummer night’s dream, and the moon is strong and bright.

Starlight, Lucy thinks. Starlight and strange magic. She fumbles out, finds Flynn’s hand, and their fingers twine together. She is not quite sure if she is still in her body, or if she is already becoming something else, if they both are. And so, in Matija Korvin’s arms and in his shadow, as the old world is fading, as the others are now nothing but ghosts, Lucy Preston and Garcia Flynn leave Earth, and are borne away into Faerie.
Lucy wakes slowly, rising from deep unconsciousness to filmy awareness in a way to make her think that she must have been asleep for a hundred years, and she is alone among the briars and the brambles of an overgrown, ruined castle. She lies there with her eyes closed, unable to remember how to open them, with pale light etching shadows on the inside of her eyelids. She vaguely recalls that she was stabbed, but she does not feel any pain. She’s not immediately sure where she is or how she got here, or how long it’s been. It could be a century, as she just thought, or it could have been a few moments. It could have been forever, or nothing at all.

After several more minutes, Lucy ventures to open her eyes, which takes a lot more effort than she is used to. The light falls full in her face, and she is tempted to clap them shut again straightaway. But as her sight returns, she can make some sense of her surroundings. She is lying on a huge bed, which is draped in white coverings like fine spidersilk and hung in a gauzy canopy, with tall posts of pale wood and curtains tied with gilded bands. It’s very comfortable, and she is almost engulfed in pillows covered with intricate silver embroidery. The bed is set in a large, airy room that looks medieval in its architecture, with gothic columns and fluted ogives, but the stone is twined with flowering vines that have slightly changed in color and appearance each time Lucy looks back at them. The floor opens out onto a sweeping balcony, and the windows are diamonded, letting in more of that bright, indeterminate light. She has a vague memory that it was night when she got here. She must have been out for a while.

Lucy glances around the room, which is quiet except for a faint rush and sigh like distant wind or waves. There is a silver goblet of water on the side table, a white rose, and a glass bell jar that flickers on and off with a sun-like glow. The air has a thin, fragile translucence to it like much-washed linen, and Lucy raises a hand as if to catch trailing filaments. Then she reaches down to touch her chest, finds that there is no stab wound or other injury of any sort – even her battered feet and legs have been completely restored – and she is wearing an insubstantial gown made of the same white silk as the bedclothes. It falls low on her shoulders, and swirls like clouds.

Thus far, Lucy has not seen anything to disprove the asleep-for-a-hundred-years-in-a-ruined-castle hypothesis, though this does not look like some windswept, derelict wreck in the middle of nowhere. The water has been left for her, at any rate, and the place is clean and well-kept and otherwise appealing. If she thought she might wake up in some craggy, desolate black tower under a jagged fork of lightning, that is assuredly not the case. That, or –

Wait. Why would she think that, what did she expect? She knew she was taken here by someone, someone whose color scheme and general aesthetic tended toward the dark and dramatic end of things, and this does not quite match with that. Matija, Matija Korvin. Is this is his castle, is that where she is? Is this Faerie?

Where – where is Flynn?

Lucy slides to the side of the bed and stands up a little too fast, causing a head rush. The wood of the floor is silken beneath her bare feet, and one of the vines grows a few more flowers before her eyes, which open their petals with a soft, fragrant perfume. Clothes have been laid out for her on a nearby chair, so she makes her way over to investigate. It is a deep midnight-blue dress worked under a jagged fork of lightning, that is assuredly not the case. That, or –

Wait. Why would she think that, what did she expect? She knew she was taken here by someone, someone whose color scheme and general aesthetic tended toward the dark and dramatic end of things, and this does not quite match with that. Matija, Matija Korvin. Is this is his castle, is that where she is? Is this Faerie?

Lucy stands there, trying to remember the reasons for this magical haute couture, until it finally starts to trickle back to her. Solovetsky. The monastery. Angel’s Gate. David Rittenhouse the revenant, and his fight with Korvin. Emma stabbing her, and Flynn begging her not to die.
Accepting Korvin’s offer, telling him that she would become the Raven Queen, and passing through into – well, it seems in fact and indisputable that this is Faerie. She lives here now. This must be her new home, her bedroom. There will be no going back.

Lucy rubs both hands over her face, trying to adjust to the idea. She briefly wonders if she is ever going to leave this room, if she’s been locked up in a tower like a proper fairytale princess, but there’s the open balcony, and the door doesn’t appear to have been barred. She feels physically good, at least. Better than she has in a long time, and perhaps she should introduce herself to the household, get a sense of what she’s working with here. Are she and Matija married now, or do they still have to do that? She doesn’t think that becoming a faerie queen involves a white dress and church ceremony, but they might have some other ritual to observe. And if so – is Flynn here, but she will never get to see him or talk to him, or touch him? Is adultery as much of a concern for faeries as for medieval royalty? She’s being vastly optimistic by even considering this possibility, when there are only two kisses, one of them interrupted, to go on. And yet.

Either way, Lucy would like some answers, and while the dress isn’t something to go tramping around in, there aren’t any other clothes in the room (at least that she can see) and she might as well look the part. She strips off the nightgown, wonders if there are such things as faerie underwear, and no sooner has she done so than she looks over and sees a bra and panties sitting there that she didn’t notice before. When she puts them on, they also prove to be exactly her size. That is convenient, if creepy. She hopes it’s down to magic.

She barely manages to get into the stunning blue dress without tearing it, or if she does, it is somehow intact again by the time she finishes. She feels like the cloak is a little much, but pins it on anyway. There are slippers of blue morocco (she’s glad they’re not glass) and by the time she puts them on, glances in the full-length mirror, and notices that her tangled, tousled hair has been somehow transformed into a sleek braided crown, Lucy is almost feeling up to giving this whole actual-fairytale-princess thing a whirl. She poses a little, gives the mirror her best regal face, and looks around guiltily to see if anyone noticed. Maybe she shouldn’t. David Rittenhouse was just on about her being their princess too. Is it bad if she starts to enjoy this?

Still, though. Question for later. Having thusly arrayed herself, Lucy does her best majestic sweep out of the bedroom, though she almost trips on the trailing, beaded hem. She still hasn’t seen another living creature, human or otherwise. Is this place deserted? Playing dress-up and make-believe is all well and good, but –

After a few minutes, Lucy emerges onto an outdoor terrace, glances up, and sees towers of white stone rising above her, capped in sharply pointed turrets. A banner emblazoned with a raven in flight streams in the wind from the tallest one, and from the ramparts. The surrounding countryside is green and hilly, distant blue shadows of higher peaks veiled in banks of cloud, and the air is warm and springy. She can hear water running nearby, and thick trellises of roses climb the wall. She ventures over and pokes at it experimentally, as if to see if her hand will go through it, if this is all just a pleasant illusion, painted scenery, and will melt away to reveal a grim mountaintop citadel, bristling with spikes and severed heads. It doesn’t. That’s good?

“Matija?” Lucy ventures, glancing around warily. “Matija, are you here?”

She’s sure that she’s the only one on the terrace, she doesn’t hear footsteps, but she knows in a moment that she is no longer alone. She jumps and turns around to see him standing there, watching her intently. He doesn’t look like either the handsome young man in Arkhangelsk, or the terrifying fell warrior in Solovetsky. He is middle-aged, maybe slightly older than Flynn, with long, dark, curly hair and dark eyes. The raven’s-beak nose is the same, and he retains the beauty and gravity of his faerie magic, the way your eyes are inexorably drawn to him no matter what, the way the sun seems a little less radiant when he is present. But there is more of what must have
been his human face, a few visible lines and scars, weathering and age. After all, Lucy thinks, he is almost half a millennium old.

“Good morning,” Matija says gravely, moving to take her hand and bow over it. “I did not realize you were awake. I thought you would sleep for some days yet. The transition to Faerie is often a difficult one for mortals to make.”

“Ah – thanks?” Lucy has no idea how to answer that. “So where – where are we? Exactly?”

“This is my chief residence. I have many. This one is fashioned to resemble my earthly family’s stronghold, Corvin Castle, built by my father, John Hunyadi. I can travel among my domains as I please, though it may be some time until you master the art. I have confidence, however, that you shall learn swiftly.”

*Some time until you master the art.* It hits Lucy again that this isn’t just some play-act or medieval cosplay, it isn’t a trick or a fake or a nice vacation from the headaches of Rittenhouse. This is… it. She lives here now, she’s the consort to this man (well, *man* for lack of a better word), and she is going to learn faerie magic to travel around in the span of a blink. She grips her fists in her skirt, trying to keep her smile in place. At last she says, “Where’s Garcia Flynn?”

“He is still asleep.” Matija regards her for a long moment, and she knows he can sense something else in the question. “As I said, it often takes some time.”

Lucy manages a nod. She wants to see him, she needs to see him, the one familiar thing, the one person that makes sense. At least she has some experience with her entire world literally changing overnight. First learning that she was Rittenhouse, and then when she started using the Lifeboat to travel through history and fight them, and then going to Westworld to do the same. . . by now, Faerie is just another exotic destination stamp on her multiverse passport. Matija offers his arm, and Lucy takes it, as they stroll sedately around the terrace. He asks, “Are you comfortable?”

“I…” Lucy tries to think how to answer that. On some level, yes, she is. All her accumulated hurts and bumps and damages have been smoothed away, it is a ravishingly beautiful place that seems to magically provide her with anything she needs, and it seems clear at least that she won’t be thrown in a dungeon or otherwise openly coerced. Matija seems to genuinely care whether or not she likes it, but she doesn’t know how long that will last. He wasn’t exactly into giving her a real choice before, even if she made it to save her life. He asked, he insisted, he got her. Now what?

“So am I…” she tries again. “Am I the Raven Queen now, or is there something we have to do about that?”

“You are recognized as my new consort, yes. But you have not yet been crowned, or taken up your full part in the magic of this place. As for other wifely matters…” Matija pauses, then shrugs. “We have all the time we need. We can wait until you are more used to me.”

“Thanks.” Lucy has to force it out, even though she knows that for a nobleman from the fifteenth century, who would be expected to marry as part of an opportune political arrangement, it is quite an enlightened stance to take, to not insist on consummation until you and your bride aren’t total strangers. She glances at him sidelong, trying to imagine him as a husband. He’s obviously far from hideous, and he’s powerful and mature and capable, an immortal faerie king with a beautiful castle and an endlessly magical realm. In some ways, he is the poster boy for having your shit together, even if it’s unfair because he’s in a category by himself. Maybe in time, she will indeed get used to him, she will want him. It could happen. It has to other women.

(And yet. And yet.)
They reach the end of the terrace, and a red door set in the wall. Matija touches the lock, it springs open, and he ducks under the lintel, offering his hand to help her down the step. They emerge into a high, airy hall sectioned with a chancel screen, like the ones in old cathedrals. It’s worked intricately of wooden filigree, in the shapes of men and beasts and flowers and other things, gilded and bejeweled, and the eyes of the statues seem to follow them as they move closer. The carved raven that sits atop it wears a crown, and as Matija steps up, the filigree twists away into an arch for him to pass through. He beckons to Lucy, and she follows him in.

Inside, it is a compact nave with towering columns, stained-glass windows, and two chairs on a dais at the far end. One is clearly Matija’s throne, with another crowned raven set atop it, and inlays of gold and jet and black pearl shimmer among the polished wood. The other is smaller and plainer, simple and unadorned, and Lucy feels a brief affront that she isn’t worthy of a fancy throne too. Matija sees her expression, however, and laughs. “It does not know you. Once you sit in it, it will change itself accordingly.”

“Am I supposed to do that now?” Lucy knows it will happen eventually, but this still seems rather sudden. “Let this place measure me for decoration?”

“No yet,” Matija says. “At your coronation. I only wanted you to see it for now. My subjects from across my realms will be here. There will be a splendid feast, and of course, a ball. We will dance for days.”

“I can’t really dance.” Lucy is, after all, not the most coordinated individual in the world, and having to waltz in front of thousands of faerie-creatures sounds like a nightmare. “Or does magic handle that too?”


Lucy hesitates. She is, but she remembers something from the stories about how if you eat or drink in fairyland, you’re forced to stay there for good. Then she also remembers that this doesn’t apply in her case, since she’s already taken up permanent residency, and she isn’t going to starve. “Does anyone else live here, or is it really just me? Us?”

“I told my subjects to hide themselves, and to leave you in peace, while you became used to it.” Matija leads her out of the throne room, back through the chancel screen, and down another corridor, out into the great hall. It is just as elegant and magnificent and empty, and as he leads her to the high table, Lucy can’t help glancing around in search of any other living creature anywhere. Even some weird thing with a toadstool for a head might be welcome. Matija is being very gentlemanly, and the place is lovely, but she can hear the echoes of silence to every side, like centuries of dust and solitude, and if he goes away again to whichever else of his palaces, the idea of being left totally alone here is unbearable.

“Can you… tell at least a few of them to come back?” Lucy asks, as they sit down, and Matija waves his hand to summon up a hearty plowman lunch, with fresh bread, wine, fruit, cheese, boiled eggs, and cold cuts of meat. “I’d rather have some company.”

“I will tell them to appear in shapes that will not distress you.” Matija does not eat himself, but watches her, as if to be sure that the food is to her taste. It is delicious, but it has a way of melting insubstantially in her mouth, not quite solid, and it’s disconcerting. “In the meantime, is there anything else that I can do for you, my lady?”

She’s in Faerie, Lucy thinks. She could probably ask for anything. She doesn’t know if it would be better or worse to ask for a mirror back to Westworld, or to Earth, to see if Rittenhouse has been defeated, in what state her friends have been left. Rufus and Jiya will carry on to the end, but
now that she’s once more left them behind for a strange land, and they know she isn’t coming back, what do they do with that? Are Ada and Priscilla all right, did Anton help them? Did someone kill Emma? Is Wyatt a werewolf again? She doesn’t know. She doesn’t know.

“You are sad,” Matija says. “I can confect you some amusement. I can take you to see another of my palaces, or the woods between, or the far marches. You have but to ask.”

“Thank you.” Lucy looks down at her magical lunch. “Do you know when Flynn will wake up?”

Matija shrugs. “Time does not have much meaning in Faerie. It could be weeks but seem like moments, it could be minutes but feel like days. I will bring him to you, when he rouses. He will be a good servant for us both, and I may also make him one of my soldiers. He fights well and strongly for what he believes in, and I respect that in a man.”

Lucy manages a tight little nod. She wonders if that was what Flynn thought he was signing up for, by volunteering to go with her: an eternity in Faerie as her footman and butler, forced to stand in the shadows and watch her with Matija from afar. At that, a sudden, overwhelming wave of grief for Mr. Woolsey hits her, of all the stupid, raw, inexplicable things. She pushes her plate away, and puts her face in her hands.

Matija looks startled, as it’s clearly been a very long time since he has had to deal with the vicissitudes of human emotion and crying women. He pats her arm gingerly; his touch is still cold, if not as much as before. “I will go and see to Garcia Flynn,” he says. “Stay here.”

With that, before Lucy can ask what else he thinks she’s going to do, there is that brief rush of air, and she is alone in the great hall. She sits there, throat too choked to think of eating again, though she does pick up the nearest wine goblet and take several long swallows. She catches a few darting shadows behind the tapestries that line the hall, whispers and chirps and giggles in unknown languages. Are the servants spying on her, since Matija said he would allow them to return? The fascinating human woman, the zoological curiosity, that the master has brought into the house, and means to make their queen?

Lucy is almost ready to run back to her bedroom (if she can even find it again) and throw herself dramatically on the bed, when the air shimmers again, and Matija steps out. This time, however, he isn’t alone. Flynn – still slightly dazed, wearing a green tunic and boots and looking like a very handsome and scruffy Renaissance Faire extra, but alive and present and whole – is with him. He looks around, sees Lucy, and their eyes lock for a spellbound moment. Then – and finally, finally, for the first time, the first instant since she opened her eyes here, since all of this begun – she is in his arms, he is holding her, neither of them give a single, remote damn that Matija is standing right there, and they are kissing so hard that she cannot breathe and does not care.

