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## The Runners of Shawnee Road

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The Runners of Shawnee Road

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
The University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film, Theater and Communication Arts  
Creative Writing

by

Melissa Remark

B.A. Trent University, 2010  
Diploma, Humber College, 2000

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*The Sheeny Man rides through the streets pulling his wagon of junk. Sometimes he is black, sometimes he is white, and sometimes he is French. It depends on where he comes from. Either way, the Sheeny Man rarely says a word and always smells worse than his donkey. His cart comes buzzing with flies and rabid raccoons nesting in the piles. Always mumbling under his sour breath, he prays for odds and ends. He has hardly any teeth left in his mouth at all, but the ones that remain wiggle around when he pushes them with his purple tongue.*

*The little ones hide inside their homes when they hear the Sheeny Man's bell approach. Maman never sells anything to the Sheeny Man, but she saves up what she no longer wants or needs in the back of the car shed, and gives it away when he comes down Shawnee Road. When Tecumseh children are bad, their mamans say, "You be good, or we'll sell you to the Sheeny Man." No girl was threatened as many times as Lulu Marceau. She used to wonder where the Sheeny Man would take her if Maman ever made good on her word.*

*When the children grow up, they realize the truth. The Sheeny Man is just an old gypsy who needs other folk's rubbish to live. He fixes their broken things, makes them new again, and sells them away somewhere. This is what he does. And the people need him, too. Otherwise, they would live in piles of garbage. Life is hard enough.*

## ONE

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Heat lightning flashed violet in an early evening sky above the thick Detroit River. It bounced off the windows and bronze patina towers, off the limestone and brick walls of Detroit's new skyscrapers. Great ascending steel puzzles of construction lit up above. Momentary spotlights illuminated the Gothic steeples of the city's cathedrals, onto storefronts down to the avenues where clusters of cars and trucks and streetcars lined up to inch forward at traffic posts. The faces of Detroiters turned up to catch the jagged lightning tails overhead; businessmen and ladies, drivers and police officers, vendors and children; everyone heading somewhere. High and distant thunder wrinkled the air.

Across the river in Canada, the light ricocheted off the chalky yellow and brown brick surfaces of Windsor and Riverside, and lit the grasses and low lying fields beyond the neighbourhoods into the county. And in the boggy ponds of the Shawnee Rod and Gun Club, Lulu Marceau crouched amid the cattails, smacking mosquitoes and listening. Hundreds of bullfrogs sang out to each other on the water. Their predictable sounds made them easier to catch but you had to know what to listen for. And she knew. She'd been eyeing two fat croakers facing one another upon a single flat lily pad and chanting their ru-hmm ru-hmm beat.

With the net in her left hand, Lulu moved knee-deep into the water. Not too close. She paused within striking distance and readied herself. The pond bottom was soft and wormy

between her toes. Before the frogs could respond, Lulu lunged out with a curved swoop. Barely a splash, she noted with pride, and both beasts lumped together in the base of her net.

Lulu had a faint feeling then like a scent or a sound that this evening might be her last frog-hunting quest to the pond. She could feel the change ahead. On Tuesday, she would turn thirteen. The shadows blinked purple again in the lightning flashes, and gave Lulu a good shiver. She waded back on solid ground with her catch and dropped them into the waiting stew pot. She was a petite girl, but one whose internal thoughts filled immense and detailed worlds, and as the bats swooped low to drink and then circle back into the plum sky, Lulu's mindset soured.

She was the only child left to mother after her six older brothers had grown up and moved on, and the quiet house on Shawnee made her skin itch. Lulu thanked God often for her middle brother, Lauwy, that he'd married young, moved right next door, and had given her real life baby dolls to play with. So, Lulu kept her hands busy with fishing and hunting and shooting at the Club. Tonight, she should have been content to sit in the muck, listen to the noise of the day closing down, and bag dinner for tomorrow. The day felt off, though. And the feeling had hung on into these dusky hours.

A Riverside girl had gone missing. She'd not been seen in two days now, and American criminals were slinking around the county with their fancy cars and revolvers looking for Lulu's rumrunning brothers. Her mind had churned all Sunday long way more than usual. She yawned. Her eyes felt dry. This is my land, she said to herself. This is Tecumseh. She meant to set her worry free, but it didn't work. Too much had happened in too short a time to feel secure even on her family's land.

The idea of a person just disappearing from her everyday life could not settle inside Lulu. She moved through the events of her own day plagued by that feeling of absence, just as she now

picked up the stew pot of frogs to relocate on the pond. The missing girl's name was Bernadette Durocher. She lived in Riverside right across the street from Lulu's eldest brother, Yves. She had met Bernadette only once, Bernie they called her, last summer at the brewery swimming dock in the river there. These were the only facts she knew, and there was no optimistic reasoning why a fifteen-year old girl would not return home for two days straight.

Lulu crouched back in the rushes forcing herself to think of all the delicious, hot, butter-fried frogs legs they would have tomorrow if she could just keep her nerve to be alone. Be Spotted Rabbit, she told herself. Be the Indian warrior princess. But she kept picturing Bernie in the navy blue swimsuit and white bathing cap that she sported the day they had met. Lulu's memory had preserved Bernie as the most vivacious girl she had ever seen in person like a silver screen actress. And now she was missing. A new kind of fear settled into Lulu's chest like a beehive.

Everything about life appeared the same, but it wasn't. Lulu let that strangeness breeze around her body anticipating some kind of tangible change when something snapped in the copse to the north. A rustle of summer bracken followed. Lulu stood, expecting something large, a deer or a man, and found the familiar shape of Bear clearing the woods. He carried an unlit flashlight in his left hand and a baseball bat in his right.

"I knew you'd be here. How many you caught?" he asked, sauntering over to the pot and lifting the rock from the lid.

"Only twelve."

Lulu usually left it to Bear to kill the frogs.

"Want some help then?" he asked, eyeing the pond's inky black surface. "Only if I'm invited for lunch."

"You know you are." Lulu turned her back to Bear and the frogs as he began his massacre bashing each one dead on the head.

"We still on for the search tomorrow?" Bear asked, hushing his voice. The police were mounting a search party for Bernadette first thing in the morning. An English lady had announced it at Mass. Since Lulu and Bear had met the girl in person, they figured they would have a better chance at spotting her wherever she might be.

"Bien sur," Lulu whispered. Good, she thought. I need to do something more than just think about the girl. To do nothing but think was infuriating.

Night was full now; the darkest of blue skies, and Bear didn't waste time. The moment it seemed he had settled in the water, he stunned a bullfrog with his flashlight, and whacked its pea brain fast. Jack and whack, he would say. It was slicker than using a net.

"Two more," he said, holding them up by the frog waist, dancing their gummy marionette legs in the air. Over the years, Bear deemed himself, "Maître des Grenouilles" and he waded back out of the pond like he was master of all the frogs in the world.

Lulu and Albért Laforêt were neighbours and had been meeting in the Shawnee pond to hunt frogs for five summers. From the first hello standing over a half-dead squirrel in the woods, their spirits connected. Even though she had been born seven years after her last brother, Luc, and had been spoiled with the most feminine dresses and toys as a child, Lulu gravitated to the dirt and rough play usually reserved for boys. She had worn Maman down long ago with her protests against lace and wearing shoes, and her consistent inability to stay clean. Maman had a saying, "Plus tard, elle apprendra à la dure." Someday she'll learn the hard way.

Pond water parted around Lulu's knees without sound as she inched forward into the middle of the dark. Spotted Rabbit, her Indian alter-ego, bled into her bones. In the grey, one fat

bullfrog nearby shifted its glassy eyes her way and seemed to watch her stalking. The frog remained still and then pulsed its rubbery throat in and out, in and out, about to croon. Spotted Rabbit transferred her weight from the left leg to the right, readying to lunge with the net. Heat lightning flashed in the darkening sky and then out in the pond Bernadette Durocher swam by with a quick breaststroke wearing the same navy blue swimsuit and white bathing cap. The hunted bullfrog slipped into the deep as Lulu stood upright, straining her eyes. Was it real? Had she actually seen a girl swimming? Lulu searched the dark water where Bernie had emerged, and where the girl might surface if she was truly out there. Every lily petal, every single jointless stem, every simple leaf appeared frozen.

"What's wrong?" Bear asked. The bats darted low and then away.

"I don't know," she said. "Nothing." And then squatted back in the rushes.

Bear jacked another. Whack! The baseball bat came smacking down on the mud. "Ha, suckers!" he laughed. "I'm catching up to you." He pointed his weapon at Lulu.

The quality of his new, deepening voice made Lulu think he was too old for grenouilles games. Bear was fourteen already, but he did not exist in the modern world anyway. He could not go to school, or to Mass either. He was dead in the eyes of official Canada. Since the Laforêts had arrived in Tecumseh, since his Chippewa mama and French papa left the Walpole reservation where they lived five years ago, Albért had been declared deceased to government officials. Bear told Lulu the story only once; said to listen close because he would never tell it again. At three years, Bear was taken to a labour school for Indian boys in a place called Brantford. The priests there had the faces of grotesque demons and were twice as wicked. After several years, those devils cut ties with Bear's parents. He forgot how to speak Ojibwe, and he was always sick, which they punished him for. In what way, Bear would not say. Time stretched



out until he thought life would always be illness and fear. Then, at the end of a regular school year, his papa arrived to retrieve him for the summer. Bear was nine, and that is when he “died.”

In the rushes behind them, something moved. Bear heard it, too.

"Shoot. I should've brought my gun," he said. "You think it was a deer?"

It hadn't sounded big enough to be a deer. "Probably just a raccoon," she said. Couldn't he tell? Bear resembled his mother. He had her sweeping brow line and coal black hair, but his skin was light like his papa's. He was a boy you remembered.

Lulu secretly relished the looks she and Bear sometimes got in town. Tecumseh was just a speck on the map, tucked behind Windsor's ear, but it was growing. Who was that kid, they were all probably thinking, going around with that odd little Marceau girl? She liked to think of Bear as a ghost, an apparition to everyone but her. True, the neighbours on Shawnee all knew Albért, and knew his maman taught him at home, but that's where his existence met its limit until he turned seventeen. At times, she fancied herself his protector, but really, they were a team. Skilled hunters, she liked to think; and in the hunt they shared an understood quiet. It bred a closeness that no amount of conversation could weave together. Lulu felt there was something everlasting in the silence they shared on the pond. Even if they lost each other in adulthood, she would always remember that quiet.

The ru-hmm ru-hmm frog beat crescendoed with full night. It sounded as though every frog in the county was tuning up for a symphony that would never begin. Just a few more and then I'm leaving, Lulu thought, and swept the pond again. If Bernie Durocher's ghost was out there swimming in the dark, Lulu wasn't going to wade out to meet it. Besides, Maman's worry had begun to reach her in the countryside all the way from the back porch, its sticky fingers beginning to squeeze her chest and seize her nervous heart.