Flynn lifts her off her feet, they spin in a circle, and both of them are gulping back tears by the time he finally puts her down, starting into helpless, fragmentary sentences and unable to finish any of them. “Are you – ” He brushes the backs of his fingers across her cheek, thumbing her chin, as they stand there and sway with her arms still around his neck, their foreheads touching. His other hand slides down her shoulder to grip her waist, as if to be sure that she’s not about to start bleeding again. “Lucy, are you – ”

“I’m all right.” She laughs shakily. “I’m fine, I – I’m healed, I just – now I’m – ”

A look of mild horror crosses Flynn’s face at the reminder of where they are and who is watching them, and he lets go of her, stepping back quickly. But his eyes flick over her in that blue dress, sparkling like the night sky, and the unspeakable awe and adoration in that look sinks into Lucy’s bones like a hot bath. For a second, she actually thinks she can do this, she can be the all-powerful
Raven Queen and ride across the heavens in her corvid chariot, or whatever else she is supposed to do. But how, how can she be in this world without him? How can she find the strength? She might, if she has to. Most likely will. Lucy Preston is used to sacrificing absolutely everything dear to her, after all, and yet this time, there’s no greater cause to excuse it. Whatever happens with Rittenhouse from here on, it’s out of her hands, unless Rufus and Jiya try summoning her to help (and you never know, they might). This is just loss. Nothing else to it. No greater purpose. Nothing but a man that she loves desperately, and now can never have.

Lucy tries to think how best to do this. Should they make the break clean, not torment themselves with possibilities, of what-ifs? Ask Matija to banish him to some far corner of Faerie, so while she may grieve, she at least has the chance of moving on, of the pain becoming less? At last she says, “My lord. Could we have a – brief moment to talk, perhaps? Outside?”

Matija regards them thoughtfully, then nods, waving his hand. The next instant, they’re not standing in the great hall of the castle, but in the walled garden that Lucy glimpsed from the terrace. There’s a fountain that spills live butterflies with its water, and more of the huge, luminous, color-changing roses. They stand there, staring at it, and then Flynn nods awkwardly at a nearby boulder. “Should we – ?”

Lucy nods, throat suddenly too dry to speak, as they perch on it. They once more resume their stilted silence, stealing looks at each other beneath their eyelashes, until she finally blurts out, “I’m glad you’re here. I don’t know if this is what you expected, though, and if you – ”

“If what?” Flynn glances at her. “If I wanted to leave? I can’t do that. I’ve become one of Korvin’s servants, the way you’ve become his – ” He can’t seem to quite get his tongue around the word. “That was what he said. That the debt was both of ours now, and so he had claim to us each. And besides, I wouldn’t – I wasn’t going to let you go by yourself. If you wish I didn’t – ”

“No!” Lucy reaches out and grabs his hand, cradling it in both of hers. “No, I wouldn’t have – I just… I don’t know how it’s going to be for us here. If we’re going to stay ourselves, or if we’re going to change. If I’ll turn into the Raven Queen, if I’ll become a merciless faerie too, if I’ll forget you. If you’ll go away to some wild corner of this world and I’ll never – ” She stops, looking down at his hand, blinking the stinging salt in her eyes as hard as she can, and yet it begins to trail down her cheeks. “I don’t want to forget you, Garcia. I don’t want to forget anything about this. About you, or – or us.”

“Lucy.” His voice is soft and heartbroken, as he strokes his fingers under her chin, making her look up at him. His eyes are just as wet. “I never want to forget you either, moja ljubav. If this was – if this was what we had, all of it, I don’t… I’m not sorry. I just wish…” He has to take a few bracing breaths, which don’t help that much. “I wish we had more time. I wish I could have loved you properly. I wish I could have given you everything. But I can’t regret that you get to live, even if it’s not with… it’s not with me.”

“Garcia.” She has said his first name so rarely, because she has grown used to Flynn, because that’s his name too and he seems to prefer it, as well as using it as a convenient way to hold the world at arm’s length. But there seems no point in returning to it now, when they are already so far inside each other’s defenses and are holding each other as the old world burns. Lucy reaches out again to cup his face with both hands, as he wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her into his lap, and for the first and last time, they can both be utterly certain of their feelings. That they love each other quite literally more than life itself, more than all of time and space, and yet it comes at the moment when they will have to bid a permanent farewell. They have gone beyond the limits of the ordinary, beyond all laws of nature. It changes, now. It all changes. It rushes on inexorably, and it too will fade.

Lucy touches his cheek, can feel the roughness of his stubble and the wetness of his tears, presses
her nose against his, her mouth, her forehead. His big hands grip her forearms, sliding down to rest his thumbs in the joint of her elbows, then move to encircle her waist. She turns her head and opens her mouth to kiss him, tangling her hands in his hair, pressing him into her, wishing that she could burn him, and herself, like a brand. He kisses her back just as ferociously, and she thinks then that she cannot. He defied the laws of Faerie for her once, and she will defy the magic of it for him. No matter what, no matter what it takes, she will not forget. And one day, she will find him once more.

That night, once Flynn has gone and Lucy does not honestly know if she will see him again in a human lifetime, she sits on the balcony of her room and gazes out at the huge silver moon. Faerie by night is even more bewitching than Faerie by day, and the breeze blows the tears off her cheeks. They fall to the ground with soft clinks, and when Lucy looks down, she sees that they have turned to diamonds. She gathers them up and puts them in the small jewel box on the table, and notices that all the roses in the vines have turned black. Matija said that the throne would change once she sits in it. Is she going to be the queen of heartbreak and darkness? The weeping woman, the drowned Ophelia, that you call upon in the moment before you leap?

She does not want that, Lucy thinks. She does not want that. Even in the depths of her pain, she still wants something good to come of this, to use her power to help people if she can, and she does not want to poison Faerie with her grief. She has to do this. She has to try.

Lucy pauses, then takes a crown out of the box instead, the tiara that Matija fashioned for her in Arkhangelsk. She walks to the mirror and places it on her head, gazing at her reflection. She looks somber and regal and beautiful, oddly ageless, dark and lovely, and it gives her a deep, elemental shiver. “Hail the Raven Queen,” she whispers, and feels the air stir around her. Knows that those words are no longer a meaningless platitude, an empty sentence, but have begun to have form and power, should not be uttered in haste or frivolity. It is the becoming, now. It is the change and the transformation, the apotheosis. Her tears are locked in her jewelry box, safe and secret, hers alone. She will weep no more.

Lucy’s coronation is the next day. She wears the splendid robes, she stands before the throne, and looks out at her new subjects for the first time. Some are human in appearance, with the splendid, forbidding beauty of the fae, though their ears tend to point and their eyes have a glow like a cat’s. Others are less so, with shells and scales, wings and claws, horns and hooves, skin like moss or bark, or chiseled stone. Some look like the small green men or tiny pixies of old fairytales, and Lucy is sure she recognizes the creature from the Oxford covered market, the one at whose stand she decided not to eat for fear of enchantment. They all bow or curtsy or otherwise genuflect before her, and when she sits on the throne, it grows with vines, with lilies and orchids, with a quiet strength and an unshaken grief. Matija glances over with an approving expression, as they raise their hands to acknowledge the acclamation of the hall and the ravens wheel above, cawing. Queen. Queen. Queen.

It is hard to say what happens after that. Weeks pass, or days, or hours. Sometimes they go very slowly and sometimes very fast, and sometimes time does not seem to pass at all. Lucy does her best in her new role, and accompanies Matija to the far-flung outposts of his domains, for the creatures there to see their new queen. They move about the kingdom in different ways. Sometimes it is a long carriage ride on a high, lonely road, and sometimes it is stepping into a curl of smoke and emerging somewhere else. Matija is kind to her, and does not insist upon more than their formal appearances. He still seems to hope that she will eventually turn to him, to truly take him as her husband, and once or twice, she considers it. It is not the worst choice, as ever. It is not the worst fate. Perhaps she will. But not today. Not tomorrow, either. She can’t.

It is – well, there is absolutely no telling how long – since she has arrived in Faerie, when she and Matija travel to one of his castles in the mountains. It sits in the side of a valley over huge
waterfalls, an elegant airy house that reminds her of Rivendell, and the memory hits her like a kick. *Lord of the Rings.* Marathon movie sessions with Rufus and Jiya, sitting on the crappy couch in that bunker and recharging the Lifeboat between trips. Was that ever her life? Was that some other Lucy that lived it, or was it just a long dream? Is this the dream?

Oh God. It’s happening.

She is starting to forget.

Lucy is distracted at supper that night, as the seelie lord of the manor has thrown a great feast to welcome the king and queen, and as ever, there is dancing afterward. The stories have it right that faeries love to dance, and Lucy is still human enough that she can’t whirl countless nights away in immortal abandon. She takes a few turns with Matija to be polite, and then excuses herself, wandering out onto the moonlit balconies. The waterfalls thunder below her, and the spray rises into the night like phantoms. She can hear the music from inside, the violins and the flutes and the harps. It is thin and lovely and utterly alien. This isn’t—it is not her—

“Lucy?”

She jumps a foot, turning sharply, not least because almost everyone calls her my lady or Your Highness, which takes some getting used to. She has a dim memory of Carol telling her that she was a princess at the age of ten, pure-blood Rittenhouse royalty, and how excited she was at the idea. Now here she is, she has become one in a way that not even Carol could have seen coming, and yet. She cannot do anything, or answer, because all she can see is Garcia Flynn standing a few feet away. She didn’t know he was here, that this was the distant place he was sent to carry out his sentence, as a servant for this particular faerie. He still looks like himself, if gaunter and older, but all of that fades as he stares at her, and she stares back at him. They remain motionless an instant longer, and then they collide like falling stars.

Flynn grips her face in both hands, kissing her senseless, as Lucy’s beaded slippers dangle off the ground and she cannot get enough of him into her arms. He is solid, he is warm, he is human, among all these icily beautiful faeries and the cool touch of their marble fingers, and his mouth is rough and raw and devastatingly gentle all at once. She is sobbing until she can’t breathe, and she does not, she does not care about anything else. She is the Raven Queen and he is hers and she is his and somehow, impossibly, they have once more found each other, from one world to the next, over and over. It is time, it has long been more than time, and she does not fear a thing. When he puts her down at last, she catches his sleeve and whispers, “Come with me.”

He blinks, with that old look of oh-no-she-likes-me-what-do-I-do panic on his face that makes Lucy burst out into painful giggles. She lifts his hands to her mouth and kisses them, then tugs on them, and he follows her into the dark halls of the house. He seems about to suggest that they go to wherever he sleeps, whatever small and mean servant’s quarters, but Lucy is not having any of that. She takes him to the rooms prepared for her, the queen’s chambers, with the bed that rises up and grows into the ceiling, the shafts of moonlight on the floor, and shuts and bars the door. As they stand there, as they gaze at each other, he looks about to fall on his knees. At last, barely able to get it out, he whispers, “Moja kraljica.”

That, then, simply does it. Lucy takes two steps and reaches him, and the next instant, they are trying to kiss as hard and as much as possible while also tearing each other’s clothes off. She rips several buttons off his shirt as she jerks it over his head, and the gauzy silk of her dress is no match for a very determined Flynn. The shreds float to the floor around her, he gets his trousers undone so fast that it might actually be magic, and they can barely stop to look at each other, finally standing there together in nothing but their skin, because they are too blind and desperate and starving. His rough hands slide up and down on her back as he lifts her, as he kisses cheek and jaw and throat and collarbone, in the secret hollow between her breasts, and takes the nipple of
each in his mouth. He sucks consideringly, then bites, and she locks her legs around his waist. They walk backward to the bed, and fall on it in a tangle.

Lucy has never in her life needed anyone more than she needs him right now, and since it is their first time, she thinks that perhaps she should take more care about this, slow down, savor it properly. But she can’t. She can’t take the chance that they’re interrupted one more time, that they don’t get to do it, and she grabs at his hips, pulling him on top of her, as he presses hot and hard between her legs. “Please,” she breathes. It is one word, and it is every word. It is the only thing she is remotely capable of saying, a plea and a prayer. “Please.”

He searches her face, with that last bit of residual hesitation that this is not what she really wants, or that he is going to hurt her somehow. But even for him, there is no mistaking it, and he pauses, then nods once. He reaches a hand between them, stroking her silky wetness, as she shudders and moans, twisting against his fingers. Then, as if having been sure that she is ready for him, he shifts position, eases into her a little – and then, as she wraps her arms around his back and bucks up hard, as he fills her with a sweet, sharp stretch – all at once.

They lie there, breathing as if they’ve been chased by a train, though those of course do not exist in their present universe. Lucy lifts one knee to change the angle and urge him still deeper. He is pressing kisses into her mouth and shoulder and breasts with wild abandon, as she can feel the tense and coil of his muscles against her and inside her, and it is more than she feels humanely prepared to stand. He smooths her hair out of her face and kisses her again, both of them letting out short, sharp gasps at the sensation of being finally, completely joined as one. Then he tangles his hands into hers, pushes them up over her head, and thrusts into her so deeply that she loses all sense of separate bodies whatsoever.

Flynn’s breath is a low, rasping grunt in his chest as he moves, as he rolls his hips back and then forward and takes her hard and fast, over and over. Lucy pulls up her other knee, her fingernails stripe his shoulders, and they end up with him on his back and her riding him with savage, insolent thoroughness, drawing out each stroke until neither of them can stand it. It does not take much longer after that. Their backs break, they see white, and they hiss and swear the other’s name, as he collapses on her at full length and they lie there, still entangled, crying silently, as her hands pet and caress and cup his head against her chest. She spasms around him as he remains inside her, as neither of them could ever think of pulling away.

At last, Flynn slides out of her and settles next to her, gathering her against him, as she nuzzles into him and they kiss again, slow and satiated but far from satisfied. Lucy grins at him, shyly and shakily, as he kisses her nose and chin. “You are all right?” he murmurs. “You’re fine?”

“Yes.” Lucy rolls on top of him, curling up on his chest. “Yes.”

They recover their wits and their wind for a bit longer, have a drink from the water goblet on the bedside table, and then as they are both more than ready to go again, Lucy considers the various avenues for exploration. She pulls him onto his back, which takes nothing more than the lightest pressure of her palm against his stomach, and kisses her way down the length of his lean, rough-hewn body. She pays particular attention to each scar, circling it and marking it with her lips, before she slides lower, chin on his hipbone, and takes him in her mouth. Just slightly at first, a wet warm curl of her tongue around the tip, and then deeper.

Flynn jerks, swearing with considerable invention, as Lucy puts a hand on his other hip to keep him in place and continues her explorations. She slides her mouth slowly, thoroughly up him, sucks a few times quick and deep, then relinquishes him, as his stomach heaves with the force of his contained shudders. She kisses him there as well, then sits upright, crooking a finger at him. He scrambles up to face her, as she turns them around, leans back on the pillows, and guides his mouth down between her legs instead.
Lucy had a moment of imagining what his technique would be like in this department all the way back in Oxford, and she is very pleased to report that it does not disappoint. Flynn kisses her at first, nosing her folds apart, then licks and toys at her clit with light, dainty motions like a cat in cream, making her shiver and arch her back and grab his hair. She tries not to pull too much, but he is making it difficult, as he muses and breathes on her and then goes to town. Her legs sprawl to either side, his mouth is hot and wet and relentless, and once or twice, he gives her a devilish look and a flick of his eyebrows. That man knows exactly what he is doing to her, and she can’t even get up the wherewithal to be mad at him for it.

At last, when Lucy is on the brink of release, straining and starving for it, Flynn sits back, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, and pulls her onto his lap. He touches her gently and thoroughly, smoothing his palms across her shoulders, the underside of her arms, between her fingers, down her ribs, her stomach and her ass, along the planes of her thighs and the back of her knees, the line of her calves and the bone of her ankles. It’s only after that when he flips her over into the pillows again, hitches a knee up on her, and takes his time about entering her, the way neither of them could stand to do earlier. He lets her feel him slipping in bit by bit, as her mouth opens in breathless gulps and he kisses it from her lips, until they finally once more sink into union and both of them moan. “God,” he says indistinctly. “God, you feel so good.”

“Mmm.” Lucy isn’t up to being much more eloquent just now. She lifts her hips, moving to seat him more firmly, hooking her heels around the back of his legs. He moves in her, hits a sweet spot that makes her whimper, and is almost unbearably slow and detailed about each stroke rather than the wild, desperate coupling of the first time, making love to her with every soul and sinew of him. He listens to each small sound she makes, adjusts himself by minute fractions in response, as she whispers there, there, and he follows her lead. It is, in fact, akin to being worshiped, something pagan and primal, a magic even deeper and older than that of Faerie. Lucy’s head falls back, and he kisses her throat. He is heavy and solid and strong on top of her, bearing her down into the bed, though he takes some of his weight on his elbows so as not to crush her. They continue to rock and thrust, the friction warm and sweet and urgent, until they begin to lose their careful control, go faster, and then faster still.

The second climax is no less sweet than the first, even as it undoes both of them just as completely. It takes them even longer to separate, and they lie sprawled on the bed in nothing resembling a coherent direction, the sheets twisted around them and their limbs tangled like the vines. Lucy kisses his chest and rakes her teeth over his nipple, and enjoys the tremor of gooseflesh that passes down his entire body. She might torment him more, but her spine has been removed, and all she can do is wriggle closer, to be held tight and kept safe. Cherished.

They doze on and off, impossibly comfortable in the pillows and each other, as the moonlight comes and goes in wild shadows on the floor. Sometime in the wee hours, they wake and join together a third time, deep and dreamy, sweet and slow, as all Lucy wants to feel is him stiff and strong inside her, bearing her down into the bed, though she can feel the strength of his shoulders, the very making of him. Flynn moves like a man who would give anything for the morning to never come, and for them to stay here forever.

Just then, even as she’s gasping and sighing into her third orgasm, as her skin is flushed and damp and dewy and her toes clench hard, as he fingers her clit and slides himself in and out of her in a few short, deliberate shoves, Lucy decides that she is not giving this up. She is not going to walk away from here in the morning and pretend it never happened, and she is not going to deny that it did. She will straightly admit to it, if Matija asks, and nor is she in any mood to be punished for it, if that’s something that faeries do. This is hers. Flynn is hers. He is coming back to Corvin Castle with them, and that is just that. Lucy will be discreet, she will neither flaunt him nor make a spectacle nor embarrass Matija, but still. The queen wills it. So it shall be.
They sleep once more until dawn, then sit up slowly, giddy and giggly and dazed, as Lucy kisses Flynn until she feels good and ready to stop (or at least pause, because she can’t imagine ever wanting to stop). Then she informs him that she’s going to go tell Matija what she has decided, and he can come or not – provided, of course, that he does want to go back with her. If for some reason he would rather stay –

Flynn cuts her off with a hard, deep, delightfully possessive kiss, and the matter is finally settled. They get up, dress, and walk hand-in-hand, out to the veranda where Matija Korvin is watching the sun rise. At their entrance, he glances up, and does not look altogether surprised. “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” Lucy says awkwardly. There is not really a good way to tell your immortal husband (they haven’t had an actual wedding ceremony, but that seems to be understood anyway) that you have finally done the deed with your human lover and you intend on bringing him back to your marital home. “I – we need to talk.”

Matija raises an eyebrow and turns to them, as it occurs to Lucy that he obviously could not have failed to know that Flynn was here. Was this a test, a trial, but for what purpose, and what was the desired outcome? Back in St. Petersburg, Flynn told her that story about the Raven King going into Faerie and having to complete three tasks to prove his skill and worthiness to return. Before Matija came here for good, he too was a voyager, a wayfarer, who needed to find his way back to the human world. That is also how it is, in all the stories. If the lovers follow one another into Faerie, they must demonstrate their devotion, must hold fast and never let go. And with the echoes of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, there is perhaps something timeless and fittingly literary about all this. If, that is, they passed.

“Well,” Matija says. “What is it?”

“We…” Lucy hesitates, takes a firmer grip on Flynn’s hand, and straightens her back. “We’re in love, and we want to be together. I’m not leaving here without him. I’ll continue to be the Raven Queen, if that was the terms of my bargain. I won’t do anything to embarrass you. But as you said before, Garcia is mine, and I am his, and I am not walking away from that again.”

There’s a long pause. Lucy doesn’t know what sort of reaction to expect. Matija Korvin, the Raven King, Lord of Faerie, does not seem like the kind of man to make a complaisant cuckold, and he was displeased to find them together in a physical sense when he interrupted them back in Arkhangelsk. He takes that in implacably, as Flynn tenses and shifts his weight. Clearly, if Matija makes any move whatsoever to go after Lucy, he’s going to get in the way.

“Is that so?” Matija says at last. “With all this time, all the delights and blandishments of Faerie, all the magic and power, the banquets and the dances, as my queen and lady, you still choose him? That is a rare sort of bond. I do not recall its equal.”

“I – yes.” Lucy’s knees are a little watery, but she locks them, holding his gaze levelly. “You’ve been most gracious and generous. But I love Garcia. That is how it is. You’ve always known.”

Flynn squeezes her hand in silent support, as Matija mulls this over. Once more, there is a glimpse of the human man beneath the glamour of the faerie king, thoughtful and touched and sad. At last he says, “I told you that my last wife died many years ago, that she never took to Faerie. That is so. She wanted to go back to the human world, to the man she had left there, and told me – begged me – so every day. I did not listen. I thought with enough time, with enough rich gifts, with all the strength and money and magic she could wish, that she would change her mind and turn to me. Yet she did not. She did not take root. She withered, and she died, without wavering in her love for him, and her last word was his name. It was… it was cruel of me, to do that to her. It was wrong. After all, the bargain is done, the price is paid. You came to Faerie and became the
Raven Queen, and Garcia Flynn has been my servant. It would be no dishonor of the laws of magic if I was to release you from your vow. And perhaps if the law is just, but the law has no mercy, it is a bad law, and should be encouraged to pass away.”

“You –” Lucy doesn’t think she’s heard right, wonders if this is another trick or test. “You – you’d let us go? Back to the human world?”

“Yes,” Matija says. “Which world, you could choose. I can open a door to anywhere, anywhen. You could return to your home reality, if that was what you wish. You could take him with you. I think you have indeed suffered enough, apart from each other, and there should be an end.”

“I –” Lucy’s throat is briefly too thick to answer. She considers the idea of going home, to modern Earth, to the year 2017 (or whatever it is by now). She could take Flynn to yet another new world, where he would again follow her, and teach him the ropes. They could most likely have a good life there, especially if Rufus and Jiya made it back from Westworld in the Mothership. Rittenhouse might be defeated, or weakened. It’s possible. And yet.

As she stands there, Lucy can see something else in her mind’s eye, waiting just beyond the horizon. She can see the golden glow of Oxford’s magical spires, and blowing leaves on the cobbled streets, and the faces of her students at Somerville, fascinated and horrified at once. She can see Anton and Gennady Sokolov, and Ada Lovelace, and Priscilla Mackenzie, and the hustle and bustle of a London just that bit different, that unknown and static strange. She can see Flynn’s entire world, and his lost family, and his past. She can see the steam from the trains pulling into Paddington, and taste the soot and the embers and the rain.

Lucy says, “I want to go back to the place we came from.”

Flynn glances at her in surprise and disbelief, knowing what the other option is. “Lucy,” he says. “Lucy, wait. You could go home. You could go back to your world. This is your chance.”

“I know.” Lucy looks at him, and her heart shakes in her chest. She came to his world, he followed her to this one, and now all she wants is to do the same. She doesn’t want to go back to her own world, not particularly. Not without him, not without everyone. “I – I know. But we need to go back to Solovetsky, on the night we left, and we need to make sure it’s done. We need to stop Emma, and we need to make sure that Rittenhouse can’t open Angel’s Gate. With Rufus and Jiya and Wyatt and Ada and Priscilla and. . . and everyone. We need to go back.”

Flynn takes that in, then nods. “If you’re sure,” he says. “I’m with you.”

Lucy looks at him and loves him, loves him so ferociously that she feels it like an inferno, and then she turns to Matija. There is one last question she needs to ask him, ever since she learned it was his magic that made revenants, and thought there was any chance. There’s not, of course. The revenant was David Rittenhouse, and her sister is lost, and yet. “Do you know what happened to Amy? Where she went? Where she. . . is?”

She doesn’t think she’ll have to explain who Amy is, and indeed, she doesn’t. Matija considers her, then says, “Rittenhouse used the revenant to snatch her away, from space and from time. Yet it is ultimately from my power, and all the empty places, all the distant roads, lead back to Faerie eventually. I could go searching for her, in the remote marches where no human feet can tread. If I do find her, and she is in any state to know herself, I will bring her back to you.”

Lucy opens her mouth, finds nothing to answer to that. Then – surprising both of them – she steps forward and hugs him. To say the least, this is not something that one normally does to imposing faerie kings, and he goes tense, as if she’s trying to attack him (however foolish that would obviously be). Then he hugs her back as if it has been several hundred years and he doesn’t
remember how to do it, and steps away. “You have brought light to many dark places,” he says. “I will miss you, Lucy Preston.”

With that, he turns away, raises his hands, and seems to gather up the glow from the sunrise, rolling it into an orb. Then he throws it, and it grows larger and larger, unraveling and spinning and burning still brighter, until it comes to a halt in the shape of a door. He makes another motion, and it swings open. Waiting.

Lucy and Flynn look at each other. Take firmer hold of each other’s hands. Murmur a farewell to Matija, to Faerie, to this strange and wild and beautiful and magical place. They cannot regret that they have come, and yet they do not look back.

And so, they step forward, and once more, all the world is gone.
In Which Important Matters Are Sorted Out

Flynn knows that they are back in Solovetsky before he can actually see anything, and before he is once more fully aware of himself. He wonders how much, if any, time has passed in this world while they were in Faerie, and if by circling back to the night and the moment that they left, they are erasing a future that has already played out, for better or for worse. If that involved Rittenhouse taking over the world, he is all for version two. But if this gives them a new chance, a second wind – if Emma gets an opportunity to correct any mistakes she might have made, if the revenant of David Rittenhouse himself is somehow resurrected –

And yet, this is possibly a case of looking the gift horse in the mouth, and there is no more time to ponder it anyway. Flynn feels a blast of cold air, can smell soot and char, and then they are tumbling out of the angel carving, as he hits the ground first. This is not entirely bad, as it allows him to break Lucy’s fall, but it does knock his wind out, as he lies in the darkness with the light of Faerie not yet entirely gone from his eyes. He peers over Lucy’s head and sees the ethereal blue glow starting to fade from the stone, as Angel’s Gate closes from the far side, and turns merely back into a wall. There is a grind and a bump, and it goes dark.

As his other senses belatedly re-engage, Flynn can hear a communal, shocked intake of breath from the room, which at least indicates that someone is alive to do it. He can’t blame them, as it must be disconcerting to see himself and Lucy vanish through the gate in the company of a very powerful faerie king, him shot and Lucy stabbed, only to tumble out a few minutes – seconds? hours? – later with the king nowhere in sight and both of them fit as a fiddle. He twists his head around, and gets an upside-down view of Rufus Carlin goggling at him from a few feet away. Next to him is a large wolf, which makes Flynn suddenly recollect the use of his higher faculties and spring to his feet, clutching Lucy to his chest. “Jesus! Get away from it!”

“Uh, hello to you too?” Rufus rubs his eyes very hard, as if to verify that he is in fact seeing the right people. “It’s all right, it – I guess there was something extra about the magic the Raven King hit him with. When he woke up and transformed, he didn’t go crazy. Maybe it’s only as long as we’re in this room, but it’s okay. For now. I’m really tempted to throw a tennis ball for him, but that’s preferable to being mauled to death.”

Wyatt-the-werewolf manages to give Rufus a dirty look even without the use of eyebrows, then cocks his head at Flynn and Lucy, asking the obvious question. Flynn has to admit that he doesn’t seem inclined to leap at their throats, not that this will gull him into letting his guard down, and glances around the room. He sees Anton Sokolov positioned at the door with a rifle, Ada and Priscilla sitting on the stones with dazed looks on their faces, and no sign of Emma, which is either very good or very bad. Anton’s tense and armed posture seems to indicate that they don’t think the trouble is over, even as he looks around, sees the new arrivals (or rather, re-arrivals) and gapes.

“Lucy? What – what has happ – ?”

Lucy wriggles down from Flynn’s grasp and runs over to hug Anton and Ada, who return her embrace while still looking flattened. “I thought you were badly hurt,” Anton says. “Stabbed. By horrible woman. Would call her other word, but gentlemen do not use that about women, even horrible ones. What has gone on?”

“It’s a very long story.” Lucy glances back over her shoulder at Flynn, as he feels unaccountably shy and hangs back, shuffling his feet. “I’ll have to explain later. Where’s Emma? Is she gone? What about the other Rittenhouse goons, and the revenant?”

“That creepy-ass Demonic Founding Father of Terror that I will see in my nightmares for eternity is gone, thankfully.” Rufus shudders. “Your pal the Raven King did us a solid and exploded him,
and then the ashes burned again for good measure. Emma grabbed a gun and fought her way out of here, I think she went to get more reinforcements. We tried to go after her, but that was when Laddie woke up and turned into a wolf, and there was a lot of confusion, and anyway, she got away. But we don’t think she went far, and we can’t leave the gate, in case she comes back with another revenant or something worse. I have to say, we were really not expecting to see you for a while.” He pauses. “Or ever again.”

Lucy steps over and hugs him hard, and neither of them say anything for a long moment. Flynn and Wolf Wyatt continue to eye each other suspiciously. Then Lucy says, “Is the Mothership still outside? How far did she go?”

“It’s gone,” Rufus says. “It was gone by the time we got out there. I thought for two seconds about seeing if I could open Angel’s Gate and find out where she went and follow her that way, but I decided that was definitely a bad idea. I don’t know if we should just sit here and let her do whatever she’s doing elsewhere, but we didn’t exactly have much of a plan.”

“She probably went to get aether.” Flynn glances warily at the wall, but the carving has not yet lit up again. “It’s no use getting the gate open if she doesn’t have anything to send through it. I’m guessing she went to the aether farm in Arkhangelsk and stole a few barrels, and she’s bringing them back here. If she got enough of it, she could just set up a doorway to Solovetsky directly, and move in whatever she wanted – aether, automatons, more soldiers, anything. So right now, we’re under siege, with a dozen guns, a werewolf, and three of you who can’t fight. That doesn’t make our odds particularly wonderful.”

“I can fight,” Rufus says, miffed. “A little. Lucy and Jiya and I didn’t just play tiddlywinks at Rittenhouse throughout history. But what the hell happened with Raven Boy? Is he coming back, or what?”

“I don’t think so.” That bargain is over and done, paid and settled in full, and frankly, it’s a relief. “And you’re talking about Matija Korvin. Show some respect.”

Rufus raises an eyebrow, but offers a wave of the hand in apology. They settle down in terse anticipation, as Flynn and Anton line up with rifles by the door, Lucy, Rufus, and Wyatt barricade the gate, and Ada and Priscilla do their best to keep out of the way. As she eyes the setup, however, Ada says, “Are you sure there’s nothing for me to do? I’d feel rather cheap at standing back and having you lot do all the work. I’m not letting those people kill Mr. Woolsey and then never get them back for it.”

“I know you want to fight.” Flynn says. He does, he knows that losing friends and family to Rittenhouse lights the fire of vengeance even in tiny seventy-two-year-old lady inventors, and he has personal cause to know that Ada can be plenty ferocious, especially with a fan. But he doesn’t think that bonking Emma with one will be much use, and he doesn’t want to risk Lucy losing Ada. “But it might be better if you don’t.”

Ada eyes him with a steely expression, even as Priscilla clears her throat. “I said I could shoot a musket,” she reminds him. “And we’re going to need all the hands we have. You have a few extra guns, don’t you? Lady Lovelace and I can take the windows.”

“I don’t – ” At that, Flynn decides to hell with it. It would be useful if they had someone covering the windows, they can’t afford to waste willing bodies or present passive targets, and they have indeed come well-supplied on the gun front. He looks at Ada. “Can you shoot?”

“I will treat that as another impertinent question on your behalf, Mr. Flynn, as I was raised as an aristocrat, thank you very much. I have been on more than my fair share of partridge and fox hunts, and if you need proof of my marksmanship, I am prepared to demonstrate it directly upon
Flynn, you. Upon your behind, forgive my crassness. Now hand me that pistol and be quiet.”