"I'm about ready to leave," Lulu said loud enough that Bear could hear, though she could only sense him somewhere in the pond. Normally, they would not leave until they caught at least thirty frogs, plenty enough for the usual supper group—Maman, Pepé, Lulu, Bear, and the nephews—but Lulu could not brush the fear off. It floated around with the mosquitoes, hovering with a high pitch whine, and landing in the hairs of her arms. Bernie Durocher is still missing. The words pulsed in her mind. And minutes passed while Lulu blinked into the pondscape, focusing on nothing. Where is Bernie while we go on with our live, she wondered. Searching for her mentally made Lulu visualize the countless things that people might be doing all over Tecumseh, and Windsor, and the country, and the world. Where in all that chaos could Bernie be?

Bear's light beam tracked across the pond. A splat on the water followed, and another, immediately after.

"Three!" Bear hollered. "First time ever!" He was a Viking standing tall in the water holding the dead frogs overhead, boasting his kill, and he bounded back on land.

"Did you hear me?" Lulu asked as he circled the pond. Bear held up the three to impress her. "I said I'm ready to leave."

"Oh." Bear leaned over the pot to dump his catch. "How many is that?"

Together, they calculated. He'd caught nine in less than half an hour.

"Twenty one's not bad," he said, grabbing a pot handle. "Come on, then. Allons-y."

Lulu stuffed her wet feet into her stiff Sunday shoes and picked up her side. She wanted to tell him so much about her day, but she held back wanting to hold on to that shared silence a morsel longer. Together, they started back home through the stand of birch. Bear clicked on the

flashlight and shone a lone beam into the woods. Wherever the yellow tract of light fell, it bounced back at them leaving the rest in absolute black, a confusing type of blindness.

"Turn it off," she said.

And he did, asking, "Why?"

She stopped, tucking the net into her armpit and pressing her fingers against her eyelids. Inside, purple dots drifted. "It's too hard to see that way," she said.

"I'll point it at the ground."

Shuffling her best shoes in the brush, Lulu focused on the darkness ahead. Moths and mosquitoes dashed into the flashlight beam and beat their squishy bodies against her. She swatted them wanting the work to distract her from her runaway thoughts she knew could never be unthought. What if Bernie Durocher is dead? What if someone had taken her? She plucked the reasons for kidnapping a girl like walnuts from a tree in her mind and cracked them open. Every one of them was rotten. Lulu understood that as the hours and days passed things did not look good for Bernie.

*Bernie Durocher is missing. Bernie Durocher is missing.* Lulu picked up the mantra to the time of her marching feet. She searched in the forest shadows as if Bernie were just there hiding all this time, playing a ridiculously exaggerated game of hide and seek.

"You think anything dangerous could be out there?" Lulu asked Bear. "Like a wolf?" Or a bad man, she wanted to add.

"No," Bear said. "Maybe in a bigger forest. I'd love to see one someday."

"Me too," Lulu said although she didn't feel as brave as she once did.

"You know, there are cougars in Ontario. They're huge, like jungle cats," Bear said.

"Thanks." Why had this never come up before? All the night hunting—frogs, muskrat, grubs—two kids would have been a proper feast for a beast like that.

"Don't worry, though. We're too far south."

"Thanks." Why was every male she knew a joker?

Bear laughed. From her peripheral vision, Lulu could see the white of his teeth shining in the glow of the flashlight. Five years in a child's life can feel like forever, and Bear's faint profile was as familiar to Lulu as any of her brothers, even more so. He was comfort.

The moon, a faint slice, hung low in the calmed, clear sky. They reached the open strip of woods where the train tracks cut through the land, creating an arbitrary boundary. Left and right down the tracks, Lulu half-hoped to find Bernie there, dead or alive, a mystery solved, and she half-prayed that nothing but insects would appear down the way.

"Listen," Bear whispered, freezing between the irons. "Look," and he pointed into the twisty outlines of sumac bramble edging the railway.

She heard it first—laboured breathing. She strained her eyes against the dark and held her breath so she could hear its location. Bear was training the light beam along the scrub toward the sound, slow so as not to scare whatever was hiding there. About ten yards off, his light landed upon brown-grey fur in a rounded lump. Seeing the thing brought its heavy breath into deeper focus.

"There's your wolf," Bear whispered.

"Shut up," Lulu hissed back, but couldn't help herself from approaching the animal. The hair on her arms prickled but she didn't bother to wipe the sweat dripping down her torso or swat at the bugs drifting up from the tall grasses. Her fear was stuck on the idea of getting bit by a ravenous, mad beast. Yet her instincts knew better. She could hear no ungodly growl or whine.

The animal had not concerned itself with the two of them, hadn't responded to the light. Close up, Lulu discovered the lump was a small deer lying curled on its side. She waved Bear over, whispering, "It's a deer."

She lingered a safe distance from the deer and let Bear ease himself in next to her. The animal huffed with more vigor the closer they leaned in.

"I think it's injured," Lulu said. Bear agreed and guided the light onto its face. The deer blinked tight and scuffed its legs in a failed attempt to flee. Lulu shoved the flashlight off. "Don't." She pointed the beam away behind the deer onto the ground, illuminating the area indirectly. The deer shuddered but went back to the nervous panting from before.

"Think it'll bite me if I touch it?" Lulu asked.

"You gonna heal it?" Bear asked.

"I'm gonna try."

Bear slapped a large mosquito on his neck and shook his head. "Can't you just do it from here?"

"Healing's stronger if I lay my hands on it," Lulu said, taking one knee and inching forward. "Help me hold it down."

Bear placed the flashlight on the ground so that the globe shone across the deer's back.

"At the neck," Lulu directed him. She was the seventh child of a seventh son—a faith healer of the Roman Catholic Habitants—and she relished a chance to use her gift for the good of animals. Since she was ten and the gift had manifested, Lulu was called upon again and again to soothe sore throats and fussy babies, to ease joint pain and chronic ailments. This had become routine. But she could not reset broken bones, cure deadly disease, or bring the crippled to their

feet again, and because of this some declined to believe in the small miracle of her powers. Here now along the tracks, Lulu knew she could calm the deer and soften its injuries.

With Bear poised to hold the deer safe at the neck, Lulu counted off a silent *one, two, three*, and together they pressed their weight down on the animal. It fought at first, scuffling like before, but it had nowhere to go and no energy to take it there. Lulu felt the deer's muscles relax beneath her palms where she pressed into its shoulder joint, pinning it down. She prayed, sending the words like charged arrows down her arms into her fingertips. The warm sacred energy pulsed into the deer's fur and onto its skin with her Pater Noster, Ave Maria, and an invocation of St. Francis for good measure.

"Okay. Let go," Lulu said to Bear. And they both jumped back, squatting on their heels to give the animal some space. But the deer appeared to have died in the darkness. Its laboured breathing had subsided, and with it seemingly all manner of breathing. "Come on," Lulu whispered. "Come on, chou chou."

The crickets and cicadas conspired to fill the waiting with resounding trills. Then, the deer jerked upright off its side with its hind legs tucked underneath, and its front legs splayed out ahead, in a ready stance. The beast's black eye turned in their direction and reflected the flashlight globe. It shifted left, then right, and back again seemingly considering the closeness and intentions of Lulu and Bear.

Lulu backed herself along the grass without turning from the deer until she felt the rough rocks of the railway behind her. In the jittery light beam, as Bear snuck away, the deer flicked its long ears backward a few times, still watching the two of them as they receded farther into the dark.

"Think she's better?" Bear asked, standing on the track again.

"I think so," Lulu answered, grabbing the stew pot. "I hope so."

Now Lulu wanted to hang back in the dark, to stay with the deer until it lifted up to its legs and sauntered off into the woods. The night was getting late though and she could almost hear Maman's shoe tapping on the back porch, her prepared reprimand bubbling up from the back of her throat.

"Allons-y," Bear said again, and they continued on into the birch.

To be a deer, Lulu thought. Things would be simple. *Bernie Durocher is missing*. The sentence returned as they moved on home. She sent the words to Bear telepathically, like they practiced on their hunts, and waited for a reaction. But Bear crossed through the trees and into the harvested cornfield, steadfast, predictable, and oblivious.

With the sight of the last streetlight on Shawnee Road flickering at the end of the field, Lulu released a long sigh.

"Something's wrong," Bear said.

"What is?" She mistook his words and her body chilled.

"With you," Bear said. "Something's up."

That was the problem with familiarity and comfort. A girl's thoughts could never just be her own. Lulu shrugged.

"Come on. You're too quiet. What are you thinking about?" His voice cracked in that silly way and she ignored it.

"Just Bernie," she said. "I keep thinking about her, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. Me too."

The more they acknowledged her disappearance, the more final it became; that Bernie was gone for good, that they'd find her floating in the lake or the river, or discover her remains,

half-eaten by coyote seemed more likely as the hours passed. If she was trapped somewhere like a well or under a tractor, how long could she survive? Three days seemed like a breaking point. Why do I scare myself with these horrifying thoughts, Lulu wondered.

"You think maybe she ran away? Eloped with a boy, or something?" Bear asked.

In all the hours since she'd first learned about Bernie's disappearance, Lulu had not thought of this option. That a young girl would want to leave her life so finally did not seem reasonable.

"Why would she want to do that?"

"Don't know. For love? Maybe she was in love with a boy her parents didn't like." Bear swiped his baseball bat at a mist of tiny bugs. Lulu felt them ping against her face. "Maybe her father's a drunk who beats her every night."

Lulu looked at a picture of Bernie Durocher in her mind—the round-faced smile, her bottom teeth a little crooked, which you could only see when she laughed anyway, her shoulders brushed pink with too much sun, her lean, shapely limbs, the navy blue bathing suit and matching cap, and when she removed it, chin-length curls, a pretty dark blonde. Lulu remembered the haircut. Now she had the same one. Squinting up at Bernie and her friends last summer at the diving pipe, Lulu had felt like a baby with her long, frizzy, boring brown braid. Those teenage girls were film actresses talking about their French accents and how to lose them. Some girls were pros at it. Bernie was the best. She said the trick was softening the R. When she did it her voice took on a gravelly tone, sensuously connecting the words into a sentence—*Where in the world are you going this evening?* Lulu remembered the way the sound made her blush. This Bernie did not seem beaten down or sneaky.

"No," Lulu said after some time. "She seemed like a happy person."



"What can you tell by one afternoon?"

Bear's every response offered a challenge to her that night. He seemed older suddenly. She wanted to retort, "I can just tell," but she knew that would be a childish lie. It seemed they had both been doing a lot of thinking that day.

"I don't know. She just seemed like a happy person," Lulu said.

"Yeah, but what people seem and what they really are, sometimes are two different things."

"I guess."

She knew it was true but she did not like thinking of Bernie that way. Lulu had created a myth around Bernie and her friends. They were golden girls. Bernadette Durocher was someone Lulu wanted to be someday soon, and like giving up Santa Claus, Lulu did not feel like letting this glittery Bernie go. In this disappearance, Bernie was still a victim in Lulu's eyes. She couldn't explain it, but she could feel it, strongly.

"Who really knows," he said as if to end the point, put the conversation behind them in the trees, or at the pond, as they stepped onto the dirt of Shawnee Road.

The interior light from the neighbourhood's open windows illuminated front lawns, gardens, and driveways. The stew pot was getting heavy as they rounded the dark side of her house at the blind end of Shawnee. In Lulu's back yard, the smell of tobacco and honeysuckle vine announced home. They set the frog pot down next to the car shed and Lulu placed a heavy brick on the lid, just in case. Out of habit, she slid out of her tight shoes. The grass already felt cool in the new dark. From the shadow on the porch, Pepé cleared his throat of the phlegm of a lifetime.

"Combien?" he asked. A light from the upstairs bedroom turning on threw a swatch of yellow on the lawn. Maman's shape came to the window, bent over with outstretched arms, and lifted the pane open.

"Vingt-et-un," Lulu answered. She did not want to go inside just yet.

Pépé coughed and his whole hefty body jiggled from his middle outward. He knocked his pipe against the house and yelled through the screen door for Maman, his daughter-in-law, that the kids were home with frogs legs. Pépé only spoke French, a relic of the original habitants who came from Québec, and before that France. Lulu crossed her arms bracing herself for Maman. She noticed Bear too, hardening himself with hands on hips looking up at the house as Maman's shuffle and the light switching off conveyed only seconds until she would emerge from the house calling out orders, demanding something. Lulu was not ready to deal with Maman. And so she grabbed Bear by the wrist and pulled him behind the car shed, covering her mouth to stifle a giggle. Inching along the wall, arm touching arm, Lulu and Bear heard the open creak and the smack shut of the screen door.

Maman asked Pépé in French, "Where are they?" Pépé only grunted.

Out of Maman's sight, Lulu still felt free. She took off in a sprint through the stagnant back yards of Shawnee—the Martins', the Roys', old Mrs. Chevalier's—and only stopped when they reached the Laforêts', Bear's back yard.

"In here," he said, ducking into the open door of his papa's empty car shed.

Is he still gone? Lulu often wondered where Monsieur Laforêt went for so long, weeks sometimes. Monsieur Laforêt was supposed to be a salesman but it was likely he was runner on the river, like her brothers. Take half the population along St. Clair and the Detroit. There are your rumrunners.

Inside, Bear clicked on a workbench lamp and shuffled around to reach a rusty, old toolbox. Was he taller? Lulu wondered, watching him concentrate on rolling his papa's tobacco into cigarettes. She had always liked the color of his eyes. The light coppery hue reminded her of how a husky's piercing eyes appeared even paler against the snow. The dry dirt floor stuck to the bottoms of Lulu's damp feet and the way the grit wriggled its way in the creases of her toes reminded her of being much younger. It was simply the best feeling and she never wanted to live somewhere she could not be barefoot most of the time.

Bear popped the first finished cigarette between his lips, struck a match, and lit it. "Here," he said, handing it to her.

"I can light my own," Lulu said, screwing up her face. He had never done that before and they had been smoking whenever they could grab a few cigarettes or a packet since the previous fall. He flashed an amused smirk at her and went on rolling his own.

Lulu took that first long pull and lifted her body up onto the worktable, letting her legs dangle off the side. She crossed her legs. Thirteen next week. She couldn't wait to say it when people asked. Thirteen felt so much older. Bear leaned his elbows back against the table. When would life be any better than this? Side by side again, except here in the dusty light, Lulu could see the stark difference in their skin colour. She looked like the Indian, holding her spindly, bronzed forearm up to his freckled bicep. He looked down at the difference too, and then rubbed at his skin as if the colour would brush off.

"Your maman, she's going to give you a good cuff when you get home late smelling like ciggies," he said.

Lulu shrugged. "We're going to find Bernie tomorrow," she said. The words came from nowhere. She hadn't even thought them first.

"You think so?" he asked, exhaling smoke in three perfect rings. "I'm starting to think it doesn't look good."

"I have hope," she said.

"Doesn't it scare you?" he asked.

"No." She knew it was a knee-jerk response. Was he always so direct? For some reason, she had the instinct to hold back now. Bear was distracting, the way he could see into her, seem to read her mind, apparently. Back off, she wanted to say to him. Frustration rose into her chest in a flutter like a beetle trapped inside her ribs. Tears pushed into her eyes. Could he see this too, she wondered?

"I think it's pretty haunting," he said. "Suddenly, she's just gone. Almost three days?"

"I know," was all Lulu could say. That's what I've been feeling, Lulu thought. Haunted. Bear seemed to be able to detach himself from the outcome, when she just could not. It would mean something personal if Bernie went forever unfound. It would be something that would cling to Lulu's own life story for good.

"She's this girl and her body must be somewhere," Bear kept going. "But there's this idea of her drifting around. Everyone's out searching for her, looking for clues. And she's just not there anymore."

"You said 'body.' So, you think she's dead?"

He didn't answer at first and they sat quiet, letting the question hang with the smoke trapped beneath the low ceiling.

"I guess so." Bear exhaled another ring and then ruined it with a forceful breath, swirling the smoke into the space where Monsieur Laforêt's car should've been.

His flippant answer flushed heat into her face. A real, live girl was missing. She wanted to go look for her now. Why weren't they searching now? A lone cricket chirped somewhere outside the shed.

"Sign of autumn coming," Lulu parroted the phrase Maman said each time she heard a cricket in August.

A man's heavy footsteps came across the drive first, and then the shape of her shortest and stoutest brother, Lauwy, appeared through the dirty shed windows. His big-nosed profile pointed in the direction of the house, then turned to the black back yard, and then he was at the shed door before Lulu could move from her perch. Lauwy's wide body filled the doorframe.

"Smoking?" he said. There was no use in denying, so in reply, Lulu breathed out a billow of white fumes. "Maman is going to kick your ass. I'm going to kick it, too."

She kept swinging her feet back and forth under the workbench. "What? I'm old enough," she sassed.

"Allez. You have to go home." It had been a long time since Lauwy was sent out to fetch her. Lauwy, twenty-seven, lived next door with his pretty wife, Flo, and their three little boys, Lulu's nephews.

"Why?" she asked.

"There's a copper and some people waiting for you."

"Who are they?" Lulu asked, the hair rising on her arms. What had she done? The events from the past week hurdled through her memory. She came up with nothing.

## TWO

Friday, August 3, 1928

The cops were out. Nine or ten Detroit Police cars lined the front of the Coliseum, a domed monolith block of white against the void of the unlit Fairgrounds. Three officers stood each in an archway under the marquee glow, hawk-eyeing some coloured teenagers loitering in the parking lot. One copper was playing with his baton, alternately patting it against his heels. Doubtless, the rest were patrolling inside.

Like the soldier he used to be, Yves surveyed the scene as he swung the sedan past those front steps and followed Joe's car into the darkness around the side of the arena.

"Christ. They planning a raid or something?" Luc asked no one from the passenger seat. Yves' had instructed his brothers, in descending order—Lauwy, René, Michel, and Luc—to say little, reveal nothing at this meeting, and this quip would have set him off. But still there in the car, he let it slide. He forgot it immediately because tonight the Marceau brothers had the upper hand for once, and except for his acidic stomach, Yves was enjoying himself.

Ahead, Joe Jarotsky, a Brueckner man, slammed the lead car into park, disturbing the dirt into a cinematic dust cloud. Yves parked beside him. Outside in the night, Yves breathed easy surprised by the exquisite freshness of cut grass. Midtown Detroit was becoming something vibrant and new, a cultural hub with a stunning library and institute of art, and the air was nothing like the cross-border sour sweet scent like gasoline and horse shit on fire that Yves was used to smelling on his Canadian-side riverfront lawn. It was a constant tang on the tongue that

Yves began to think of as America. It was industry, where all that money came from, and it always got him thinking about possibility and science and luxury. But that smell left an aftertaste of contempt.

Yves lit a cigarette beside Joe's impressive new maroon Model A and admired its shine. The big meeting was moments away now and Yves knew he always faltered in the anticipation. Face to face, as in combat, was where the white noise filtered out all the confusion and the way became clear. He needed these little pauses, recalibration of sorts, to adjust, to read his position because he had one consistent disadvantage to consider.

On Yves' deaf side, Joe grabbed him by the elbow, and he shrugged it off a bit too aggressively.

"Whoa, buddy," Joe said.

Yves fixed his fedora just so, arranging his longish hair over his missing left ear. It was a habitual, casual gesture that concealed more about himself than he hoped anyone could guess at. The hearing loss and missing appendage were only known to his family. The Spring Offensive had taken much. Étienne his closest brother, too.

Étienne, he should be here, Yves thought. Ten years buried this month.

But the rest of the world only saw what the surface revealed—a deep, unreasonable scar snaking along his neck, gouging his left jaw line, and stretching up to his temple. He was spared his eyes, thank God, but the ear and his hearing on that side were not.

"I was just gonna tell you, this detail probably means Roy's here," Joe continued. "Could be Mr. Brueckner, too. The jokers follow him around."

Yves only nodded. He'd seen Joe in action, a vicious son-of-a-bitch with a stocky British Bulldog gait, and now Yves would find out just how high up he ranked in the Brueckner's organization.

Yves and his brothers moved through the lot following Joe. Yves glanced back at Luc with the look and he fell into step on Yves' right side mirroring the composure of his eldest brother. Without Yves' facial scars, they would have been nearly physical copies of a man, only Luc was nine years younger at twenty-one, fresh faced, possibly an inch shorter, and with two perfectly-tuned ears. The impression of their side-by-side stance was usually an accumulation of influence, not of a top dog and his side-kick. The middle brothers added bulk to their stature. Brawlers, all of them. The Marceau brothers were notorious in their readiness for a fight. Busted knuckles. Broken and reset noses. Bloodshot eyes. Tonight, they had cleaned up good but their story was plain on their faces.

"Relax," Joe said to Yves, knocking on a metal side door, "I think you got this one."

It struck Yves as an odd thing for a Brueckner guy to say. *I think you got this one*. And in the quiet, waiting for the door to open, standing in the heat on the gravel with all of his brothers, Yves' heart released into a free fall. In that second, all of the risks and sacrifices they had made for two years—the tests, measurements, and blueprints, the year of nights digging under the river, shoring up the ceiling, the losses and gains of inches—all of it collapsed into his stomach.

The side door swung out. Tinny shouts of men en masse and the amplified nasally voice of a boxing announcer came at him. Yves was fairly certain that he did not *have this one*. He wanted to step backward into the dark and recalibrate again. The tunnel they had built under the river was near perfect. They'd been as exact in their engineering as those high paid bastards constructing the bridge to America. It was deep enough, supported as strong as anything his unit



had dug in France, and close to a hundred feet from Belle Isle's south bank. They had even thought to include room for a track if it seemed necessary in the coming years. Yves tipped back on his heels, losing confidence. He must have overlooked some flaw in his strategy. Luc noticed Yves' hesitation as they all entered the dank concrete hallway.

Luc leaned in. "Quoi?" he asked.

"Nothing." Yves knew this could not have been reassuring. He feared they were walking, five strong, into some kind of ruin.

Emerging from the fighters' passage into the piercing spotlights, Yves' good ear stopped up. In the ring, two coloured fighters were dancing, jabbing at each other with leather gloves. The packed stands spat jeers down into the centre. The collective boom overwhelmed his capacity to hear anything specific. Individual hoots and insults bounced off the arena rafters and crackled through his only working eardrum. Yves straightened his tie. He would have to read lips, if he could manage it. Yves felt Luc instinctively closed the gap between them, as Joe shoved an elbow into Yves' other side.

"Thattaway!" Joe said.