Flynn chews the inside of his cheek, pulls a gun out of the stockpile, and gives it to Ada, as Priscilla picks up a musket and tests it. The two ladies take up positions by the windows, with such determined looks on their faces that Flynn thinks he himself would not want to burst through there and be blasted promptly into oblivion. He wonders briefly what has happened to the monks, if they’ve all been killed or if they have wisely gotten the hell out of here and left the two opposing factions to duke it out until they’re done. He would elect for the latter, if he was a Russian monk living atop such a sensitive magical hot spot, but perhaps they feel it is their duty to stay and fight in its defense. He can’t foresee that going well, against whatever Rittenhouse is going to bring against them, but if it is their choice, so be it.

Some time passes in tense silence. Flynn’s sojourn in Faerie has completely wrecked his ability to judge how much, but it might be a few hours. The darkness is getting greyer, thinner around the edges, when they all hear a whine and a bump, and a flash of blue light crosses the window, followed by a golden one. Flynn is quite certain that someone is arriving in the – whatever they called it – the Mothership, along with creating an aether doorway from Arkhangelsk, and that means, just as before, that Rittenhouse is about to storm in here with God knows what, and prepare to do battle for Angel’s Gate. It gives him a surreal swoop of déjà-vu, until he’s not even sure that this has already happened for the first time. The concept gets fluid where aether is involved. What if the revenant returns, un-destroyed, and Emma stabs Lucy again, and there is no bargain to save her, there is no Matija to call upon? Did they even go to Faerie at all, or was that merely one of their possible futures, crumbled to nothing?

There’s no chance to wonder anymore. Heavy footfalls boom through the corridor outside, the door shakes under the force of a blow, and the next instant, turns to splinters. This time, Emma isn’t pussy-footing about with subtlety or the risk of being underprepared, not that she was before. A long line of tockers come wheeling through in regimental order, spread out and deploy, raise their arm cannons with clicks and whirs, and open fire.

The room turns into chaos in moments. Flynn and Anton have one tocker dropper apiece, which they pump and fire as hard as they can, but the charge is bulky, finite, slow, and hard to use on a never-ending cascade of opponents; it’s designed to drop one tocker, not a swarm. They manage to fritz out a few, but there are many more to take their place, and Flynn finally tosses the spent gun aside and grabs a traditional rifle, yelling at Anton to aim for the weak joint in their necks. There is only a thin corrugated-copper casing protecting the wiring between head and trunk, and if you hit it straight, it has the same effect as the dropper, and with less lag time between shots. Flynn really thought he was done with these mechanical bastards after Lucy and the gang plucked him off the train, but evidently Emma doesn’t see the need to waste valuable human Rittenhouse operatives, when the automatons are right there and designed to take (and inflict) a lot more punishment. They cannot let her get to the gate.

Flynn is just glancing frantically around for Lucy, since he’s lost sight of her in the uproar, when the sea of tockers parts, and Emma herself strides through, hands crackling with golden fire. She conjures a burning orb, then flings it in the direction of Wyatt and Rufus, who have been tag-teaming the tockers trying to reach the gate. Wyatt is jumping on them and tearing them apart with teeth and claws, gouging into their metal torsos and gutting their wiring, while Rufus has adopted the straightforward expedient of bashing them with a heavy stick. This doesn’t really stop them, but it disorients them enough for someone else to get the drop on them, and the defunct, smoking shells are starting to pile up. At least until Emma’s little bomb hits. The entire gate area goes up like a flash bomb, and werewolf and man vanish in the explosion.

Flynn wheels around, fighting through the tocker tide, trying to get a clear shot at Emma. He has a confused impression of Ada shooting one at point-blank range and shaking her finger at another
one wheeling murderously toward her, at least until Priscilla nails it in the back of the head and it keels over flat. He still can’t see Lucy, and the terror drives into his heart. He just – he just got her, and that after almost losing her far too many times. He can’t – he can’t –

And then, out of nowhere, he does. He doesn’t know where she might have been before, if he just didn’t notice her in the fighting and the smoke, or if it was something else, but she’s striding out of the pandemonium with a pale, fixed, utterly dead-set expression. As Emma hurls another golden firebolt at her, Lucy raises both hands – they burn with blue-black glow, shot with stars. The resulting midair collision is like the birth of a galaxy in miniature, divine fire blazing across the heavens. Aether magic against faerie magic, Flynn thinks. Science and myth, new and old, present and past, time and space. It seems fitting, and in that moment, he knows he is not going to be able to interfere. This battle is personal, and it is being fought on an entirely different plane. This is it. The reckoning.

It is like Rittenhouse and Korvin’s duel earlier, and yet it is not. Emma has clearly been well-supplied with aether from her raid on the Arkhangelsk farm, and given herself a crash course in how to use it. She is not a trained magician, obviously, but she is strong and totally merciless, and she has an apex predator’s killer instinct. There is not much critical nuance or sophisticated technique to her form – only crashing, thunderous blows, over and over, that Lucy struggles to deflect. “Come on, princess,” Emma pants. “Come on, is that the best you can do?”

“I’m not a princess.” Lucy’s eyes burn spectral, incandescent. “I’m the queen.”

For a moment, Emma looks startled. After all, the last thing she knew, she had just stabbed Lucy, possibly fatally, and was watching her vanish into the netherwhere. Seeing her mere hours later, fully healed and seriously improved in power, has to be unsettling, and then for the first time, Lucy goes on the full-throttle offensive. Her blast scorches a crater into the ground, and a black vine grows out of it, twining its creepers around Emma’s legs and jerking her ferociously off her feet. Emma goes flying, manages to catch herself, and fires an off-balance shot in return, which splatters out uncomfortably close to Flynn. He feels it clawing at him, trying to change him, burn him – but he is still too thickly cloaked in Matija Korvin’s magic for it to get a foothold. It fizzles out, and he is untouched.

That, Flynn thinks, that is an interesting development. He charges into the swarm, scattering tockers, as he makes for the gate. He can’t interfere directly in Lucy and Emma’s battle, but he can protect its object, and while he is under no illusions that his immunity is permanent, if he can absorb a few blows and buy time, that is what he will do. He still can’t see Wyatt and Rufus, wonders if Emma blasted them through the gate and into God knows what world beyond, but the carving of Michael and the Devil is still – as yet – dark. Not entirely, though. The glow is starting to burn blue again. The magical locks are weakening. It’s going to open.

Emma breaks off from her pitched battle with Lucy long enough to yell over her shoulder, and Flynn catches a glimpse of two Rittenhouse underlings, these ones human, trundling in with huge barrels on wheels, covered in complicated systems of tubes and wiring to neutralize the otherwise-overwhelming power of the aether stored inside. If they get the gate open, and those things through, that’s it, for Lucy’s world and for any other one they feel like. But Flynn can’t shoot the barrels directly, because if just one of those things goes up, there will be none of them left. No Solovetsky, no Arkhangelsk, and possibly none of northwestern Russia either. “HEY!” he shouts frantically, in the direction of an invisible Anton, Ada, and Priscilla. “DON’T SHOOT THE BARRELS! SHOOT THE MEN, THE MEN! NOT THE BARRELS!”

Flynn hears the crack of a gunshot, and one of the Rittenhouse underlings staggers, but Emma whirls around and waves her fiery hands, and the man gets up, perfectly undamaged. He continues to shove the barrel forward alongside his compatriot, knocking tockers aside, as the
glow from Angel’s Gate continues to get stronger in response to the overpowering presence of magic. It has almost fully flooded the carving, and the Devil has vanished. Only Michael is left. *Blessed Michael, defend us from demons.* And yet, the archangel is not here. Only them.

Lucy aims her next round of blasts at the barrel-pushing flunkeys, even as Emma flashes to block them, and Flynn climbs over the rubble of stone and metal and vines toward the gate. He stands up in front of it and spreads his arms, feeling blows pummel him like muffled punches; for now, Korvin’s magic is still protecting him, but the cocoon is weakening. He is aware that he is close enough to the gate that he is being drawn into it, that the energies of multiple universes are working on his body, and for a moment, he can see somewhere beyond, somewhere that must be Lucy’s world. It is slick and metallic and futuristic to his eyes, crowded and cold and impersonal, and he can’t really imagine personally wanting to live there, or why Rittenhouse is going to such trouble to conquer it. But perhaps it’s fitting. Perhaps only that sort of world could make them, and this is only natural, final step.

Just then, Flynn is hit with another blast that knocks him spinning, the burned afterimage of Lucy’s world vanishes from his eyes, and he spits blood as he lands. He is aware that he can’t take another one of those head-on, but he also can’t move away from the gate, and he looks around madly. “LUCY!” he yells. “LUCIJA, GAVRAN KRALJICA!”

He does not have time to think if that would be the proper prayer, if Lucy’s status as the Raven Queen vanished when she left Faerie, or if she can be hailed or summoned in the same way as Matija, especially when she’s already less than a dozen feet away. But she’s been using Matija’s power in a way that even he hasn’t, and the next instant, she is standing over Flynn, arms outstretched like black wings, and he feels the magical shield around him rise anew – but not quite the same as before. It is not the King who guards him now. It is the Queen. Stronger and stranger and utterly elemental. It is, then. It is her.

With that, Flynn spits one more time and scrambles to his feet. Angel’s Gate is fully open behind him; he can hear its roar, like a wave gathering speed, about to sweep in and drown him. He and Lucy reach out, catch hands, and brace themselves against the white-hot glare. Emma and the Rittenhouse thugs have reached them, they are almost close enough to touch. The first barrel is disengaged from its wheels and boosted up, and Lucy uses her free hand to generate a shield, which Emma is savaging at relentlessly. The noise and light is deafening, blinding.

And yet, for all their efforts, the aether barrel is still getting closer. The edges of Angel’s Gate are starting to lap at it, golden dust swirling from the cracks, as Lucy has to let go of Flynn in an effort to push it back. Emma is just a few feet from him, and this is it. This is his chance, his moment. He has to take her out, avenge Lorena and Iris and stop Rittenhouse from ultimate control over the multiverse all at once. But he has no gun, he doesn’t think a shot would stop Emma now, and if it deflected, it could hit the barrel and then no more anything. She can see it in his eyes, and bares her teeth at him. They are being shoved into conjunction, impossible and devouring, as the maw of the gate expands and explodes, and –

Time and space turn upside down, unpinned from all familiar or rational relations or dimensions, and Flynn is everywhere and nowhere that he has ever been. He’s a boy in Šibenik, learning the raven prayers from his grandmother, ducking his father’s fists and seeing the shadow in his mother’s eyes, and he’s a gangly, angry young man running headlong at monsters because he’s too stupid and full of piss to be afraid of them. He’s traveling across the world on his hunting assignments, he’s getting hit on the head by Lorena as she informs him not to kill the were-beast, he’s already in love with her and tongue-tied beyond help. Then he’s marrying her (still no idea how that happened), and Iris is born, and he steps into a dim cabin in frontier Missouri and meets Emma Whitmore, and it unravels, faster and faster, through the screaming and the flying bullets of that night, where he died too in a way. The rebirth in London, the cold and feared crime lord, the
zeppelin burning as it crashes. Then it’s Henry Morton Stanley, pathetically begging for his life after Flynn has forced the information about the Siberian railway out of him, the information that started all this, and it’s his finger pulling the trigger and the hole that flowers wet and red in Stanley’s head. And then, everywhere, it’s Lucy. Lucy, and ravens, and soft oblivion.

Flynn has no idea what’s going on or where he is, if he’s back in Faerie or somewhere else or if his entire life was ever even lived, when he opens his eyes. He’s staring up at the vaulted ceiling of the gate room, and his head is cradled in someone’s lap, and there are stark after-images burned onto his eyes, to the point where he briefly fears he’s seeing only his memories of the place and he is in fact blind. He raises his hand in front of his face, or tries to, but the relevant muscles and bones do not seem to be connected. Jesus, is he paralyzed?

Is he dead?

Before Flynn can travel much further along these disturbing trains of thought, some sensation returns in his arm, and he blinks again, allowing him to see that the face looking down at him is Lucy’s. Upon seeing him stir, her grip on him tightens, and she bends closer. “Garcia?” she whispers. “Garcia, are you – are you all right?”

Flynn still thinks that talking is beyond him, so he makes what he hopes is an encouraging noise, and her eyes flood with desperately relieved tears. As far as he can belatedly piece together, he must have been caught in the blast when the energy of Angel’s Gate struck the aether, sending him cartwheeling through his own existence like a scattered leaf, and yet he was somehow caught, anchored and brought safely back here, at the moment that he left. He doesn’t even need to wonder why. As before – as ever – it was Lucy.

“What happened?” Flynn manages, after another few moments. “Where are the others? Where’s Emma? Did she – did she get the aether through?”

“Emma’s gone.” Lucy rubs her free hand over her eyes. “I’m not sure exactly where. You need to ask Rufus. He’s the one who saved us.”

Flynn is mildly pleased to hear that Rufus is back in the picture, and twists his head to see the man in question standing by Angel’s Gate, examining the carving. The first beams of far-north daylight are slanting through the windows, illuminating the heaps of broken tockers and blasted stone that lie everywhere. Anton, Ada, and Priscilla are sitting across the way, all considerably banged up and black-eyed, but alive. Wyatt, once more human, is perched awkwardly a few feet away, as if unsure that he has permission to join the others. The body of one of the Rittenhouse goons has been removed from the floor and covered with a spare altar cloth, and the silence rings in Flynn’s ears. “What the hell happened?”

“Emma hit me and Wyatt with some kind of teleportation blast.” Rufus doesn’t glance up from what he’s doing, but he nods sideways in Flynn’s direction. “One moment we were in here, the next we were in the snow outside. I’m guessing she actually meant to kill us, but didn’t know exactly what she was doing. Anyway, it gave us a moment to clear our heads, and I remembered that I still had that thing I was working on with Jiya, back in St. Petersburg. The device that was supposed to open a portal, like how I got here in the first place with the Refractory-Glass plans. So I made some modifications on the fly, we ran back in here, and that was when you decided to blow the place up.”

Flynn wants to point out that it was a mutual effort, but has to acknowledge that explosions tend to be a frequent occurrence where he is concerned. “And?”

“I managed to get to the gate and patch this in.” Rufus nods at the small device he is holding up to the wall. It is made of concentric circles of brass like an astrolabe, with wires and tubes twisted in
and around. “Once I did that, I just spun the combination and changed the destination on the other side of the gate. Emma was trying to get back to Earth – our world, I mean – with the aether, but I sent her somewhere else.” He shrugs modestly, as if this is an ordinary thing that anyone could do. “She didn’t realize I’d changed it until it was too late. She and the other dude went through, and then I closed it, and… yeah.”

“And she’s… gone?” Flynn blinks. “How do we know you didn’t send her somewhere else in the multiverse? Somewhere she could be even more dangerous?”

“This fell through just as I was locking it.” Rufus holds something up. “I kind of have a feeling he isn’t going to be pleased to see her.”

Flynn looks at it, realizes that the item in question is a long black feather – a raven’s feather – and utters an impressed, disbelieving laugh. “You sly son of a bitch.”

“Coming from you, I think that’s a compliment?” Rufus cocks an eyebrow. “Besides, I didn’t actively pick it, but there was enough of his magic in here that it must have guided the thingamajig like a compass. Lucy says that our good buddy Matija Korvin will definitely keep Emma in fairy jail, so she’s his problem now. It’s only now sinking in that she might be gone. For real. I don’t mean that it’s totally done – we still have to clean up Rittenhouse’s messes in St. Petersburg and London – but if she’s… if she’s not here to do more crazy shit, then…” He glances awkwardly sidelong at Lucy. “Does that mean our war is over? For good? We can pick up Jiya, we can go home. Connor Mason still has a lot of stuff he’s doing with Rittenhouse back on our side of reality, but I’m guessing he’d help us hit the kill switches. And then we… I don’t know? Settle down? Finally start a new life?”

Flynn isn’t oblivious to the way Lucy’s hands tighten on his shoulders, even as she says nothing aloud. “That’s the idea, I suppose,” she says at last. “What we’ve been fighting for this whole time.”

She doesn’t sound particularly jubilant, and there has been no jumping up and down and celebrating on anyone’s part. Rufus finishes his calculations on the gate, ensuring that it is closed and locked, and then pockets his device, stepping back from the wall. “Right,” he says. “The Mothership is still outside, so unless anyone wants a return trip with Steampunk Santa Claus, that’s the fastest way to get back to Arkhangelsk. But I know some of us haven’t ridden in it before, so if you want to catch a ride back on the sledge, that’s fine.”