Yves barely discerned the three words rolled into one but understood as Joe pointed and then waved over his shoulder, directing the Marceau brothers again. The whole place stank of body odour.

Merde, Yves thought. If I ever had an upper hand, I just lost it. If this isn't the shittiest of luck... Yves drew his fedora lower over his brow and skirted the ring. The bell dinged the end of the round and the sharp chime drilled his good ear like a blow. One of the fighters, pitching back toward his corner, stretched his gloves out to the sides, shaking out the muscles of his glistening

arms. The movement captured Yves' attention. As he turned to look up, a spray hit his face.

Yves smeared fluid into his hand. Blood and sweat.

"Sacré bleu," he cursed loud. The static in his ear captured his own muffled voice in the top of his skull, and the fighter collapsed onto his corner stool. Fuck, he wanted to smash the guy. The fighter sloshed water around his mouth and spit. It was The Black Panther. Luc gripped Yves' arm and pushed him forward.

"What's eating you?" Luc spat French into his good ear. Yves spun around. Ahead, Joe leaned over two men in the third row that appeared annoyed. Yves craned his neck to see them.

"You better fucking move," a man with a bristly white handlebar mustache shouted at the brothers lined up stiff against the ring. Yves barely heard it but he turned and caught the young green eyes of the old man's glitzy date. Everything sounded as if he were submerged underwater. It was a fucking calamity.

"Ya make better doors than windows, ya dopes," another fan spat from somewhere. The stands overflowed. Down front the spectators were dressed up slick like Hudson's storefront mannequins. Above that line, people faded into shades of dust. They disappeared into the black high up near the rafters. Yves continued on down the aisle toward the fighter's tunnel on the other side with the weight of his brothers follow behind him. Joe was mounting the stairs of one aisle. Yves followed his course and locked eyes with a man he recognized from the papers, Elon Brueckner, who nodded.

"Sacré." The curse echoed in his head. This is supposed to be a real meeting not some sideshow on the fringes, he thought. Were they only meeting Elon? He was supposed to be the wild card of the Brueckner family. A lunatic baseball fan, Elon was known for pissing on his

victims after beating them with a homemade mace, a Louisville Slugger spiked with nails. His unforgettable mug was synonymous with unpredictable violence. Yves' nerve took another jab.

"What's happening?" Michel asked, with René huddling up behind him.

"Is that The Black Panther in there?" Lauwy asked.

"This is fucking fantastic!" René swept a hand up toward the ring. "Think we can watch the rest of the fight from here?"

"This is bullshit," Yves said, checking the hair over his left ear and glaring into the dead space above the ropes. He could not believe their naïveté. Roy Brueckner worked with Capone's guys in Chicago, while Elon swept their casualties into the river, and his brothers wanted to watch a goddamn boxing match? "I think we should leave."

"No fucking way!" Lauwy yelled. "All that goddamn work?"

Yves crossed his arms, shoving his hands into his armpits. He glared at each of his brothers trying to convey the absolute seriousness of their position. The round bell dinged. An intensified murmur picked up around the stands. "You think this is a fair set up?" Yves searched his brothers' eyes. "No goddamn way!"

They all seemed to consider it as the boxers' gloves smacked skin over and over in the ring.

"We're missing something," Yves said and waited for his brothers to catch up to him. Yves knew then he had made an irreversible mistake but he was not sure exactly what it was. They were not ready for the Brueckners. That was evident. But he had to continue now or two years of work and the tunnel would be a waste. It would rest unfinished and unused beneath the Detroit for nothing.

Joe came shuffling up with his cigar tucked into a jolly grin and slapped Lauwy's back with an arrogant laugh.

"This a'way, Frenchie. Deal time," Joe said. "Just you." He pointed at Yves.

"What's this bullshit?" Yves asked, his arms still folded across his chest. No way he would be able to hear everything on his own.

"Ain't no room for an entourage." Joe shook his head.

"Just Luc then."

Joe kept shaking his head. He spat tobacco juice on the ground. "See up there?" He cocked his head back without turning. "Mr. Elon graciously made room for just one of you. So, who's it gonna be?"

"We'll wait," Yves said, fixing his eyes back on the fight. The unknown opponent appeared to be gaining an edge over The Panther.

"Jesus Christ," Joe said, losing his grin. "You must have an idea who you're dealing with, yes? Multiply that idea by a thousand. That's Elon. You stupid French fuck."

Yves met Joe's stare. He hated dealing with what he now considered the quintessential American cocksucker. Obnoxious to the core. Over the past several years, the absolute arrogance of him was something Yves had admired in Joe and most Americans he knew but now it curdled in his stomach. In the beginning, making quick and dirty runs around Peach Island, and mounds of fast cash, Yves had liked Joe and felt drawn to his particular brand of power. How many early mornings had they spent tying one on and chasing birds at the Deutches Haus? Those times, in that place, Joe, a Jew, and Yves were doubly fueled by hate for the Hun, and they would end up with bloody knuckles and shiners as often as a headache and a handful of pussy. But Joe had been short-changing the Marceau brothers for the past year. Yves knew it. Up until this moment,

Yves had needed Joe to shuffle down jobs and set up meetings. This meeting was supposed to change all of that. If Yves managed to turn this spectacle around, in a few minutes Joe would work for him.

"This is bullshit," Yves said. "You know it."

"Relax. I gave him the background. All you gotta do is shake on it."

Yves wanted to lay him out right there, harder than what The Black Panther was taking on the jaw in the ring. Since the meeting had been set, Yves went over and over his pitch to Roy Brueckner, the man he was *supposed* to meet. Who knew what Joe had told Elon? Instead, Yves relented with a sigh. I do not like my choices here, he thought. But I'm in a corner.

Waiting, Joe wiped sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand, the hot bud of his cigar just grazing his brown bowler. "Take it easy, Frenchie," he said. "Piece of cake."

It would have made better sense to keep the mood light, something Yves usually worked for, but he was already on edge. His senses had adjusted to that leathery Detroit tang and now he would demand respect. They all turned back to the fight, waiting for the round to end. The Black Panther was losing steam. The man hung back, looked beat. Harry Wills. Yves had never been to a fight but he had seen Wills' photograph in the papers a few years back. Wills won some coloured heavyweight title years ago. He still looked like those images, a large, dark wildcat, all sleek muscle, but his energy was low. After a series of exhausted clinches, Wills took a brutal cross that drew more blood over his cheekbone. What a couple turns around the calendar will do to a man like that, Yves thought.

Up in that third row, Elon beckoned to Joe and Yves with a flick of his fingers. The round bell dinged. Awkwardly passing and knocking knees with the well-to-do couples at the end of the row, Yves extended a hand down the aisle.

"Yves Marceau," he said and wondered if he was still shouting.

Seated, Elon Brueckner shook it without a word and scanned Yves once over with the kooky, broken-toothed smile of a tough mutt. A young blonde with bright pink lips and a glittery green number sat to Elon's right. Her eyes were trained on the ring. She didn't even acknowledge Yves' arrival with a flutter of a glance. Elon gestured to the seat beside him. On the left. Thank God, Yves thought.

"This is the Frenchie I was telling you about," Joe said. Realizing there was no seat for him, Joe shuffled back down the aisle disturbing the rich couples on the end again. Taking in an odd scent like berries and spice, some kind of drug perhaps, Yves tried to swallow his anger and anxiousness.

"You got any action on this bout?" Elon asked Yves.

"No." The round bell dinged again. Immediate roars directed at the ring faded the volume up again.

"Take the dog," Elon said. "Trust me."

"Right." Yves nodded, unsure of where to focus. Sitting this close helped him hear, but it obscured his vantage for reading Elon's lips that were yelling something heated at the boxers in the ring.

"I don't know why I bother," Yves thought Elon said. Only his last three words and a closing snicker were uttered in Yves' direction. Fuck me, Yves thought.

But Elon's comical dark, arching eyebrows accentuated his expressions. It helped. His nostrils were wide open in a permanent hairy flare. So, this is Elon Brueckner, Yves thought, settling next to the man. Not much to look at. But Elon could not really see Yves own unfortunate markers, the scars that no one missed. Usually, they earned him some respect from

the men or some extra affection from the girls. And now, Yves wasn't sure how to start this conversation. He had pictured a different setting. He had pictured Roy Brueckner. In the ring, the boxers circled each other and next to him, Elon Brueckner appeared completely at ease. He lounged back, his body wiry and obscured in his suit, as if he had recently been sick or plainly hadn't worked hard labour in his life.

"So, you have something special for me?" Elon asked, shrugging his shoulders forward and fixing concentration on Yves.

With his deep ear canal still vibrating, he needed to answer, start this deal. "I really do," he said.

"Sounds like it." Elon crossed his right knee over the left and leaned in.

"I don't think we can get into details here," Yves shouted now.

"Why not?" Elon shouted back.

Yves hesitated. Everyone knew the business Elon was in. He very plainly did not care. It was loud. No one was paying attention.

"Joe told you?" Yves asked. "About the tunnel?" What if these men sitting in front of them were detectives?

"He did. Where's it at?" The high notes of Elon's voice pinged through Yves' ear canal.

"We're less than a hundred feet from Belle Isle."

"How far? Exactly," Elon asked.

"Approximately eighty feet before we have to start meeting it from above."

"And you want us to meet you there?"

"Yes," Yves answered with no choice but to keep it simple.

But Elon froze then. He didn't blink, didn't move, or even seem to breathe. The fighters stole his attention. The crowd thundered.

Yves had to seize this chance. He'd revealed his hand. "Think about it. With the bridge almost complete and every home distiller and small outfit waiting to sprint across, the Feds are going to be overwhelmed on the West Side." He was hollering almost to a strain into Elon's ear but Yves could barely hear his own words. "It's all going to funnel down the bridge piecemeal, a few cases, a few bottles, while we're on the East Side pushing whole train loads underneath. You could supply the East with enough left over for Chicago and Cleveland."

Yves caught his breath. He had not meant to get worked up but the energy was high, and their tunnel was a masterpiece. A vision of it, the dim glow of bulbs strung up against oak beams at intervals, flashed into his mind. He pictured it filled with men pushing carts of whiskey, or whatever was coming through the pipeline, completely carefree and smuggled tight under the river.

"And it would open into the park?" Elon asked. Yves mostly read his lips now. The arena was just an overpowering fuzz.

"Yes, inside the forested area behind the south pond." As soon as the sentence shot out of his mouth, Yves wished he could suck it back in. Maybe Elon had not entirely heard him. As if by magic, something happened in the ring sending the crowd raging to its feet. Elon stood. Yves mirrored him. The unknown opponent lay out on the canvas. The Black Panther stood over him. Who was the underdog? Yves wondered. The round bell pierced the noise. Elon turned to face Yves. The stands hummed to a lower frequency.



"And how do I move it off the island, Yves?" Elon asked, raising those black caterpillars above his eyes. "Belle Isle's only got one bridge." He paused a moment, recalling. "And a fucking Coast Guard station."

"They'll be looking in other directions—St. Clair, Grosse Ile, Fighting Island, Lake Erie. They know it's just small timers on Belle and Peach anymore," Yves said, the sound of his own voice just simple pulses now tapping out morse code in his head.

"But once they catch on, the tunnel is dead." Elon folded his arms. Spectators started taking their seats. Some clapped. Elon waited until everyone around him was seated, the two of them sticking out of the stands now. Yves wondered if his brothers were watching while Elon searched around, looking for what Yves couldn't tell. Perhaps he just wanted to be noticed. Then he took his seat casually, leaning back again. Yves followed.

"If the cops find out, and it's an easy trap," Elon said. "Then I'm a sitting duck. And that tunnel will lead them straight to you, too."

"They won't catch on. They'll be busy with the bridge," Yves came back.

"Maybe." The twisted Brueckner pulled his shirtsleeves down at the wrists. "Maybe not." The round bell punctuated his quip. What goddamned round was it anyway?

And fuck him. Yves realized he was grinding his teeth and unclenched his jaw. He suppressed an urge to reach out, grab Elon by the collar, and bring his smug mug real close. But then Elon Brueckner opened his mouth and smiled wide, revealing his monstrous teeth again. Up close, his blunt, angled fangs caved inward and there was a missing a tooth on the bottom right side leaving a gap large enough to rest a small cigar. More than a few teeth were the colour of urine stain on porcelain.

"Look," Elon said. Yves lost a few words but leaned in when Elon turned back to the boxers. "...not saying it's not an interesting project, but it ain't a royal flush." The crowd conspired against Yves. He made some quick interpretations.

"It's a solid bet," Yves said, prematurely motioning to leave. This was dangerous. And if they don't want to cash in on what could be the last days of the Volstead, then I'll find someone who will, he thought. Someone who'll treat me with respect.

"Hey." Elon was pissed. Yves turned to face him dead on. "Maybe if you'd come to me with a fully finished tunnel and I could take advantage for a few months, maybe," Elon said. All lip reading. It was getting worse. Yves cut him off.

"I'm not looking for anyone to take advantage." Yves lowered his hat and turned to look eyes with Luc back in the fighter's passage.

"You, *something, something*, Yves," Elon said. "You sh... *something, something, something*, control." Yves missed it. He fumed, frustrated on all accounts.

"I'm sorry?" Yves said, his voice aggressive.

Elon laughed. "Exactly my point," he said, pointing. "You got a hot head, pally." He snickered through his nose. The blonde bird behind Elon rocked forward, and over his shoulder, caught Yves' eye. Her gaze went quick to his scars and then she faded away, hidden beyond Elon's back again.

"Look, I'm interested but I'm skeptical," Elon said.

Yves delayed.

"Maybe, you do this thing for me," Elon said. "Maybe we can work together."

Yves body went arctic. A favor for Elon Brueckner could mean anything. He had hoped to avoid this but the thought had run through his mind, and he was prepared to draw the line at

murder. He had done enough killing. He figured the Marceaus had proven themselves enough working with Joe.

"I need a guy on your side this week. Friday. At Middle Island. Heard of it?"

Yves could not believe this. "Yeah." The island was mere feet from the American border in the middle of Lake Erie facing the Ohio rum row. He had never been there but heard rumours about it. Not exactly Marceau turf. "Why?"

"Because you're going for me." Elon was now the boss giving orders. But they had not agreed on anything.

"We're done here." Yves locked eyes with Elon. It seemed no one moved, or at least the world slowed, and the buzz of some giant machinery engulfed his skull. Elon sat his small stature up, pushed his shoulders back, and assumed superiority holding the gaze.

"Who the fuck are *you*?" Elon asked. "Obviously, you know who I am. So you *know* that this is my town. You hicks are nothing in *my town*, pal."

Yves' hands throbbed. Pins and needles. He placed them on his knees, fighting the instinct to react. Rarely would he back away from a position once he had taken it. That was his trademark in the trenches. Even if there was an unfair advantage or an area completely swarmed with Huns, he remained. But crossing the Brueckners meant blood on his whole family. No one would be safe. Yves did not care about himself, though. He could hold his own, or die, and that was not an issue. But his brothers, and their blissfully innocent families, images of them slashed or shot to death and lying face down in an open field somewhere, kept Yves from going the full distance with Elon Brueckner. He sifted through the piles of dirt in his mind but it seemed as if he'd dug himself a considerable pit.

Below in the ring, the bell sounded again and again. The bout was over.

"All right. What's at Middle?" Yves asked. He shrugged it off. As long as it led to opening up the tunnel stateside he'd work with Elon.

"Rum." Elon set his ugly teeth on edge. "And guns."

"What's our take?"

"Five percent."

People around them readied to leave, shuffling down the aisles and stairs. Elon and Yves remained seated.

"Twenty."

"Come on, Yves." Elon scratched the stubble on his cheek. "Ten. And I consider blowing that tunnel open."

"Look. Ten. I go to Middle. And you give me five men digging on Belle Isle. Monday."

"That's all you need?" Elon stood. He clapped his hands once and thrust his hips forward, teetering on his toes. "Why didn't you say so?" His face scrunched up in a strange, prolonged donkey-like guffaw, suddenly a jovial motherfucker. The cackle broke through the drone in Yves' ears. He's repulsive, Yves thought as Elon shook his head perversely, extending a hand for Yves to shake. "Deal."

Yves stood, and hesitated a moment too long considering how his brothers would figure.

"No deal?" Elon asked, still suspending the hand mid-air. "Well, which is it?"

It wasn't much of a choice. Flashes of the tunnel, cases of rum, the river, revolvers, Étienne, and others spun on a pinwheel in his head. Yves pulled his right hand from his pant pocket and extended it out to Elon Brueckner, who shook it heartily.

"This is terrific, Frenchie. I knew tonight was a lucky night." Elon's piss-yellow teeth glared at Yves. "Sure bets." The blonde grabbed Elon's elbow from behind appearing at his side

under thick black eyelashes. "I need a drink," Elon said, not quite acknowledging the girl. "You need a drink? Frenchie? You look like you need a drink." He laughed.

Yves finally spun around looking for his brothers' pale faces in the shadow of the fighter's passageway. Luc was a cork about to pop.

Yves spoke over his shoulder. "OK. Sounds like we need to talk."

"Have Joe drive you to The Chophouse. I'll find you later."

Back out in the evening's heat, Yves inhaled that fragrant Midtown air into his fluttering lungs. His stomach contents felt on fire as he rounded the front of the building with Joe and his brothers. He burped gasoline. Ahead, in the largely empty parking lot, a Detroit Police squad car waited with two uniforms out front. Its headlights clicked on blinding the bunch of them. The cops exchanged mock jovial words with Joe.

What a bullshit twist, Yves thought. Through all of this Middle Island bullshit, he would find a way to gut Joe Jarotsky.

"It's a deal?" Michel asked. Yves nodded and his brothers gave their smiles away.

"Terrific," Luc said, jabbing the air.

"We're going to The Chophouse now to make the arrangements," Yves said.

"I need to get back to Canada," Lauwy said.

It was a good idea. Yves knew Lauwy and René want to get home to their wives and kids. Hell, *he* wanted them stowed safely in Canada, too. René concurred.

"I'm coming with you," Michel surprised Yves.

"Non, desolé," Yves said. His little brothers, they were always meant to be unseen. He was the oldest and it was his role to protect them. And now, he understood his paramount mistake of the evening. Yves had practically lined his family up in front of a firing squad. They had all seen in the newspapers what fooling with the Brueckners looked like. Yves had to put them back behind the scenes again.

"You're with me." Yves regretted needing Luc at his side but that was the way it was.

Rolling out the drive with Joe in the Model A sedan, Yves scanned the Coliseum. A flashy pale blue Dusenbergs swung past. From the driver's side, Elon gave him a limp-handed salute and sped toward Woodward.

"Mother of God," Yves said under his breath.

### THREE

Friday, August 3, 1928

Grand Circus Park and the downtown avenues were bustling. It was humid and late, but it was Friday night. Girls and men flitted in and out of the street lamp light like paired insects amid the manicured dogwood trees. The city held its heat. Yves could still feel it even as the wind swept through the car's open windows. He breathed in the air, as if it were fresh, and made an effort to calm down. Joe pulled the sedan into the dark breadth of an overreaching elm, and braked violently to a halt. The music of Detroit—the roaring machinery, whistles and horns, the hearty chatter and laughter of passersby—became louder as Joe silenced the motor.

Yves stepped onto the sidewalk, feeling peculiar and new. Luc emerged from the back seat and joined him there.

“Point the way, Joe,” Luc said, smacking his hands and rubbing them together. He looked about as if he'd never set foot in the city before. But Yves enjoyed Luc's enthusiasm. It masked his own severity and allowed him some space to hang back with less suspicion.

They waited for traffic to pass and then took long strides across the boulevard before the next set of vehicles pressed upon them. As Yves followed Joe around a few corners, down a narrow alley, and along a short block, he told himself to relax a little. The deal had been struck and he could now look ahead. Take in what that all meant. With the Brueckner's help, the tunnel would open up in six weeks. Two months, tops. The most difficult part was over it seemed, but Yves had lived enough hardships to be wary of those rosy horizons. He was still considering this contradictory side of his disposition when they ducked into the blue light of The Chophouse. It

took a moment to allow his eyes to adjust to the difference between outdoor and indoor nighttime.

The coloured doorman's white teeth practically glowed. "A late dinner, Mr. Jarotsky?" he asked without a smile. The Chop was a place that didn't pretend.

"Sure enough, Leon," Joe said. "Something cool and wet." He turned to Yves and Luc. "Meet you in there. Take the back corner."

Yves nodded. He was used to Joe's ways, how he had his hands down everybody's pants in town. A heavy black curtain was pulled back presenting the way in a luxurious flare. Once an à la mode, champagne fountain kind of club, The Chop had shut down in the early Volstead, and recently reopened after a decade hiatus as a sober dining lounge. Gentlemen met here to get away from the weary and rambunctious speaks.

"No girls?" Luc said from where they stood surveying the crowd.

"There will be," Yves said. "Come on." Very few and only the most unusual girls could be found at The Chop. Yves remembered a few of them fondly as he led Luc to the banquet fixed farthest away from the stage. Up there, a four-piece jazz outfit minus a singer dressed a gay tune in a gloomy funeral pall. Yves put his back against the wall in the midnight leather booth and kept his hat on.

"Two whiskeys on the rocks," Yves ordered from a tuxedoed waiter who materialized the moment they had settled.

Luc unbuttoned his jacket and licked his lips about to say something. Yves watched his jittery little brother decide not to speak and take in the sheen of gold and lacquered black of The Chophouse decor. Yves released the breath he was holding.

"Drink slow," Yves said. "We're not through with the business of things."



“I know.” Luc gave him an offended look but relaxed, which relieved Yves, too.

“Écoute-moi.” Yves leaned into the table. “I’m not exactly thrilled with the way this deal is piecing together, eh. Try not to react if something strange comes up.”

“Like what?” Luc asked.

“Don’t worry about it,” Yves said. “D’accord?”

“Oui, d’accord.” Luc turned away again likely scanning for girls in the room.

“Hey.” Yves tapped the polished wood table to get Luc’s attention. “Elon. He’s got a fucked up set of teeth. Don’t stare.”

“Seriously?” Luc asked. “That bad?”