Flynn and Anton glance at each other, as if trying to weigh up the risks, but finally agree to be transported in it with the others. Everyone gets unsteadily to their feet, brushes themselves off, and sets off, emerging into the monastery (which also appears to have been through the wringer) and apologizing to the hegumen for the mess. It feels like a ridiculously banal and strange thing to do, if this is the first morning of a life without Rittenhouse, but then, Flynn thinks, as Rufus said, that is not yet the case. There are remaining weeds to uproot in Russia and in England, a process which, he hopes suddenly and selfishly, will be good and long and complicated. That way, Lucy might stay on for extra months, or years, and be less inclined to go.

They catch up with Waclaw Sieroszewski, assure him that they can make their own way home, then crunch out into the pale, shivery morning, to where the Mothership is parked on the tundra. Flynn eyes it up and down, wondering what sort of madman would get into that thing once, let alone repeatedly for any number of godforsaken trips, but Lucy and Rufus assure him that they’ve done it before, albeit in their machine, and he supposes he will take their word for it. Its capacity is for six, and there are seven of them, so Rufus takes Lucy, Ada, and Priscilla back first, leaving Anton, Wyatt, and Flynn to wait. Anton gets bug-eyed as the ship vanishes before his eyes, swears in inventive Russian, and wheels on Flynn. “What in devil is that thing?!”
“Time machine. Apparently.” Flynn isn’t in the mood for beating about the bush. “Though they’re just going to Arkhangelsk a few minutes from now, not any further.”

Anton whistles, crosses himself just in case, and has to be chivvied into getting in when Rufus returns shortly to pick up the men. He finally does so, however, and looks around the interior in confusion and awe. “There are many of these things, where you come from?”

“Fortunately, no.” Rufus shuts the door and gets into the pilot’s seat. “This is one of two. And once we get back home, we’ll probably destroy it. Honestly, who needs one?”

It’s a good thing that Flynn has just sat down and is battling to figure out the restraint straps, so he can focus on that and not the sick swoop in his stomach. Of course it’s the safe idea to destroy it, stop anyone else from getting their hands on this kind of power, prevent the rise of a new Rittenhouse or some other fanatical ideologue determined to control all of time and space. He wasn’t even counting on Lucy making pleasure jaunts back to visit, since it has to be dangerous to cross dimensions too often, but hearing it stated so unequivocally makes him feel like he’s lost in the aether storm, whirling and whirling with no solid place to land. He can put it off for a while, perhaps, but still. Eventually, Lucy will leave, and she will never come back.

After a trip of several unpleasant minutes, which feels like being propelled to very high speed, slammed against the chair by massive centrifugal forces, and then having your guts sucked out through your back with an unaccountable blackout in the middle, they whirl to a halt, Flynn makes a note never to get into the habit of traveling by time machine, and the door cycles open. Beyond, he can see that it somehow is in fact Arkhangelsk. They have traveled miles and minutes in the blink of an eye, rather than their cold, slow, hours-long sledge out to Solovetsky, and he has to admit that it does have its advantages. They disembark, Wyatt pauses to discreetly vomit into the snow, and even Flynn’s innards do not feel quite as rock solid as usual. He’s not going to be sick now that Wyatt was, though, so he keeps it down.

Once they find a place to lock up the Mothership, and sweep the city for Rittenhouse agents who might be looking for it, they tramp back to the boarding house, where the women are anxiously waiting for them. Rufus gets a hero’s welcome from all concerned, which makes him blush and look at his feet. “I mean,” he says. “Technically, it was just science, right? All the magic and the mystery, and Einstein saves our asses.”

“It’s science that only one person in the world could do, and I am so proud of you.” Jiya kisses him again, looking a little giddy and beaten-up herself. Apparently she, Gennady, Karl, and the gang also guessed that Rittenhouse was going to make a play for the aether farm, and headed up there to lie in wait. Their vigorous efforts might have nearly blown up much of the Arctic Circle if they went wrong, but they managed to stop Rittenhouse from getting the full dozen barrels that they wanted, and to count themselves lucky to escape with two. Due to the unpredictable influence of that much magic, Robert Taylor has inexplicably been turned into a large wallaby, but they are reasonably confident they can find someone to reverse it soon.

Taylor-the-wallaby is put in the cellar for safekeeping (Wyatt looks terribly enthused about having a new roommate, but doesn’t say anything) and everyone else gathers in the kitchen. There’s a lot of chatter going on, they keep breaking into hysterical giggles at the smallest thing, and everyone keeps asking Rufus to repeat and verify that Emma is in fact gone for good, which swiftly frustrates him. “I don’t know! I think she is! It looks like she is! I’m not the Raven King expert around here, how about you pester Lucy and Flynn instead?”

As soon as Rufus says it, he looks stricken, and bites his tongue as if to snatch it back. “I mean,” he says. “I don’t – look, I don’t know what exactly happened while you were gone. It seemed like just a couple hours for us, but I’m guessing it was more on your end?”
“Yes, it…” Lucy frowns. “Yes. It was a while. I’m – I was – the queen. That was the magic that I used against Emma. I’m not even sure how, but it was… there.”

“You are like HARRY POTTER,” Gennady suggests. Jiya has taught him various popular-culture references from their world – which, to judge by Lucy, Rufus, and Wyatt’s amused faces, he keeps using incorrectly. “Blowing up DEATH STAR to defeat Sauron.” He frowns. “No. Wait. Was WHITE WALKERS?”

“We’ll go with that, buddy.” Rufus pats him on the arm. “Anyway,” he continues to Lucy, in an apparent effort to cover his gaffe. “You don’t have to talk about that if you don’t want to. But how the hell did you get back? It sounded like a for-good situation when you left.”

“Matija let us go.” Lucy glances shyly sidelong at Flynn, as if he will back up her memory on this crucial point. “He… said he didn’t want to do the same thing to me that he did to his last wife, and we…” She coughs, cheeks turning a delicate pink. “Made clear that it was both of us, and that was just how it was.”

“Oh?” Ada’s ears perk up like a bat. “And what exactly do you mean by that, Lucy, dear?”

“Never mind.” Lucy’s blush deepens. “Let’s – let’s just eat and be together and celebrate Emma finally being gone, all right? We deserve this.”

They do, and they are, and yet, even as they cook and laugh and crowd in at the overstuffed table, as a shadow crosses Ada’s face and she remarks that Mr. Woolsey would have loved to serve them at this, Flynn feels strangely remote, detached, like his smile is fixed and painted on. The conversation floats over his head like ocean waves. Emma is gone – not dead, but she’s looking at a good few centuries in some deeply unpleasant faerie dungeon, given as Matija made his opinions on Rittenhouse extremely clear. Justice has finally been served, justice for Lorena and Iris. Flynn doesn’t have to spend every waking moment trying to track her down and uncover her plans and maneuver to interfere and disrupt them, no matter the outcome or the cost. He should feel relieved, healed, like the war is finally over. Instead, he feels so empty and heartsick that he can barely swallow, or breathe, or stand up.

He excuses himself early, as Lucy glances concernedly at him, and he tells her to enjoy the time with her friends and then heads upstairs. He turns back the covers and gets into bed. His previous physical injuries, including his bad leg, were magically healed in Faerie, but he wonders if getting caught in the aether storm has inflicted new ones, ones he can’t necessarily see or touch. As if his soul was ripped all the way out of him, and has only imperfectly been put back in. If there are wounds, ragged edges, unraveled threads that can’t be mended, and that he somehow, impossibly, has to learn to live with again.

Flynn dozes on and off, finally slipping under into real sleep from which he is woken by the door opening, a strip of light from the hall, and then a soft click as it shuts. He can see Lucy’s silhouette in the dimness, peeling off her dress and corset and petticoats, stepping out of the crumpled fabric in just her chemise, and then moving toward the bed. When he rolls over to face her, she looks startled, as if she didn’t realize he was awake. “I’m sorry, did I – ?”

“No.” It’s a lie, but Flynn doesn’t mind that she did. He shifts, moving to make a space for her, and Lucy hesitantly gets in, into the warm hollow left by his body. They lie there, looking at each other on the pillows, until he finally reaches out and runs a hand down her arm, feeling the shiver in her that follows his touch. “What time is it?”

“I don’t know. Late. We finally all went to bed when the food and booze ran out.” Lucy bites her lip, shifting closer. “We’ll leave for St. Petersburg tomorrow. Anton and Gennady have volunteered to mobilize their various contacts and see if they can get Rittenhouse’s Russian
projects dismantled. I mean, they also still want to overthrow the tsar, since they are Bolsheviks, but unless that happens before another three decades – ”

“What?” Flynn looks at her quizzically. “So you do know when it happens?”

“I know when it happens in my world,” Lucy says. “1917, thirty years from now. I also know what’s going to happen – again, at least in my world – a few years before that. 1914. It’s known as the Great War, and later, World War I. It basically destroys an entire generation in Europe, it sets the stage for World War II twenty years later, and…” She stops again. “It would happen here. In our lifetime. If I… stayed.”

A strange, agonizing lightning bolt goes through Flynn from head to heel, momentarily rendering him speechless. He wants to ask what’s so wonderful about her reality if it has both these wars to its discredit, unless they’ve somehow solved it and she would be returning to some perfect Utopian future. If Rittenhouse is there, if that is the world they’ve sprung from, he doesn’t think so, but perhaps he is scrambling for any shred of hope, grasping at straws. The fact that she’s even voiced the possibility of staying is one he can barely stand. He knows that she came back here, rather than go home, when Matija gave her the choice back in Faerie, but of course Lucy Preston was not going to leave the fight against Rittenhouse undone, Emma’s fate uncertain, when she had to come back and do it with her own hands, see it with her own eyes. Now that that’s the case, she would be entirely justified in finally claiming her reward, the reason she has fought this long and terrible and more-than-mortal battle across the multiverse. She should – certainly she does – want to go home, and take no more journeys into the unknown, and sleep. No more kings, no more enchantments, no more battles. Just solace, at last. Peace.

(Flynn doesn’t see himself having any, not after she’s gone. But he’s used to that state of being, at least. It is an old friend, and the ache is dull, and he can manage. He will go down there, and he will fashion it until it becomes a place he can exist, if not live, and he will somehow go on.)

“I’m… frightened,” Lucy says at last. “Of going back to my world. That I’ll get there and I’ll find there’s been a mistake, that Emma got there with the aether, and we didn’t stop her after all. That Rittenhouse is back and stronger than ever, and nobody can challenge them anymore. And that not just Rittenhouse, but other bad people will use that power, and make things even worse. It is… not good in my reality right now. Rufus and Jiya have told me what was going on when they left. It’s just… it’s chaos and it’s dark and scary and there is so much of it spiraling out of control that I don’t – ” She stops, voice breaking. “I don’t know what’s going to happen. And that’s always been the safe thing, the comforting thing, about living in the past for so long. It was different, it had its own challenges, especially here, and we were fighting an evil secret society that wanted to take over the world, but I knew what was going to happen. Even now, I know that the Great War may happen, but if I go home, if I go back to the utter uncertainty of the future, I… I don’t know. It could get better. It could get so much worse.”

Flynn has no idea how to answer that. He moves to pull her closer, hesitantly if she doesn’t want to come, but she rolls over into him and clings to him, arms around his neck and legs locked around his thighs, face buried into his neck. He breathes the scent of her hair and strokes her back and feels as fragile as blown glass, as if he could fall and shatter into a thousand pieces. There is a hot wetness against his skin from Lucy’s silent tears, and he kisses her head and wraps her in his arms as tightly as he can. He wants her, he wants her with every inch of him, but he doesn’t know if this is the right time, or if it will ever be again. A dreamy coupling beneath the horned moon of Faerie, an enchantment and a sacrament, is not the same as this. Not when they are back in the cold light of reality, and all their scars remain, and all their battles go on, and all the days and nights and weeks and months and years will pass on in endless, marching time. If it is no longer magical, will she still want that? Want him?
Lucy shakes in silence for a few minutes, as he continues to hold her and feels it like a knife in his chest, struggles to breathe around it, to make it be all right. Then she finally pulls back and looks up at him with watery eyes, a shaken smile. Apropos of nothing, she brushes her fingers across his scruffy chin and whispers, “There’s silver in your beard, you know.”

Flynn wants to tell her that it’s a miracle his hair is not totally white, even as he wonders if that means she thinks he’s too old, too used, too damaged, that they found each other too late in life and after too many tragedies to ever really start fresh or unburdened. “There is,” he agrees, as lightly as he can. “I’m not as young as I used to be, alas.”

“We didn’t…” Lucy pauses, as if they are thinking of flaws to unearth, unflattering facts that are certain to frighten the other off. “We never talked about me being – being the heir of Rittenhouse. What he – what it said, I – I’m descended from him. David Rittenhouse. I learned when I was ten years old. My mother told me and it was… anyway, I should have told you before, but I didn’t… I didn’t think you’d have to know, or that if you did, you’d… hate me.”

“What? No.” Flynn doesn’t know anything else, but he does know that not once, not ever, not in any shape or form, could he hate her. “It was a shock, I can’t deny that. But it’s not your fault. That demon, that monster – that’s not you. You’re not part of him.”

“Except I am.” Lucy shakes again. “By generations and generations of blood that I can’t erase. My family – they’ve all been in it. They’ve all done terrible things. I’m the Raven Queen, or I was, but I’m also the Rittenhouse princess. Now that Emma’s gone, they could try to recruit me again, or hope that I’d see the light and come home. I don’t think so. I’m pretty sure I’ve burned all my bridges. But I can’t cut that off, that fear. I am them. I’ve done some things I can’t forget either, opposing them. Given into that part of me. If I do go back, and it happens…”

Flynn wants to say desperately that if she’s frightened of the future, of her own family legacy, of everything that awaits her in that world, she never has to go back, home or no home. But he doesn’t want to force that on her, doesn’t want to extract a promise from her in haste that she might eventually have to break. There are enough wounds of betrayal between them, enough reasons that they should have been torn apart long since, and he doesn’t want to give the universe another one. Instead he says, “You’re the strongest person I know. I don’t give a damn whose blood you are. You’re better than them. You always have been, and you always will be.”

Lucy doesn’t answer, but nestles closer again, her breath soft against the crook of his neck and shoulder. “Garcia,” she murmurs. “Hold me. Just hold me, and don’t let me go.”

There is nothing else in the world, in his life, that Flynn wants to do more than this, forever. He gathers her against him, into the protective bulwark of his chest, and marvels at the miracle, and though his crumb of borrowed faith is all but burned out, at that, he feels it. He has long been entirely in doubt about the existence of God, and yet. Just now, on this night, in this moment, on what cannot be otherwise that they have somehow been led together by some higher power, some great gravity or watchmaker’s hand beyond even starlight or science or magic, in that heavenly light, he does.

They leave for St. Petersburg the next morning, as planned. Rufus takes them in two trips in the Mothership, as before (Flynn still solidly hates it), with Karl and a few of the others left behind to scour Arkhangelsk for any more Rittenhouse thugs and catch the train, ideally with no crashes this time, back down when they’re done. They also have to de-wallaby Robert Turner, which is definitely something the gang is going to get mileage out of for the rest of their lives, but if worse comes to worse, the Russian Magisterium will have some accidental-transformation-reversal sub-office to deal with it. Obviously, all of them would strongly prefer to avoid involving the government in any capacity, but the option is there.
Once they get to St. Petersburg, it is a matter of returning to the house to collect their things, hold a small funeral for Mr. Woolsey, and arrange for Anton and Gennady to get to work on the project of disrupting Rittenhouse’s leftover operations. By now, it is December, and even with the obvious fact that they still want him dead, England is beginning to sound like a balmy vacation to Flynn in comparison. England. God, it seems strange to think of going back there, even as it’s where he’s spent the last two years, built himself into a man for other men to fear. Is he going to return and step back into the crime-boss shoes? He doesn’t really know any other way to live, even if his main motivation for doing it is now gone. Not that he thinks that Lucy wants to move into a dank tunnel under the Thames with a lot of unwashed and actively criminal Irishmen. She’ll have to go back to Oxford and think of some way to possibly explain this. Flynn advises her to blame Karl. Everyone blames Karl. Karl’s used to it.