Yves nodded. “Don’t stare at them.” The drinks arrived and Yves shook the ice in his glass before drinking. “He’s a madman, that one. He’s unpredictable. I couldn’t read him.”

“I heard he cut a guy’s hand off.” Luc pulled his tobacco pouch from his jacket to roll a cigarette but Yves motioned for him to put it away.

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” Yves said. He waved the waiter over and ordered two cigarette packets. “Truly. I wouldn’t doubt it.” Yves tried to communicate the severity of his statement with his eyes for emphasis.

“Great.” Luc rolled his eyes beneath his thick dark lashes as he lit a smoke.

Yves lit one, too, and through the smoke, Carla Segewick came floating at him. A girl dressed in grey held Carla’s arm and followed close behind with dumpy Joe Jarotsky, who appeared to be in the wrong company.

“Look who I found,” Joe said dropping into a seat.

“Look who you found,” Carla said, tilting her head and raising an eyebrow at Yves. She paused at the banquet corner for effect, just long enough for Yves to take her, and course the night was turning, in.

Then Carla placed her handbag on the table and glided her slender body onto the leather bench next to Yves, who lifted his arm when she continued her slide into his body. She tucked herself into his armpit, placed her porcelain arm on his woolen slacks, and looked up into his imperfect face, their noses almost touching. Her strawberry blonde hair was a blur this close and her blue eyes seemed faded and dyed to match the same shade of her beaded, lavender dress. Meeting Carla’s forwardness, Yves leaned in and kissed her hoping for a surprise reaction but she kissed him back. It was evidence of the excitement Carla Segewick aroused in a circle, and in Yves. She had never given in so easy. All over town, Carla pretended Yves would never have her. He knew different. A game she likely played with other men but Carla was who she was and could get away with it. And while her whispers sometimes angered Yves, finding himself alone at the end of the night, he really didn’t care. The Segewicks were in shipping, timber, newspapers, and the Marceaus were who they were. In honesty, he cared less and less for the chase these days.

But this was more of an offer. And the name Marceau was rising.

“Ahem,” Joe interrupted. “We need another girl. Over here.” He gestured to no one in the smear of crowd building. Yves surfaced from Carla’s attention to find Luc ordering for the girl in grey.

“I guess you two know each other?” Joe asked.

Carla sat forward. “Yves is in love with me.” She gave Yves a wink only he could see. “Hopelessly in love.” At that, Yves had to laugh. It was easy to watch her take the spotlight. She ordered something she called a French 75.

“I can’t get enough of them,” she declared. “Isn’t that right, dear?” The girl in grey agreed emphatically. The dear girl was already blinking slowly in Luc’s direction.

“Oh shoot,” Carla said, “you’re wearing my lipstick.” She thumbed Yves’ lips and let her fingers graze his left jaw scars. He sat up taller.

“Let’s have a party,” Joe said.

“Isn’t this a party?” the girl in grey asked.

“Not yet.” Joe slapped the table and motioned for the tuxedo to come back.

“It’s all about intentions, isn’t it,” Carla stated.

Every time the next drinks landed, they toasted a number of misguided things. Carla slipped Yves into kisses from which he didn’t struggle. The rest fanned complaints about their affectionate display but they forgave Carla because her laugh was so bright. It warmed the pit of Yves’ stomach and made him believe in a truly carefree life. Joe’s intentions kept their party in flux, and the whiskeys came straight up.

“Were you in the war?” the dear girl in grey asked Yves point blank at that familiar unsteady turning point of an evening. Yves nodded.

“Were you in France? What is Paris like?” she went on.

“Paris is gorgeous,” Carla said. “Full of drunks.” She rose her French 75 a little.

“I’ve never been anywhere but here,” Luc added. The dear girl seemed to enjoy Luc’s humility and she slipped her arm in his, squeezing it like a doll.

“Were you there when the war ended?” she went on.

Yves shifted his weight into Carla and glanced up toward the ceiling, catching his own eyes in a mirrored bevel. “Yes.”

“Let’s change the subject,” Luc said and kissed the top of the dear girl’s wavy hair.

“Why should we?” Carla asked, crossing her legs and lighting one of Yves’ cigarettes.

“Do you ever notice how people want to ‘change the subject’ when the conversation starts to get interesting?” The rich confidence in her voice had an easy way of getting her what she wanted. It made him laugh a little.

“No, I’m serious, darling.” Her cigarette flitted about with the flick of her wrist. “People sit around and talk about boring whatnot all day long. Silly stuff. Why should we make safe small talk when it accomplishes nothing?”

“And what do you want to accomplish?” Joe asked.

“No, Carla’s right.” Yves stuck up for his girl. “Why not talk about the war? Why not talk about death? It’s unpleasant but it’s the truth. All the shit we talk about only covers up the ugliness underneath.”

Luc and the dear girl appeared dumbstruck at this.

“But why put it that way?” Carla asked. “Why must the truth be ugly?”

“War and death are pretty ugly subjects,” Luc said.

Another round of drinks drifted onto the table.

“Wait, let’s toast,” Carla said, raising her glass.

“To war and death?” Luc asked.

“I’m sick of this conversation,” the dear girl sighed. “I’m sorry I brought it up.”

An awkward pause breezed across the table.

“Raise your glass, darling,” Carla said. Feeling her attention, her waiting, Yves’ looked up into her entitled and beautiful face and practically hated her. He grabbed his glass and held it an inch off the table.

“To the truth,” Carla said. She held her glass high and seemed to drink in all the admiration and enthusiasm of the others while they clinked and clinked.

After a fair stint of this and a pause in the music, Elon arrived the table. A too-familiar roar of greeting went up to him but he took it in good spirits and sat on Carla’s other side.

“Miss Segewick?” Elon asked.

She composed herself and answered, “Yes.” Yves rested his hand on the dip in the back of her dress that revealed the most pampered skin. The feel of it under his rough fingertips made him think of exquisite hotels, places he could only fantasize about.

“I thought so,” was all Elon said with no hint at his meaning. He flicked a glance at Yves, at Joe, and ordered whiskey. Joe collected the girls together and ushered them off somewhere. The way Yves enjoyed himself now felt days away from parting with Elon at the Coliseum. Either Elon’s mood and countenance had softened by some unknown activity in between, or Yves had decided along the way to see this merger in the most positive of lights, or both. Elon moved to conspire, crossing his arms and placing his elbows on the table.

“So, the Middle Island deal happens Sunday,” Elon said.

“Really?” Yves said, at the same time as Luc questioned, “Sunday?”

“Not a problem, is it.” It was a statement.

Yves waited a moment for more news and felt his face smiling. He licked his lips with an aim to wipe it away.

“You’ll need to be there first thing in the morning,” Elon urged. “Five, six o’clock, say. Get there early.”

Yves needed to do something with his hands in order to focus. He made some business out of pulling a cigarette from the pack, offering it to Elon and to Luc, who both declined, and then lighting it for himself, listening as closely as he could manage.

“You’re going to tell them you’re Jacques Lapin,” Elon continued.

“Are you serious?” Yves laughed. Luc did not, presumably too glazed to join in. “You want me to tell them I’m Jack Rabbit?”

Elon’s stone face read that he did not like to be duped, or laughed at. “It’s too late to change it. That’s what my guy in your parts was calling himself.”

“It’s a bullshit name.” Yves shook his head and drank. “Fuck.”

“Are you going to do this shit or what?”

“Of course,” Yves said. Now, it was all so amusing, every step of this night a surprise. America. It blindsided him every time.

“A boat called Petite Hermine is coming in from a place called The Gaspé with a load of Irish whiskey. You been there?”

“Fuck no,” Yves practically snorted. “You know how far that is? We don’t even speak the same French.”

“But you’ll be able to communicate, right?”

“Yeah, of course. We’ll figure it out.”

“They’ve got the papers and all that shit. And it’s already been handled.” Elon pulled a cotton hanky out of his suit pocket and blew his nose. For a second, Yves thought he registered some deviance in Elon. In his eyes.

“That’s everything then?” Yves asked, waiting for Elon to look him in the eye.

He did. “Joe’ll give you more details. Drop off’s gonna be in Clinton Township. Black Creek?”

“That’s quite a trek.”

“Well, that’s where you’re going.”

“And that’s everything then?”

Elon nodded and rapped the table with his knuckles twice. Twitchy sonofabitch.

“Good. So, Monday.” Yves reached up to adjust his hat, but it was not on his head. A buckshot of panic iced his body and he tried to hide it, running his fingers through the hair on his left side over the missing ear.

“What about it?” Elon asked. Yves noticed Elon landing on the mutations of his face, as if noticing for the first time.

“We start Monday on the tunnel,” Yves said. “That was the deal.”

“Was it?” Elon asked. He let the question hang long enough to anger Yves, and then glared those hideous teeth again in what could only technically be called a smile. “How about we talk Monday? I’ll wait to hear from Joe about the Irish shipment and we’ll see.”

The band struck up again, this time with more of a heartbeat over the carnival game of men and girls shuffling to and from the circular bar between the dining room and the lounge. An accordion filled in the jazz sound now and its sound took the music on a spin around the European countryside. In those comforting tones, Yves was back in France eating buttery roasted chicken and drinking homemade wine with French women and Étienne. It made him search for Carla in the crowd. Just her name could arouse him. Had she left?

“Fine. Monday.” Yves gave up. He had to acknowledge the distance the booze had settled between himself and every other human in the room. Luc had just about given in. There was only one thing that could close the gap and it was wearing a shimmering lavender dress. He found his hat on the floor and sat it back atop his head.

Elon watched. “We clear?”

“Oui. Yes.” Yves corrected himself. “We’re clear. Sunday. Middle. Monday. We talk.”

“How old is he?” Elon pointed a thumb at Luc who looked about sixteen, his hair messed like he’d just woken, his dark eyes squinting at the stage now.

“Old enough.”

“Hey, kid. Listen.” Elon snapped his fingers at Luc, which was obviously futile. Anything that Luc heard now would be forgotten come morning. “Yves, explain your job to him.”

The posturing made Yves want to throw an elbow into Elon’s already warped nose. Luc focused his eyes between the two of them.

“Sunday morning, five o’clock, Middle Island. We meet...”

“Petite Hermine.”

“Who?” Luc breathed.

“The boat. Petite Hermine.” Elon said in a put-upon manner, likely becoming skeptical and displeased at having to repeat himself. “Go on,” he said to Yves.

“We unload Petite Hermine. A shipment of Irish whiskey.”

“And what’s your name?”

“Jacques Lapin.” Registering slow, Luc snorted much in the same way his brother had. Yves shot him a look. “And we meet at Black Creek. Sunday night?”



“No. As soon as you can cross it.”

“Midday?”

“We’ll expect you say, no later than two.”

Yves couldn’t deliberate any longer. His expectations had been steamrolled beyond recognition. And the calculations of time were swelling into a headache. He needed water. Two was possible. Probably. Risky and difficult, but possible.

“Je m’excuse.” Yves slid himself down the bench and stood. He extended a hand and tipped his hat to Elon. “I think we’re done. Yes?” They shook. “Je vous en prie. I need to use the restroom.”