After Anton and Gennady assure them that they have it under control, and Lucy hugs them and makes them promise that they will come back to visit occasionally, it’s time to go. Flynn, Lucy, Rufus, Wyatt, Jiya, Ada, and Priscilla are loaded into the Mothership for one (or two) last jumps, and once they finally get to London, which indeed feels like Saint-Tropez in comparison, they make their way to Ada’s mansion in St. James’ Square. She apologizes for the lamentable state that it is sure to be in, though hopefully the other servants haven’t totally let it go to pot in her absence. She really does have to see about hiring a new butler, but she still can’t bring herself to think about replacing Woolsey. Maybe they’ll make do without for a while.

Once they’ve arrived and settled in, Flynn sits in the front parlor and stares out the window, watching people go by on the street. It’s close to Christmas, so there are holly sprigs and evergreen swatches, strings of lit candles, decorated trees in windows in the fashion that Queen Victoria and her family have popularized. Speaking of which, Ada has promised that she is going to go to Buckingham Palace personally (good, since Flynn himself does not want to come within sniffing distance of the damn place – once was enough, thanks) and insist that the criminal charges were misplaced, that he was fighting a greater enemy, and she would like to see the Government immediately remove any stain of obloquy or dishonor from his good name. Flynn’s grateful, he thinks. Though he’s still not sure he’d ever feel comfortable settling down openly in this city, he could at least give it a try.

He's still staring out into the winter mist, lost in a reverie, when the floorboards creak, and he jumps and turns to see Wyatt. He also doesn’t look completely thrilled about all of this, as well as hesitant about presuming to talk to Flynn alone, and holds up a hand, apologizing for the fright. “Hey. You got a minute?”

Flynn grunts, but jerks his head, and Wyatt perches on the striped-moiré armchair, staring at his hands. Then he says in a rush, “I can’t turn back.”

“What?”

“With all this talk about how to get your dude changed back into a human from an animal, you better believe I was asking questions, and…” Wyatt trails off. “I can’t. There is nothing magical or medicinal or that anyone has ever heard about that can stop me being a werewolf. I can keep taking that awful shit that knocks me out, and that way I won’t transform, but it also won’t get any better. If I ever miss a dose or can’t get it any more, I’ll turn back into that raving monster. So…” He blows out a long, painful breath. “I can’t go back. Home, I mean. I’m stuck here for good. You probably knew that, since you’re the monster hunter and all, but. Yeah.”

Flynn considers him. It’s true that he had never heard of any cure for lycanthropy, and he didn’t think one existed, but if Wyatt thought he could find one, more power to him. It’s a hard thing to have that flicker of hope stamped out, to know it’s the death sentence for any chance of seeing your home world again, and he nods awkwardly. “I’m sorry.”
“I guess I knew it in the back of my head for a while, but there was enough shit going on, and I pushed it away.” Wyatt looks down. “Anyway, according to Ada, W – Woolsey asked some other questions while he was out looking for Jiya, and there’s a chance that my wife is in Bedlam here, Bethlem, I mean. Bethlem Royal Hospital. Jiya thinks that Rittenhouse used something similar to Rufus’s device to get her and Jess here in the first place, as an attempt to have hostages against me and Lucy. That backfired, at least because Jiya escaped, but Jess could still be here. In London. Less than five miles away, and I – I can’t go to her. Because how do I do that? How do I go back to her and tell her that I’m a damn werewolf and expect everything to be fine? It’s probably better if she thinks I’m dead.”

Flynn has to admit, that would be a hard thing for a loved one to swallow right off the bat, especially one from a non-magical world and with no frame of reference. “So what, you’d rather leave her there in Bedlam, to grieve over a lie?”

“Of course I’m not leaving her in Bedlam.” Wyatt’s eyes spark with a brief yellow glare. “If she’s there, I’ll make sure I get her out. I’ll let her go back home too, if she wants. Rufus is going to take the Mothership on a final jump back to our world, to take back Anthony Bruhl and anyone else who wants to go. If Jess wants a seat, I… can’t stop her.”

“So Rufus and Jiya are leaving?” Flynn asks, as neutrally as he can. They are Lucy’s best friends and her partners in saving the world, their presence on the other side will be a significant counterweight. “For sure?”

“I think so. I don’t know. Anthony could technically pilot it himself, but Rufus isn’t letting the Mothership out of our sight until we can make sure it’s safely done and dusted. Has given him extensive marching orders on what to go back and do with Mason, apparently. So, yeah.”

“Tell Anthony he’d better do exactly that, or I’ll kill him.” Flynn is not at all bluffing with this threat, given as everyone is cognizant of the fear of Rittenhouse somehow surviving and reinventing itself in its home reality, even without Emma. “Do you trust him to?”

“I have no idea,” Wyatt says, “but he was no fan of Emma’s, and he was trying to sabotage Rittenhouse on this side. So if he can go back and sort it out with Connor, I think they’ll de-fang as much as they can. But.” He stops again. “Honestly, I’m not sure why I’m telling you all of this. I know we’re not friends or anything. I just… thought you should know.”

Flynn regards him. He obviously knows the pain of losing a wife, even if not in the same way as Wyatt, and part of him wants to grab the man and shake him and tell him if that if his Jessica is alive in any shape or form, he should spare no effort or expense in going back to her. The rest of him knows unshakably that some things cannot be undone, some monsters cannot be unmade. Flynn is not a werewolf, but he has been changed in the same way, or deeper, and he knows there’s no simple fix, no instant cure. He wishes he knew what to do, but he doesn’t.

“There’s another choice,” he says at length. “You stop taking the medicine. You transform on the full moon every month, yes, and it’s uncomfortable and painful and frightening, but each time, you’ll learn how to control it a little more. You saw back at Solovetsky that it’s possible, that you can be yourself even when you’re a wolf. There are places where you can go, away from humans, so you won’t hurt anyone while you’re learning the ropes. When you’ve sorted things out, you have more of your life together, you go to Jessica then, if she stays, and see what she has to say. Before that, you let her know that you’re alive and you want to see her, but right now, you can’t, and you’re working on that. She would understand. I’d hope so, at least.”

Wyatt’s throat quivers as he swallow. He glances away, the reflected light from the gaslamps falling on his face and throwing the faintest shadow of a wolf on the window. “That’s actually not terrible advice,” he says, sounding surprised. “It’s not like I have the hell of a lot of other options,
so I may give it a shot.”

“You’ll think of something.” Flynn glances at him with a thin but genuine smile. “If you’re staying in this world, you’ll learn how it goes.”

“I guess.” Wyatt lets out another breath. “I, uh, I hope things work out for you too, man. And no more concussing me and piano-wiring me up naked in a coal tender?”

“That was for your own good,” Flynn reminds him. “But I’ll do my best.”

“Thanks.” Wyatt gets up, stiffly holds out his hand for a shake, and Flynn obliges. “I’ll – I’ll see you around.”

After Wyatt has left, the parlor gets very quiet again, and Flynn wonders if he feels up to joining the others to eat. At last, his hunger outweighs his melancholy, and he gets up and heads to the back dining room, where the others look startled to see him. “H-hi,” Lucy says, her voice coming out as a squeak. “I was going to call you, but I didn’t know if you…”

Flynn can sense that that is about more than supper, and hesitates, then sits down next to her. Wyatt is gone, as is Ada, so it’s him, Lucy, Rufus, Jiya, and Priscilla, and he wonders if he can find a way to casually ask Lucy about her travel plans in this setting. It doesn’t seem likely. Finally he says, “So, you lot. Are you going home tomorrow, then?”

“We have a few things to finish up, but…” Rufus shrugs. “Ada asked if we wanted to spend Christmas here, and honestly, I don’t see any reason to rush back. We’re keeping an eye on Anthony, but he’s cooperating, and we shouldn’t mess around with extra or unnecessary trips between worlds, if the quantum fabric is fragile. So yeah, we’ll go when the holidays are over.”

Flynn feels a sudden, childish wish that the holidays would never end. He looks at Lucy, but she isn’t looking at him. “Good,” he agrees, with horrible, forced heartiness. “I’m sure you’re looking forward to getting back to your world.”

“A little, maybe,” Rufus agrees. “This place doesn’t have the internet or Xbox or other things that I consider indispensable, but it’s not bad. I mean, it’s still late-nineteenth-century Victorian England, so it’s deeply messed up by default, but everywhere is.”

“I want to take them up to Oxford,” Lucy says, speaking for the first time. “Rufus and Jiya. To show them around, where I’ve been living, what I’ve been doing. Besides, I have to explain this to Somerville eventually. I’ll be lucky if they don’t sack me on the spot.”

“Lady Lovelace won’t let that happen,” Priscilla assures her. “Mrs. Somerville was her old teacher, she makes generous donations to the college and she’s on the board of governors. You’ll have it as long as you want it.”

That makes Flynn’s innards turn another flip. Surely Lucy would not be worrying about losing her job if she was intending to leave it anyway? Or is it that she just wants it to end on tidy good terms, nothing more? He feels like he’s about to be sick, his appetite swiftly deserting him, and he pushes his plate away. He gets up to go, and then – just as before, when he pushed past Priscilla while blundering out of the tea party, and Iris’s agonizing screams were the prompt result – he stumbles against her, puts out a hand to steady himself, and catches her arm.

There is – at least – not any screaming. Priscilla goes tense, and something passes over her from head to toe, like wind over water. Something about her demeanor changes, and she blinks, confused. When she looks up at him, even in someone else’s eyes, Flynn recognizes her instantly, and his legs give out. He sits down on his chair with a crash, feeling like he is about to faint, as
Lorena reaches for his hand. Softly, gently, she says, “Garcia? Is that you?”

Flynn’s throat is too tight to get a breath through his throat, much less a word. He nods.

“Garcia. Look at you.” Lorena clucks in concern, reaching out to brush his unshaven chin, his disorderly cravat (if Ada was here, she would never have stood for him sitting at her table in such a state) and other signs of ill-repute. “You’ve been doing this to yourself for too long. You need to stop now, moi dragi. It’s over. We’re safe. We’re safe.”

Flynn stares back at her, even as his eyes start to fog with tears. “Iris – ?”

“She’s safe,” Lorena repeats, her own voice trembling. “She’s with me. We miss you, we miss you so much, but it’s all right now. It’s done. You don’t need to keep fighting.”

Flynn’s shoulders shake. His entire heart, his very soul, rattles and rattles like a coin spinning on a tabletop, about to tip and fall. “Lorena – what I’ve done, what I – ”

“I know,” his wife says, low and tender, impossibly forgiving. “I know, Garcia. I’ve seen it, I’ve seen it all. Let me go now, moi dragi. Let me go. You need to be happy again. It’s time.”

“I – ” Flynn has no words, and he cannot look at Lucy. Not that he expected Lorena to scream and rage, to blame him for just barely starting to move on three years after her death, but he feels the weight of all the time that was stolen from them, and he doesn’t know how to stand it. “Lorena – Lorena, moi ljubljen, I’m sorry. I should have saved you. I should have done more. I – I’m so sorry.”

“It’s all right,” Lorena whispers. “It’s done now. I love you, Garcia, you know that. But we have gone on. Is that her, then? Lucy?”

It is hard to say who is more startled by this, and from the looks of things, Lucy is almost about to jump up and bolt, for which Flynn would not blame her in the least. But she gathers herself and says croakily, “Yes. I’m Lucy.”

Lorena takes a long look at her through Priscilla’s eyes, and then smiles. “I like you,” she says. “You seem kind. Take care of Garcia. Keep him out of trouble. As I am sure you have noticed, he has a tendency to not be very bright.”

Flynn sputters, even as his heart is breaking a little at the last time he will ever be on the butt-end of some gentle wifely teasing – and even as her blessing, her acknowledgment, means more to him than he could ever put to words in any of the languages he knows. He reaches back for her, clutchers her hand, and Lorena lifts it to her mouth and kisses it. Then she says, “I’m going now, moi dragi. I’m going on. But I’ve always been with you, and in some ways, I always will be. You’ve been so brave. So brave. Now be brave enough to be happy. Volim te.”

“Volim te,” Flynn whispers back to her, even as he can see her fading, curling out of sight like the sweep of waves on a bright beach, somewhere warm and distant. “Uvijek i zauvijek.”

With that, as the rest of the room remains spellbound, she’s gone, and Flynn sits there, totally unable to move or speak, as Priscilla shakes her head and starts to come back to herself. Unlike before, when she almost passed out from the force of the encounter and his pain, she looks dreamy, slightly bemused, like waking up from a long and restful sleep and not sure what time it is. “Mr. Flynn?” She frowns. “Did I – are you all right?”

Flynn can’t say he’s fine, because he’s not, but he nods as encouragingly as he can. Then, startling both of them, he reaches over and squeezes her hand. “Thank you.”
This time, the touch doesn’t conjure anything or anyone, and it helps Flynn to believe that Lorena was telling the truth, that she and Iris have gone above and beyond, to somewhere where they will be happier, somewhere at rest. He takes a shaking breath, wipes his eyes on the napkin, and then, not feeling able to sit there and engage in any more pleasant dinnertime persiflage, gets to his feet. “I’m going to bed,” he says. “Good – good night.”

The upper halls of the Lovelace mansion are dim and deserted as he walks through them, with a memory of dumping Henry Morton Stanley’s corpse on the doorstep and conniving to surprise Lucy in Ada’s bedchamber. It seems like a thousand years and several lifetimes ago, which it may well be, and he makes his way to his room. As he did back in Arkhangelsk, he undresses, turns back the covers, and crawls in alone.

He sleeps, and he doesn’t. It’s hard to say exactly what it is, other than that he needs to try to take a breath, to turn himself back upright, before he sinks entirely. He almost can’t stand it, and he is simultaneously happier and more heartbroken than he has ever been in his life. He does not know how to face tomorrow. He has no idea who he is anymore. All his old selves and past identities have been burned away, and all that is left is Garcia. He has never liked that man much, never been entirely comfortable living in his skin. It seems, now, he has to.

As before, he is stirred by a soft sound at the door, and a small shadow slipping through. This time, however, Lucy does not presume to an invitation, does not move closer on her own. She just stands there, an angel in the moonlight with more than a touch of the fae still lingering about her to Flynn’s eyes, until she finally whispers, “Can I come to bed with you?”

“Yes.” Flynn sits upright, the covers slipping down his chest. “Yes. Yes.”

Lucy hesitates a split second longer, and then she does not at all. With deliberate thoroughness, she undresses, and this time, does not leave on the chemise. She pulls it over her head and casts it on the floor, the silver glow painting her skin as white and fine as porcelain. Then she takes a step, and then another, and almost runs. Climbs up onto the bed, crawls beneath the covers with him, and at long last, in the real world, in the here and now, they touch.

Flynn cups her head in both hands, almost engulfing it, as Lucy sighs into his mouth and wraps both arms around his shoulders, as they kiss and turn their heads and pull back a breath and kiss again, as he lets go and traces down her slender shoulders, her arms, her torso and her waist. She takes hold of the hem of his nightshirt and pulls it over his head, and he shrugs it off. They giggle breathlessly at their own nerve, like shocked schoolchildren. Then he grabs her with both arms, spins her down into the pillows beneath him, and swings a knee over her hip. “Lucy – ”

“Yes,” she breathes back to him, an echo of his own. “Yes. Yes.”

That, at last, is all he needs. He reaches down to touch her gently, to stroke and open her, and she arches up into his hand with a small, starving whimper. He caresses her for a few moments longer, and would gladly keep it up for a while, but she’s pulling and hauling on him in a way that is anything but patient, and Garcia Flynn is a firm believer in giving his woman what she wants. He shifts his weight, presses at her, and Garcia Flynn is a firm believer in giving his woman what she wants. He shifts his weight, presses at her, and then, as she clasps hold of his hips, slides into her. She is warm and soft, wet and sweet, and she feels so very much like home.

Lucy bucks slightly beneath him, adjusting the alignment of their bodies, musing kisses over the breadth of his shoulders and in the hollow of his throat. She moans, low in her throat, as her legs sprawl open to each side of his. He has the presence of mind to reach out and grab a pillow, which he tucks under her lower back, and that raises her toward him in new and exciting ways. He braces his hands on either side of her head, looks down at her flushed and tousle-haired, eyes dark with desire and mouth open, and thinks that indeed, he could get used to this.
Lucy lets out a soft whimper when he starts to thrust, as she digs her heels into the mattress and lifts her hips up to him even further, giving all of herself and then some. It is slow and thorough and inexorable as dark waves, and while Flynn has not read Shakespeare in a long time, the words float to mind nonetheless, Juliet speaking to Romeo. *My bounty is as boundless as the sea, my love as deep. The more I have, the more I give to thee, for both are infinite.*

Flynn certainly hopes that this story ends better than that one, though there is also a star-crossed lovers element to it, unfortunately. But Romeo and Juliet are a pair of stupid kids who can’t sort it out, who don’t know what to do, who cause collateral damage, who die. It’s a tragedy for a reason, not a love story to really aspire to. And yet, Flynn thinks. Much as that also sounds like him and Lucy – or like him, to be fair – it’s not. Not entirely. Maybe they can take all that, what they are now, and do what the younger lovers could not, and live.

It seems strange. No, it seems *impossible,* and more than a little terrifying. And yet, he knows beyond all doubt that it is the only thing he wants. He can’t force Lucy to stay in this world, not if she does not want to. And yet, he is beginning to wonder, to hope, to believe that she just might. Here, with him. Together. Not in Faerie, not as a magical benediction, but as the start of something real.

“*Volim te,*” he whispers to her as they are losing themselves, as it becomes no longer two, but now – perhaps, for always – one. “*Jako te volim.*”

At that, Flynn registers dimly that he’s speaking in Croatian, which he doesn’t think she understands. But as she sighs and gasps, as she lifts her mouth to be kissed, and he does, he does, *he does,* she whispers back, as if it needs no translation at all, “I love you. I love you. *I love you.* So much.”
The train pulls into Paddington at half past two, sounding its whistle in a few short, important blasts, and as they hiss and grind to a halt, Lucy glances out the window and recalls her first sight of this city, from an arriving airship at the Greenwich docks. It never changes much, except to grow larger and smokier and full of more steel and steam and invention; she’s fascinated by all of them, by just what this increasingly modern magical world is going to look like. In the last two years, there has been an explosion of new prototypes and designs, an unprecedented amount of access to scholarly archives. It turns out that Rittenhouse was strictly embargoing almost all of them, and now that they’re gone, there has been a wave of reform and liberalization in popular education and attitudes to magic. Oxford has even reluctantly instituted a magical history and theory course (they insist that it is not for practical use, much to the disappointment of countless enterprising undergraduates) that you can get into without having been born a baronet. (You still basically have to have attended Eton or Harrow anyway, so there’s not much difference, but baby steps.) It is April 1889, and England is afire with dreams of science and sorcery.

Lucy grins to herself, then gets to her feet, waiting for Flynn to reach down their bags, which he does. It is useful to have a tall man on hand to accomplish these sort of tasks, among others, and at least she no longer receives scandalized looks as a Purveyor of Moral Looseness when she rides the train, though she’s not sure that’s an upgrade. This world does, after all, have problems.

The train door opens, they join the queue, and Flynn offers Lucy a hand to step down and out into the station. A boy comes running at the unconscionable sight of a well-to-do-couple carrying their own luggage, but Flynn curtly waves him off, though he does toss him a bob for his trouble. They maneuver through the crowd and out to the vaucanson rank, which Flynn also gives the fish-eye, but he seems to decide that the clockwork carriages pass muster. He helps Lucy up into the nearest one, shuts the door, and orders, “Number twelve, St. James’ Square.”

There’s a whirl and a click as the gears start to run, and the vaucanson rolls away from the curb and into the throng of midafternoon London traffic. This one appears to have been programmed by an especially daring individual, since it zooms directly toward slow hansoms or hackneys or costermongers as if determined to make them move or run them over, and Lucy can see her husband visibly regretting his transportation choices. She lays a hand on his arm, partially in an attempt to lower his blood pressure. “We’re not going to die, you know.”

“If this blasted tocker doesn’t stop driving like a maniac, we might.” Flynn throws a black look at the machine in question. “I knew there was a reason I still hated them.”

Lucy raises an eyebrow. She can’t blame him for his residual dislike of automatons, since they also give her a jolt when she catches sight of one unexpectedly, but at least it’s less of a start than it used to be. Honestly, she’s more worried about the fact of being out with Flynn in public, in London. The charges have been dropped, he was even given a medal with the others for his service in saving the world from disaster (now that was an interesting event, with Victoria looking like she wished he would drop dead as she pinned it to his lapel and he threw out the world’s sassiest, “Thank you, Your Majesty”), but people don’t just forget overnight, or in two years, that you were a major and terrifying crime boss. His face is still burned into collective memory from the broadsheets and the wanted posters. What if someone – ?

“We’ll be fine,” Flynn says, picking up on her disquiet the same way she noted his. “That is the one thing I am not worried about. Besides, we’ll mostly be at Ada’s anyway, or in other places where it’s considered bad manners to shoot your guests.” He shrugs. “Though I do have a gun, just in case.”
“Of course you do,” Lucy sighs. Not that she should throw too many stones, as she has only recently gotten to the place where she doesn’t want to carry her revolver everywhere she goes, and she isn’t going to argue with Flynn’s protective instinct. They have been married for not quite a year – the wedding was in July 1888 at Ockham Park, Ada’s country estate in Surrey. The gang actually washed for the occasion, Karl was the best man, the Sokolovs walked Lucy down the aisle, and Wyatt and Jessica Logan, who have tentatively reunited and are working on their marriage, were present too. It was good to see Wyatt. He’s been going through a lot.

The carriage bumps over a pothole, nearly executes another pedestrian, and finally weaves into St. James’ Square. The trees are green and flowering, parasol-carrying ladies stroll on the arms of top-hatted gentlemen, and the vaucanson comes to a halt in front of number twelve. Flynn puts a few shillings in the box, the door opens, and he steps out first, hands Lucy down, and then retrieves the suitcases. They’re in London for the rest of the Oxford term break, about a fortnight, and Lucy will be visiting Emmeline Pankhurst in Russell Square, as she’s involved in the British suffragette movement, and giving a few guest lectures at King’s and University Colleges. She is a permanent professor at Somerville, where her perceived eccentricity is a considerable point of pride. She has the sense they just hope she’ll get up and do something else shocking, which is… flattering. It’s nice to have a reputation as a firebrand. And if Flynn is no longer poking the establishment in the eye (at least openly), then really, one of them should.

They head up the steps and ring the bell, and right on cue, Mr. Percival opens it. He is Mr. Woolsey’s replacement, and has vast butlering shoes to fill – a fact of which he is keenly aware and tends to overcompensate. He is appropriately solicitous over their journey from Oxford, whether Mrs. Flynn would like to sit down with a cool drink (he still gives Mr. Flynn a Look, but says nothing) and that he will inform Lady Lovelace that they have arrived. But he does not need to actually do this. There is a clunk of a cane on the grand staircase, and a voice says, “Lucy, dear? Is that you? Oh, I have been so excited.”

Lucy turns, biting her lip, as Ada hobbles into sight. The main purpose of this visit is really to spend as much time with her as they can. Ada isn’t imminently on her deathbed, but she’s seventy-four, has been frail and ailing for months, and everyone is aware that there aren’t going to be many more of them. She originally died at the age of thirty-six from uterine cancer, and Lucy has toyed with the idea of contacting Rufus and Jiya on the Refractory-Glass. Dodgson has been able to make a vastly improved model with all the new information available, and Lucy can call home and even see their faces, though it’s still a lag time of several minutes. Ask Rufus to come back and take Ada to a modern hospital for treatment. He could do that. They destroyed the Mothership, but retrieved and retained the Lifeboat, just in case, and were even able to get it modified to take three people cross-dimensionally. Rufus and Jiya went back to Earth and have been working with Anthony and Connor to dismantle Rittenhouse’s organizational and business fronts, and Rufus has floated the idea that they might return to Westworld later, you never know. He’s tried not to mess with the quantum fabric, and Lucy knows that, but for Ada –

“My dear,” Ada says, reaching the bottom of the stairs and regarding Lucy with total delight. “Oh, you look well, don’t you? You look quite blooming. It will be… July, then?”

“Yes.” Lucy puts a hand on her belly, a little self-consciously. She is almost six months pregnant, and refuses to squash herself into corsets anymore, fashionable or otherwise, so she presents a rather expansive frontage. “Everything’s gone well thus far.”

Ada nods firmly. “Yes, of course it has. You over there, you’ve been treating her like a proper queen, I imagine? Oh, don’t just stand there and skulk. I am, essentially speaking, your mother-in-law, so come here at once and give me a kiss.”

Flynn raises both eyebrows, but advances as instructed, bends almost in half, and bestows a
scrupulously correct air kiss on each of Ada’s wrinkled cheeks, as she does the same for him. He is about to pull away, but she grabs his cravat. “Staying out of trouble, I presume?”

“Yes,” Flynn says, as diplomatically as possible when once more being held hostage by an elderly woman. “Oxford is lovely, we have a house in Jericho. I’ve had… a number of projects to occupy myself.”

“I wish I could see it.” A shadow passes over Ada’s face. “Alas, the doctors insist that I am too weak to travel, and I cannot say that I would enjoy a dirty great journey on the train. What projects do you mean, exactly?”

Flynn actually looks embarrassed, so it is left to Lucy to disclose that he has turned out to be nearly as fervid a history nerd as she is, has been reading half the Bodleian and attending lectures at the Exam Schools, and accidentally landed in a position to graduate from St. John’s next year with a First. (Contingent on him not blowing his thesis, which is about the history of monster-hunting and how these monsters have been made in the first place, but she somehow thinks he won’t have to worry about that.) At that, Ada giggles out loud. “You? Sitting in the library with all those insufferable young men in starched collars? They must be terrified of you.”

“They are,” Flynn says, with considerable self-satisfaction. “I never have to look too hard for a carrel space. And once some idiot from Oriel asked if I was the groundskeeper and had gotten lost, so I punched him.”

“Well, you’re still a horrible scoundrel.” Ada looks as if she can’t wait to hear all his stories of literally schooling condescending dicks. “Let’s do go sit down.”

They follow her to the parlor at the back, which has been redone since they last saw it, and take their seats. Mr. Percival wheels in a tea cart loaded with cakes, crumpets, cream, and sandwiches, pours an excellent Darjeeling, and looks mildly horrified when Flynn eschews the tiny silver tongs in favor of removing a sugar cube from the bowl with his fingers. Once he has bowed himself out, Ada sighs. “He is very good at his job, I will confess. But I do miss Mr. Woolsey. I daresay it’s something of a blessing that I’m not strong enough to be terribly scandalous anymore, but I do try.”

Lucy nods, and the conversation proceeds more or less normally from there. Ada can’t get out to tweak the Analytical Engine at UCL anymore, so she’s taught Priscilla how to do it, among other things; Priscilla is pursuing a degree in mathematics and computational analysis, and seems certain to dazzle the steam world with her forthcoming patents. She’s also managed to harness and control her unusual gift, and funds her studies by holding séances for rich Londoners. They of course want “Madame Priscilla” with heavy makeup and foreign accent and dramatic airs, so that is what Priscilla obligingly gives them. “Who knows,” Ada adds, with gallows humor. “Perhaps you’ll still be able to speak with me even after I… well. Expire.”

“You could…” Lucy hesitates. “You know, I could contact Rufus. I could ask him to come back with the Lifeboat, and take you to the other side. To my world. There are modern hospitals, there are huge advances in medicine and technology. We could get you treatment that hasn’t even been thought of here yet. You still have so much more to do, Ada. To see.”

“Travel to your world?” Ada looks startled. “That is an intriguing offer – and I can’t deny that I’d love to go on one more adventure, even in my dotty old invalid state. But dear Mr. Carlin showed me some of the equations and the programming that he used to arrive here, and he did say that the fabric between worlds was rather unstable and should be left in peace to mend, with no more ill-advised meddling about from any of us. I can’t see that it’s an acceptable risk to endanger all of that on one silly old woman’s behalf. Besides, I’d be away from my home, from all my comforts and my work – and away from the both of you. We all have to die eventually. I just do hope I can
“Ada – ” Lucy reaches over the table and catches her hand. “I don’t – ”

“It’s all right, dear.” The countess pats her cheek with her frail, papery fingers. “I’m really quite settled about it, you see. I’ve left a substantial sum of money to you and Mr. Flynn, and an endowment for scholarships at Somerville. I thought about leaving you the houses as well, but alas, I must bequeath them to my horrible children. I’m tired of being old and feeble and ill. It will be, by and large, a great relief to die. Like falling asleep, I suspect. That’s not so bad.”

Lucy doesn’t answer, still choked with tears, until she finally takes Ada’s hand and presses it to her belly, so Ada can feel the baby moving. Ada exclaims admiringly over the little one’s strength, remarks that they had all better pray it does not take after its father, and hands Flynn another crumpet to soften the blow somewhat. The conversation revives from the solemn moment, and they’re back to chattering happily by the time tea is cleared away. Ada says there’s supper planned for later, and in the meantime, they have a few hours to themselves if they’d like to have a wash and a nap. Their room is upstairs, as ever.

Lucy and Flynn leave Ada in the sunny parlor and head up to the bedchamber, where Mr. Percival has brought their luggage. Once they shut the door, Flynn shucks his jacket and shoes, and seems about to lie down for a quick snooze, when Lucy catches his arm and turns him toward her. “Are you actually that tired?”

“Oh?” Flynn raises both eyebrows at her, and does the tongue thing. “Did you have other ideas for how we were planning to spend the time?”

“Maybe.” Lucy nestles closer. Pregnancy has done quite a few interesting things to her, but it has also and indisputably made her, well, very horny. Once the first-trimester sickness and fatigue and general malaise wore off, and before she’s too huge to do anything except pee constantly and vainly long to see her feet, there’s the second-trimester “glow” that gets talked about, and to her great surprise, Lucy is in fact glowing. She really enjoys having sex with Flynn anyway, which is the reason she got into her present predicament, but it’s been heightened times several. She reaches up to run her fingers through his hair. “What if I did?”

Flynn pretends to grumble, which even he cannot pull off remotely convincingly. He walks backwards to the bed and sits on it, and even then, Lucy barely has to bend down to kiss him. They explore each other’s mouths slowly and tenderly at first, then with a bit more nipping and intensity, and Flynn’s deft fingers make short work of the fiendishly complicated buttons on the back of Lucy’s traveling dress. He helps her out of it as she unclicks his suspenders and untucks his shirt, then slides it off his shoulders. One of the other perks of not wearing a corset anymore is that you don’t have to spend valuable time unlacing it when trying to get down to business with your man, which Lucy appreciates. It is a deeply sensual garment in the right circumstances, but also, let’s be real, a very obnoxious one.

Once they have stripped down to their skins, warm spring-afternoon sunlight slanting on the bed, Flynn links an arm around her and pulls her into his lap, eyeing her with a very appreciative expression. Pregnancy has also been quite spectacular for Lucy’s boobs, though she likes to think they weren’t that bad before, and Flynn has been a vocal fan of her new and intriguing curves. Which is nice, since she’s slightly self-conscious the way any woman is when her body is quickly changing, and he muses kisses across her chest, running his hands along her sides and her swollen belly, under her ass and along the line of her thighs. “Mmm,” he murmurs, licking at the pulse point under her jaw, then shifting them around. “On your back, moja žena.”

Lucy hesitates, then goes down under his light but insistent touch, as he settles himself halfway atop her. He kisses her belly, then works his way lower, and spreads her legs, moving his mouth
between them. Lucy is extremely sensitive right there just now, and she arches her back, grabbing at the covers, as he parts her folds with his tongue, giving her clit a little flick and seeming to weigh up the numerous possibilities as to how to proceed from here. When she wriggles again, he gives her a chastising look. “Hold still. I’m doing something.”

“Yes,” Lucy mutters, rather cross-eyed. “Yes, you are.”