The sidewalks were empty at the corner of West Adams and Park Avenue. Yves’ good ear was tuned to the soft, pulsing drone of insects in the adjacent park. This level of intoxication was disappointing, almost always. Thirty-one years old, he thought. I still haven’t learned when to stop. He scuffed his shoe in the concrete dust and kept his eyes trained on the top of the newest growing building in the distance. The size of the city sometimes drove fear into him, the kind that compelled him to flee, far and fast. A dog barked somewhere high, from a fire escape or an apartment window, allowing its racket to soar clear through to the river.

“Come on, Yves Marceau,” Carla chimed from behind. “Let’s you and me...” She purposely trailed off letting him fill in the blank.

When Carla finally stood before him with her party dress on the floor, when she had stripped off her stockings and Yves could see and have everything, he was disconcerted to discover that he didn’t want her anymore. He sat on the edge of the hotel bed, told her to come

over, and she obeyed like she never had before, crossing the white hotel carpet, barefoot now. She parted his knees with her legs and snuggled up inside his thighs. Yves held her waist, thicker than he expected, and her ribs expanded as she sucked in her breath. The creamy lamp light softened her personality and she didn't appear as young and bright as he ever remember thinking. Her mascara smudged shadows into the creases around her eyes. Naked, she was just some girl.

Yves unbuckled his belt. He would still fuck her, though. And he grabbed Carla by the hip, pulling her down onto the bed, rolling on top of her. He didn't take his time, didn't savour how expensive he fantasized she would taste, didn't kiss her elegant thighs, or suck her manicured fingers. He imagined how many men had been here before him simply because she said they could. Now, he just wanted to finish. There was something about the ordinary pleasure on her face that seized a kind of cruelty and contempt in him. These light bulbs opened a terrible hole within Yves as he realized how much he needed to feel contented, that there might not be such a thing as a truly carefree life in his future.

## FOUR

Saturday, August 4, 1928

The afternoon air was heavier and dirtier on Windsor's west side especially with all the cars and boats and machinery running at once. Grit found its way between Lulu's two front teeth. She ground it back into her molars and spit onto the street, peddling her brand new bicycle as fast as her short legs could manage. Bear was ahead and difficult to keep up with weaving and dodging the traffic congestion nearing the bridge construction site.

All heads here were pointed up. Some shielded their eyes with a salute to the brow. Lulu, too, scanned the sky as the giant Canadian bridge tower dashed into and out of view from behind the city's buildings and full, old trees. She had seen the curious structure before, upriver, from Yves' trawler, *The Hope*, but drawing nearer, the tower was a modern age version of Jack's beanstalk. Its massive black iron lattice stretched much higher than she imagined. The unfinished bridge stirred wonder within her.

"Watch it, kid!" Lulu heard a man call out, after Bear narrowly missed running into him. With the crowds on this side of town, the confusion of horses and carts, trucks and cars, and the unfamiliar landscape, Lulu was not sure she could find her way home without Bear. But then she thought, I'll just follow the river back, and when she thought it the river came into view, that deep reassuring emerald green she had never seen replicated in water elsewhere.

Bear hopped off his bicycle while it was still in motion. She was still getting used to the newness of hers. Luc had brought it home yesterday with a big pink ribbon wrapped around the

handlebars. Her thirteenth birthday wasn't until next week but her closest brother in age said he couldn't wait. It was a red ladies' model with a stylish cross bar in white. Luc said he didn't want any of the other brothers to beat him to the punch. Maman tsked thrice, the way she did a hundred times a day, and said Lulu was spoiled, and worried aloud about Luc spending so much money.

"Don't worry, Maman," Luc had said. "We're flush." He was talking like a Yankee more and more every day. They all said so.

"Hey, over here," Bear was calling. At the river now a clear view of the tower was just there visible all the way from the heavy concrete bottom. Over on the US side, a matching tower waited to be reached. "Hey!" Bear called.

Lulu turned. Bear trotted over to a fancy brick building with turrets framing the entrance and a metallic green roof. Everything was so solid and old on the west side, a place she had no reason ever to visit. Bear was lifting his bicycle, the heavy rusting model his maman bought from the Sheeny Man, over a set of trimmed hedges that outlined the building. He was ever-moving, always a half step or a half decision ahead.

"I'm going to keep mine with me," she said.

"Nobody's going to take it," Bear said.

"But what if they do?"

Bear sighed. She knew it would be a pain to maneuver her bicycle around the crowds and relented. Somewhere in the park down river the ceremonial sounds of brass instruments wafted above the boat motors and fuzz of the milling crowd. Not wanting to miss a thing, Lulu handed Bear the bicycle.

"Hide it good," she said and let herself be pulled toward the music and the bridge-in-progress, striking out first for once.

Bear caught up with Lulu who shadowed her eyes with a hand like the rest of them, gazing heavenward. The sweat collected in the creases of her nose, and dripped down her neck from behind her ears, soaking the collar of her yellow cotton shirt. A group of women dressed in long skirts and holding light-coloured parasols passed by chatting loudly about flowery-sounding affairs. Three proudly outfitted boys were playing at a game of tumbling just behind the flock of ladies. It seemed their aim was soiling their good shirts and trousers, which was lost on or ignored by their mothers who moved casually on. Church bells rang a chorus at the end of a long lawn and then chimed twice.

"I feel like a sweaty cochon," Lulu said. She never meant to say such a thing aloud and blushed.

"You look like a sweaty cochon," Bear teased. He sniffed her. "You stink, too."

"Shut up," she said and elbowed him. Maybe Maman's nagging about wearing shoes and brushing her hair back was finally sinking in. When exactly Lulu started to care about her presentation she couldn't remember. But she had always wanted to cut her long, curly dark hair. This was a sticking point with Maman and Lulu had to continually braid it in the old-fashioned style. It frizzed around her temples in the heat, framing her face like a baby bonnet. She patted it down, trying to smooth it out with sweat.

An unseen dog barked somewhere behind them, setting off another dog with a shrill tone, which set off another. Lulu and Bear continued down Riverside Drive, closed to traffic and filled with people bumping into one another absently, their eyes waiting on a spectacle in the sky. Momentarily, the bridge engineers would hoist the first cable from tower top to tower top,

connecting countries in a way that the newspapers were saying would irreversibly change life on the border.

"When's it supposed to go up, again?" Lulu rose to her toes as if an extra inch would allow her the missing view. "Think there's somewhere better to see?" she asked. Before them, the riverside park bobbed with hats and umbrellas, and British and Canadian flags. The stacks and smoke of tugs and boats drifted ghost-like beyond them.

"I can put you on my shoulders," Bear said. He grabbed at her wrist. His palms felt damp. Lulu pulled away.

"We haven't done that in years. I'll crush you."

"Come on. You're as tiny as a bird," Bear said. "You're a sparrow."

I'm a rabbit, she thought. Spotted Rabbit the Shawnee Warrior Princess who doesn't need a boost from the Bear.

But she only mumbled, "I'm wearing a skirt," and walked off in the direction of the vast black construction.

"Sparrow," Bear called after her. "I like that."

"Rabbit," Lulu called back.

"Sparrow!" Bear called. Lulu ended their childish argument by letting the retort hang and drop like a fishing hook.

Off a way in the park, in the dark shade of a full-grown maple, a boy wearing eyeglasses stood on a bench waving at them. Through a plume of tiny bugs and wavy hot air, the boy became recognizable as Lulu got closer. It was Gene Rivard from her class.

"Hey, Louise!" Gene was waving his arm and gesturing as if he'd shake it clean off.

"Come on up! I've been here all day. I brought a picnic lunch. Don't want to miss this, eh?"

Gene's hair was parted and slicked back like his father's. He also wore a tie. Resting on one side of the bench, an older gentleman with a bulbous nose leaned into his cane surveying the scene.

"You don't mind do you Mr. McGuire?"

The old codger shrugged and wiped his wide forehead with a handkerchief. Lulu felt him give her an all-over look.

"Hi, Gene," Lulu said. Gene held a hand out for her to take like a man would, and hoisted her up. "This is my neighbour, Aloysius."

Bear shook Gene's hand. It seemed so formal to Lulu.

"Aloysius?" Gene asked.

"It's a family name," Bear responded, climbing aboard the bench. Lying about Bear was a favourite lark and they were devilishly good at it.

"He goes to school in Maidstone." Lulu had used this one before. There was no school in Maidstone.

From Gene's lofty viewpoint, the entire landscape was a far-reaching painting in motion. The anticipating crowd shuffled at the river's edge like gamblers looming at the starting gates. In the middle ground, speedboats circled between the banks, churning up waves to shine like real gems. And Detroit beyond, its dusty smokestacks and skyscrapers, draped a grey curtain across the backdrop. Lulu could even make out the American assembly gathered on the opposite shore, their cars and construction trucks ambling bugs in the hazy background. The largest crane Lulu had ever seen swung a claw load of something heavy-looking to and fro. She could see the American tower from bottom to top there, its concrete base and matching latticework growing straight up out of the water, and the great Canadian tower looming high through the maple leaves. Sudden cool excitement rushed into her hands. She grabbed Gene's arm.

"Wow, Gene. Good thinking!" Lulu pumped his arm up and down and bounced on the bench, immediately feeling silly. He leaned away.

"I couldn't miss this, eh? I waited the whole day. No one was here at seven o'clock." Gene bragged again. He lifted the set of binoculars that hung around his neck. "Gramps let me bring his old bi-nocks. Look." He slung the set off his neck and handed them to Lulu. Adjusting the focus took some time but finally a sailboat jerked by and again. Then she found the distant tower. It had a platform strip of road and a half-finished ramp heading towards some unspecified point. And there were workers climbing over its raw surfaces. Lulu gasped.

"What?" Both Bear and Gene asked together.

She told them about the men climbing the ironwork, pointing, and releasing the binoculars so she could try to see with the naked eye. Bear grabbed the set while the strap was still laced around Lulu's neck, pulling their faces close together.

"They're climbing this side too. No harnesses, or nothing," Gene said.

"Let me see," Bear said and Lulu was held close and captive by his grip as he fiddled with the spyglasses. She could almost taste the salty scent of his skin and hair. She tried to find the ant-sized men crawling on the bridge tower but movement in the eastern sky seized her attention. Rounding the downtown Detroit skyline, a giant cigar-shaped balloon sailed soundlessly in the air. A real, live airship. She had only seen those flying orbs in photographs and illustrations before this and her arm struck out, moving of its own accord, pointing as if it would detach.

"Over there. Look!" Holding both of his shoulders, Lulu positioned Bear to face upriver.

"Oh yeah, the dirigible." Gene fidgeted on Lulu's other side. "It's been flying around for hours."



"Whoa," Bear said. He dropped the binoculars to smile at Lulu. "Isn't that something?"

The airship drifted like a solid metallic cloud in a cloudless sky.

"Imagine the view from up there," Lulu reflected. "Incredible."

From their perspective, the airship was the size of an entire building, the complete bulk of the Penobscot Building. It seemed impossible to create an image in her mind to which she had no comparison. Lulu tried to conjure the magnificent ship's interior but it was difficult; a little pocket of chairs below in the compact undercarriage with a great lake's worth of black space hanging above? Boats on the river would appear smaller than water bugs, she thought. Could people up there even see people down here?

"I almost can't believe what I'm seeing." Bear completed her thoughts, his eyes still glued to the binocular's lenses.