Flynn smirks at her, because of course he does, and kisses her lower lips with intent, lingering attention. She is already wet, but he takes his time about making her more so, his rough stubble rasping on the tender skin of her inner thighs. She may have rug burn later, but it’s such a terrible price to pay for having a tall, gorgeous husband who totally adores you and every inch of your body and soul. She runs her fingers through his hair, trying not to pull, even as she jerks and quivers against his mouth, almost unable to bear the shivers of exquisite sensation that radiate outward from her core. “Ungh,” she says. “Garcia, I want you inside me.”

“Just a minute.” Flynn is annoyingly thorough about everything, which can likewise be a character virtue or flaw depending on the circumstances. “I like to look at you like this, moja ljubav. You are as beautiful as a blossoming rose.”

“Ngh.” This is very poetic and romantic of him to say, but Lucy has needs. She tugs at him again, pulling him up on the bed to change places, and pushes him onto his back instead. She’s not quite so big as to make him on top totally impossible, but it’s definitely starting to be an issue, and she also likes to see him like this, this terrifying murder machine totally yielded to her, at her beck and call, carried away in the pleasure of their union. She straddles him, takes hold of him in her hand, warm and hard, and helps him slide slickly into her.

Flynn utters a soft, satisfied grunt as he enters her, arching his hips to assist the angle, as he takes hold of hers and pulls her more solidly against him. They rock together to slow and savor the sensation, until he lets out a stuttering breath and fucks up into her with a quick, deliberate thrust. She bites a moan, leaning forward onto all fours above him, as he twists his head to bite at her breast, almost hard enough to leave a mark. He soothes it with his tongue, then takes her mouth instead, pressing a hand on the small of her back to bring them closer together. Lucy can feel him moving inside her with soft, slow flutters, the same way their child is, and it makes her gulp and groan. “Faster,” she says. “Faster.”

Flynn has almost lost the capacity to be sassy at this point (as well established, it takes a lot), but he still waggles an eyebrow as if to say that someone doesn’t need to be so impatient, they’ll get to everything in good time. Nonetheless, he does start to move faster, as their bodies roll and move together in matching rhythm. Lucy has discovered that being married to a man a literal foot taller than you can present some logistical difficulties in this department, but they have managed to compensate (practice, that’s the key), and she moans again at the strength and depth of his strokes. “Yes,” she breathes. “Yes, there, yes.”

Flynn answers with some indistinct comment in Croatian (she’s picked up a little of it, though what he says in moments like this is usually untranslatable) and she presses harder, biting her lip, knees digging into the sheets, as even the heavy, carved-oak bedstead bumps a little and she devoutly hopes that Mr. Percival is not dusting the paintings right outside the door. But what the hell, they are married. Ada certainly won’t be shocked. They have every right to be engaging themselves thusly, and even if not, Lucy wouldn’t care.

Her climax catches her almost unexpectedly, short at first and then longer, approaching on quick, rough strokes and then washing over her like a warm sunrise sea. She gulps, swears, and almost collapses on Flynn’s chest, sweat trickling under her hair, as he bucks up into her for a few last thrusts and then tumbles over the edge as well. They lie there for several moments, gasping, before he turns her to a more comfortable position on her side and wraps both arms around her shoulders.
“Volim te,” he murmurs. “Volim te.”

That Lucy does know, because there has barely been a day when he does not say it to her in some shape or form, and she presses a wordless kiss to his temple. She does not regret her decision to stay, she cannot possibly. Sometimes there’s the moment of longing for a modern convenience, or wishing they had Netflix, or wanting to tell some particularly insufferable male chauvinist that he is super-duper on the wrong side of history and to shove his patriarchal bullshit where the sun don’t shine. (Often she just does this anyway, but in the scathingly polite fashion of throwing burns that the upper class has to perfect.) But she doesn’t really miss her old life at all. She does miss Rufus and Jiya, she misses them a lot, but at least they can talk, and she still hopes that they’ll come back too one day. Yet after everything that world and that past did to her, and everything that she has found and built here, she is entirely at peace with her choice, and besides. There’s him. Garcia Flynn, the most unlikely love of her life, her soulmate and her husband and the father of her child, and the second beginning they’re somehow managing to make. It is impossible, it is cosmic, and yet, here they are. Together.

Lucy lets out a long, slow breath, kisses Flynn again, and they lie there, tangled in comfortable silence, until the light begins to recede off the walls and they reluctantly decide that it’s time to get up and dress for supper. They sit up, swing their legs over the side of the bed, and open the suitcases to extract proper evening wear. Lucy ties his cravat and he laces up her dress, then conscientiously assists her in re-doing her hair so it does not look like, well, you know. He wets a comb and parts his own, neatly flattening it down, and they inspect their reflections for suitability in the mirror before they head downstairs.

When they step into the dining room, Lucy lets out a sound of surprise and delight as the Sokolovs – both scrubbed to within an inch of their lives, cheeks glowing raw pink, and looking about to burst out of their ties and tails at any moment – jump to their feet to bow gallantly over her hand. “You are looking very well,” Anton says. “When is little one coming?”

“That’s not my style.” Lucy stands on her tiptoes to hug them. “I didn’t realize you were in town.”

“We have done GOOD WORK in St. Petersburg,” Gennady assures her. “Gotten rid of Rittenhouse bas – BAD PEOPLE. Not yet tsar, though. So we soon GO BACK.”

It’s on the tip of Lucy’s tongue to tell them that they’ll have a while to wait for that, but you never know. Perhaps this world isn’t doomed to play out the exact repeat of its neighbor a few realities over. The future is not yet set in stone, after all, and for once, she doesn’t feel afraid of that. She just smiles at them again, demands to hear everything they have been up to, and they are chatting away when there’s a rustle at the door and Ada enters, splendidly dressed in silk and jewels and elegantly coiffed hair. “Ah, Lucy, dear,” she says. “I see you’ve caught up with our extra guests. I was sure you wouldn’t mind.”

“Please, of course not.” Lucy thinks briefly of another dinner party here, and her dearest spouse dropping a dead man on the doorstep. “At least these ones are alive.”

Flynn coughs, correctly interpreting this as a dig on him, and dutifully takes his medicine. Unlike that sprawling soiree, this one is small and intimate, with the table set for five and the chandelier burning with atmospheric golden light overhead. It’s a very nice spring night, long and green and soft, and Ada orders Mr. Percival to open the windows and let the fresh air in. The food is good, the drink is plentiful (Lucy sticks to water), and they have a lot to catch up on. Time does that thing where it slips away like sand, where it doesn’t matter, and she almost wishes that this evening could in fact last forever. She doesn’t think she’d mind.

At last, the tall grandfather clock’s hands are inching inexorably toward midnight, the candles are almost burned out, and everyone is finally thinking that they should retire. They have moved to
the front parlor for more sherries and desserts, and they can see the streetlamps burning out in St. James’ Square. “Well,” Lucy says reluctantly. “I suppose it is rather late?”

“Oh, yes. I suppose it is.” Ada sighs. “But I’m sure Mr. Percival has one more bottle he could be persuaded to dig up, for those of us who are imbibing. Otherwise – ”

Just then, something odd happens. The streetlamps are suddenly and swiftly extinguished, plunging the palatial houses and the park square into velvet darkness. The lamp burning in the parlor goes dim and guttering as well, then snuffs out, and everyone utters communal sounds of surprise. But as Ada is about to ring the bell for Mr. Percival, Lucy senses something, has some vestigial memory, and puts out a hand to stop her. “No,” she says. “I – no.”

Ada looks at her, confused, but does not summon the butler. A gust of breeze blows through the open window, fluttering the curtains, and in the absence of the lights outside, Lucy can see the stars peering through, here and there. She can smell something strange and green and growing. Flowered vines are beginning to twine up the lampposts, and there is a distant chime of bells that does not come from any parish church in London calling the midnight hour. And at the far side of the square, gliding out of the darkness, she can see a man on a horse, riding toward them, but the hooves make no sound at all on the cobblestones. She thinks someone might be sitting on the saddle behind him, holding around his waist, but can’t see who.

All at once, Lucy gets to her feet and hurries out of the parlor, as Flynn, Ada, and the Sokolovs bounce up and scurry after her (Anton stopping to offer Ada his arm in support). They reach the front hall together, as everyone is thoroughly mystified. “Lucy, dear,” Ada says. “Lucy, are you feeling quite all right? Is it the baby, is something wrong?”

“No, nothing’s wrong.” Lucy can feel her pulse fluttering in her fingers, in her throat. “I just – he’s here. I saw him, I can feel his magic. He’s here.”

“Matija Korvin?” Flynn must have felt it as well, and he looks deeply alarmed, grabbing out for Lucy as if she might suddenly be snatched from his arms. “What, did he change his mind about letting us go? Or did he – ”

He is likewise interrupted by the sound of one crisp knock on the front door. It echoes in a lingering way, and does not come again.

Lucy reaches out, and opens it.

She can taste the rarefied air of Faerie, the glamor of its distant mountains and tall towers, hear the eerie, lovely music and see all the creatures dancing, dancing. But what awaits before her is a young, dark-haired, handsome man, wearing his iron crown. He is dressed in white, and the horse is white, and he glows with an unearthly radiance, brilliant and ethereal, as he gazes down at her. “Lucy Preston,” Matija Korvin says. “Good evening.”

Lucy can’t get words out. She has never seen him like this, even in all her own days and nights as his queen, and she doesn’t know why he’s here. Like Flynn, she has a brief terror that he has come to summon her back into Faerie, and scrambles to think of anything to do if he does. “My lord,” she manages, inclining her head. “It’s… good to see you.”

Matija nods regally back, and then swings down, dismounting from the horse, as his boots leave brief white flashes where they touch Ada’s front stoop. “I have someone for you.”

With that, he reaches up for the other person sitting behind him, who is dressed in rags and looks dazed. Her hair is long and tangled with leaves and vines and twigs, and for a moment, Lucy doesn’t recognize her, even as Matija offers her a hand down and turns her around to face the
Others. Then at once, and totally impossibly, she does. “A – Amy?”

Her sister blinks slowly, frowning, like a sleeper rising from a very long dream and altogether unsure of reality. But at that, her eyes begin to focus. “Lucy?” she whispers. “Lucy?”

“Amy. Oh my God. Amy.” Lucy can’t breathe, tears starting to spill uncontrollably, as she grabs at Amy’s hands. They’re pale and bony, but solid, and there is a warmth in her skin that comes from living flesh and not fell enchantment. “Amy. Oh my God. Is it – Amy, is that you?”

“Lucy?” Amy grips back just as hard. “Lucy, where am I? Is this real? Am I alive?”

“I th-think so.” Lucy can feel her shoulders, her entire body shaking, as she pushes Amy’s tangled hair out of her face and takes her in. “Matija said he’d go looking for you, in the far-off places, and he – he must have – ”

At that, her confused explanations desert her, she has no more breath for it anyway, and the two of them can only clutch each other, swaying and sobbing, sinking in a tangled heap onto the floor of the front hall and crying harder. Finally, Amy struggles to get hold of herself, gulping and rubbing her eyes, taking in Lucy’s clothes and appearance and general demeanor, blinking over and over. “Oh my God, you look so different. Older. Are you – are you pregnant?”

“Yes, I am. I’m married, too.” Lucy giggles helplessly. “There’s a lot I need to tell you.”

Amy nods weakly, still too flabbergasted to say much, as Lucy remembers that they have an audience and struggles to get to her feet, before Flynn moves in and lifts her up. His hands remain protectively around her arms, even as he has made due reverence to the King, and his gaze flicks warily between them. “Matija – we are honored, of course, but if you’ve come to – ”

“I came to return her sister, as I promised.” Matija continues to shimmer in pale glow as he stands there, almost too handsome and too unreal to look at directly. “And to make an offer. If you, perhaps, might wish to return with me to my land?”

For a moment, Lucy thinks this is in fact directed at her, and has a brief and total panic about how to refuse it. But then she realizes that it wasn’t to her at all. Matija is not looking at her, but is holding his hand out to Ada.

“I – well. Oh my.” Ada blinks several times, stunned. “That is – well, that is most – oh my. Go with you? I’m not sure what use you’d have for an ill old woman, but – ”

“There is neither age nor death nor sickness in my land.” Matija smiles faintly. “And I think that you would make a most praiseworthy queen.”

Ada opens and shuts her mouth. She is at a loss for words, even as Lucy thinks of the book she bought at Blackwell’s a few months ago. It was a handsome volume of fairytales, and “The Tale of the Raven Queen” was included, though she’s sure that she’s never seen that story before. And yet, she’s discovered other places where the Raven Queen has appeared, corners of the world or small charms or old books that mention her, and the Raven Queen always seems to wear a familiar face. Lucy has become part of that story, in past and in present alike, and yet, she thinks, it wasn’t always her. Sometimes, looking back at the illuminations and the illustrations, the Queen ruling in her land, all she saw was Ada.

“I would…” Ada has to stop and compose herself. “Go away with you, and start again? To have more time? For my mathematics and my work, for everything?”

“Anything that you wish.” Matija nods. “Time is nothing there either. So if you desire, Augusta Ada Byron King, Lady Lovelace, you can leave those old names behind, and be only the Queen.”
Ada hesitates a moment longer, even as Lucy can see it dawning on her face. She looks down, almost shy, the one thing that Ada rarely is, and then up, back at him. “I…” She can barely get the words out. “I would rather love that.”

Matija holds out his hand, and Ada moves as if to put her own into it. Then she stops. “Wait. Wait, I have to say – I have to say a few things. If I may?”

Matija nods again, stepping back, and Ada turns to Lucy. They regard each other for a moment, then hug fiercely, holding on, holding on. “Be good,” Ada whispers. “But not too good. It wouldn’t stand to get boring, dear. I wish you all the days and years of happiness that any one woman can have. Look after that rascal, and love him well. Your child too. I do expect you’ll have a few more. Don’t be lonely.”

Lucy can’t answer, even as Ada kisses her on the forehead and cheeks, then lets go. She turns to Flynn, he coughs and clears his throat and offers his hand as if for a shake, but she completely ignores it and wraps her arms around him instead. Flynn looks startled, then hugs her too. “Moja kraljica,” he says. “I’ll look for you in the skies and the stars.”

Ada sniffs, then steps back, even as she turns to the Sokolovs and they both bend down to kiss her hand. “You are great lady,” Anton says. “This is right for you. We will miss.”

“The pair of you should find some nice Russian girls too, by the way. Oh, and don’t tell Mr. Percival that I was carried off into Faerie, would you? He might have the vapors.”

With that, she pats Gennady once more on the shoulder, squeezes Lucy’s hand, and then turns back to Matija. “I’m ready,” she says. “I’m ready now.”

The Raven King smiles, and it so transforms his face that the entire night seems to sing out, in strange and shatteringly sweet song. He holds out his hand, and this time, she takes it.

In that moment, Ada Lovelace changes. Her silver hair melts away and turns as smooth and dark as the cheek of night, her bent spine straightens, her wrinkles vanish, and her dress and her jewels gleam with a different light. Charles Babbage’s “Enchantress of Numbers” stands there in the full flush of her beauty and youth, pink-cheeked and fresh as a daisy, as she looks at herself and lets out a shocked giggle of utter delight. Matija hands her up onto the horse, then steps up light as a cloud himself, and Ada takes hold around his waist. Rather slyly, she inquires, “So, if we are married, I expect you’ll be a much more… attentive… husband than dull old William?”

“As you command, my queen.” Matija actually winks at her, and lifts the reins. He regards Lucy, Amy, Flynn, and the Sokolovs, then inclines his head and turns the horse around. They canter off across the square, and Ada glances back only once, at her old house, her old life, her old friends. Then she turns away, and Lucy hears her laugh.

It is hard to say when they’re gone. Lucy watches as long as she can, and yet she still isn’t sure. She is only aware of the streetlamps coming back on, and the flowering vines staring to fade, and the world settling back into its place, in the peculiar magic of the days growing longer, and the nights rushing on. She knows that she is standing there with her husband and her sister and her friends, and tears still trickle down her cheeks even as she smiles so hard that her face hurts, and that it is over, and it is well.

Flynn puts his arm around her, and Lucy nestles into his side, laying her head on his chest. She wants to talk to Amy for hours, wants to make sense of it all at once, but that too will come in time. She wants to go to bed with the man she loves, and sleep, and dream.
And so, as the last streetlamp glows again, and the moon trembles like a fine fat pearl, she does. Lucy Preston Flynn closes the door, and goes inside, and lives.

THE END.

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