"What do you suppose it feels like?" Lulu asked no one in particular. "Flying like that."

Neither boy had an answer.

"Wait until you see this bridge," Gene said. "It's going to be the longest bridge in the world, you know." He took back the binoculars and tucked the strap neatly under his collar.

"Think about that. In. The. World." His eyes popped wide behind his eyeglass lenses.

"I know. I heard it on the radio," Lulu said. "One thousand, eight hundred, and fifty feet." She didn't want Gene or Bear or the old man on the bench to think she did not know scientific and worldly things, because she did. "The Ambassador," she said, knowing they had all heard its grand title by now, but stating it for effect.

She had been collecting the newspaper articles about the bridge for six months. She followed along when the bridge crews sunk house-size caissons to the bottom of the river, where workers dug deep into the riverbed muck breathing compressed air in cramped chambers. How

the architects had dreamed up that unnatural feat mystified Lulu. There were three death notices tucked into her desk for men who had died—one had fallen, two suffered the caisson disease—while building the bridge. When Lulu first heard the word "suspension" to describe the type of bridge, she studied the books she could find on engineering in the library. She knew The Ambassador's towers were 386 feet tall and that the next step was to assemble temporary footpaths where the builders would fasten the main wires across. Eventually, the builders would lay the roadway, which would hang tight from steel wire cables attached to that suspension cable they would lift today. The bridge, and what it represented, was an endlessly fascinating saga. In a year, she'd be able to walk across it by herself, suspended a hundred feet in the air. Lulu couldn't wait to wander around the big American city whenever she felt like making the trip. She dreamed of buying pretty red Mary-Janes at the Hudson's department store, going to the pictures by herself, and eating a Coney Island in the park. Luc said there were at least six movie theatres in Detroit. Life, she thought, would surely look different in a year.

"People are going to come from everywhere to see *The Ambassador* when it's finished," Gene said.

"Probably," Bear said and as they all stared off into the space between the two towers, as the airship hovered low above the American construction site, the world already felt new.

"I'm going to be an engineer someday," Gene said. "I'm going to design stuff like bridges and dams, and..." and it seemed he couldn't think of anything more. Gene fiddled with his tie as if he were about to interview for the position. She was sure no one would trust a kid like Gene to build skyscrapers or bridges, even when he grew up.

"I'm going to fly stuff like that," Bear said, pointing at the airship.

"Really?" Lulu asked. "Since when?"

"That's a really good idea," Gene said. "With the way aviation is advancing we're going to need more pilots, Aloysius. Maybe I should consider that, too."

"Me too, Aloysius." Lulu sucked back a snicker but she was also thinking of the young Ms. Earhart who she had read about crossing the Atlantic span in an airplane.

"Really?" Bear asked Lulu.

"Maybe," she said, though she had no interest in flying a plane or an airship. In actuality, it seemed terrifying but she didn't want to be left out of their future daydreaming. It suddenly seemed silly that she had never speculated such things, as if she would never grow up. Thirteen was only days away. School would end in a matter of years. A pearly blue panic of beetles fluttered in her lungs.

She stared off into that empty spot in the river where two tugs and a barge appeared to be lining up cable in the water. She tried to tune into the plans Bear and Gene were in the process of making, mostly boyish boasts for their grown-up careers, but her focus went into her internal vacuum. Likely, she would work for her brothers in some capacity at their Shawnee Rod and Gun Club. She wondered where they would ever include her, since it was their practice always to push her out of the room when the conversation turned business. Because of this, eavesdropping became Lulu's specialty, which she often thought of as an asset in their dealings. Combined with her other talents, the acute hearing and quiet footing of the rabbit, Lulu thought she was made for rumrunning.

Once one of them, she thought it was Lauwy, had commented how Lulu might one day make a pretty dining room hostess. The brothers laughed it away like a joke, which was fine with her because the work sounded like a punishment. Luc was quick to correct him, saying Lulu

belonged on the shooting range instructing, and maybe coordinating grand competitions to draw crowds.

“But she’s a woman,” Lauwy had said. And even though they agreed Lulu was a sporting girl, and conversation snaked away from the topic, those words followed her around for a while. Until one day she had forgotten them. The opinion faded to a buried speck in her unconscious mind, and now it was jumping forward to nip her on the nose. Working at The Shawnee, a place that had always been made of magic, felt lacking now, with talk of aviation and architecture, with bridges and airships in their midst. Quite suddenly, she wanted the world to expect something of her.

At the sound of grassy footsteps coming directly for the bench, Lulu noticed two young, frazzled-looking girls approaching them. Their sandy blonde hair was unkempt and their skin shone with a greasy coating. They could have been twins except one was almost a foot taller than the other.

"We're looking for our sister," the tall one said. "Her name is Bernadette."

"No one's seen her since dinner last night," the short one added.

"How old is she?" Gene asked. "What does she look like?"

The tall one held her hand a few inches above her head. "She's fifteen. A little taller than me, but she's got short blonde hair."

"Bernadette?" Lulu asked. As she was usually the shortest in the group, Lulu felt strange bending her neck down to address the girls and she jumped to the ground. Bear followed. Gene stayed up on the bench perch that he had been protecting all day. The redness in the little girls' eyes revealed sleeplessness or crying.

"Yeah. She goes by Bernie, too." The little one scratched her armpit. "Have you seen her?"

"No," Lulu said. "I don't think I've seen a girl like that." Though Lulu had seen hordes of people that day, she couldn't pinpoint one tall, blonde, teenage girl.

"You should carry a picture with you," Gene said from above.

"Our parents have the only one that looks like her now," the tall one explained glancing past the group, scanning for her sibling. "It's from Easter. They gave it to the police."

"Well, that's unfortunate," Gene said. "A photo would make it much easier to spot her in a crowd like this."

"Check the front page of The Border Cities tomorrow," the tall one said. She looked about to pass out from exhaustion. "They're going to print it if we can't find her by then."

"Do you think she's here?" Lulu asked, wanting to distance herself from unfeeling Gene. She empathized with the girls and their sister in an immediate way. How awful to lose a sibling. How awful to be lost.

"It's happening," Gene said with the binoculars to his eyes.

"We don't know," the little one said. "She left after lunch and never came home."

"How awful," Lulu said out loud, feeling unsophisticated without anything more consoling or helpful to say. Gene was having a conniption again, and Bear bounced in place. The brass band started up. God Save the King.

"You're missing it!" Gene called down.

The older sister wrapped her arm around the shoulders of the younger. "We should keep looking," she said. "Please look out for Bernie. Bernadette Durocher. And go to the police if you hear anything."

"We will." Lulu spoke for the boys and watched the Durocher sisters search for another someone to tell the same sad story.

"Pray for her," the little one called back to Lulu. Their postures were identical and as tired as their legs looked moving beneath them.

Lulu turned to Bear. "That's so sad."

"I know," Bear said but he climbed back up onto the bench as if it wasn't.

Gene was calling something again to Lulu but she blocked him out. Bernadette. A girl of fifteen was missing. Maybe she had just fallen asleep somewhere. Maybe she had broken a leg away from help. Absently, Lulu lifted herself back onto the park bench, folding the improbable idea away in her head. Maybe she was in hospital, Lulu thought, and almost dashed after the Durocher girls with the idea until deciding quickly that their parents had likely already checked. Something was definitely wrong. It couldn't just be a mistake, disappearing for almost a whole cycle of night and day.

Above the river, a flag of Canada attached to the suspension cable raised a third of the way from the river's churning surface. On the other side, a larger American flag sailed in the breeze. The crowd sent off gleeful encouragement, but for Lulu, the excitement had drained out of the day.

"Happy and glorious, Long to reign over us, God save the King," Gene sang under his breath still peering through the instrument. Lulu wanted to jab Gene as hard as she could in the ribs with her elbow. Instead, she balled her hands into fists and watched the flags ride higher and higher, one hundred feet, two hundred feet, and still more until the cable stalled, slung from tower to tower in a grand, sweeping arch. The purply iridescent beetles she'd felt before seemed

to transform into one lone and confused beetle lodged near the centre of her chest. The thing was scraping a hole in the muscle of her heart. At least that was how it felt.

Bernadette. The girl could be anywhere—hurt, dead, trapped—and only a few years older than Lulu. Bernadette. The name felt ethereal and familiar at the same time.

"That was a moment in history, mes amis," Gene said, slapping Bear on the back.

"It sure was, Gene," Bear said.

Lulu jumped down from the bench and smoothed out her skirt. "I'll never forget it," Lulu said feeling lousy. "We saw the first time Ambassador touched shore to shore."

"Thanks for sharing your spot, Gene," Bear said.

"Pleasure, Aloysius." Gene bowed from above. He was already that big shot businessman, a wealthy engineer, his puny chest puffed out, his feet planted wide and poised to watch something more.

Lulu headed back toward their bicycle hiding spot feeling heavy and tired. Bear was his usual sturdy and quiet self. The spectators dispersed around them in every direction creating a moving maze to navigate. Talk of the bridge ceremony hummed by in mumbles. Bear reached back and grabbed Lulu's hand. The skin of his palm and fingers felt hot and rough. If she tripped, she thought, there was a danger of being trampled so she kept her eyes down, on her feet, on Bear's feet, on Bear's hand holding hers. And then they were at the tall college building and the hiding spot where her bicycle was not.

"Merde," she said. Her eyes burned as if she would cry. She said it over and over. Maman would not be happy. Luc would be so disappointed. Merde, Lulu continued to chant inside her head.

"Get on my handlebars," Bear said.

“It’s your fault,” she said. “I wanted to keep it with me. Merde!” She let her voice soar in a mad way.

Bear apologized. “I’ll buy you another one.”

“How?” Lulu asked. It was an impossibility. And it was actually her own fault. The beetle burrowed deeper.

“Some day.” Bear kicked at the grass. “I promise to buy you another one some day.”

“When you’re a fancy pilot?” The words just spat out. “I think you’re dreaming.”

The paleness in his face flushed pink but his eyes betrayed bitter disappointment in her heartlessness. She had not meant to be so mean, but instead of apologizing, she simply climbed aboard his rickety handlebars and braced herself for the long, uncomfortable ride home.

Bernadette Durocher was almost forgotten.



## FIVE

Sunday, August 5, 1928

The island was flatter than he remembered. Why Yves had pictured some elevation and more trees, he couldn't figure as he steered *The Hope* toward Middle Island in the morning dark. Something about its geography, this last stop, this southernmost Canadian land, suggested some singular importance, which he must have translated in his mind to hold some wild and regal weight on the borderline. But even as the island grew in detail with their approach, it was also much smaller than he'd pictured, low and rusty black-green with full late-summer bramble. Lake Erie was not Marceau territory and he hadn't sailed this way in a very long time but he shook on it with Elon Brueckner. A thin grey line of sand that rimmed the island's edge and trailed into a westerly spit came into view. It was dappled with large black birds.

Yves pulled the throttle back and let the vessel coast. His mind felt lined with fog, an odd sensation when visibility ahead was so clear. He should turn the boat around and head back to Riverside. He thought this every minute of the four hour trip out there. Ahead, the two structures on the island loomed higher than it seemed possible creating an illusion of the eye on the Great Lake scape. Visible for miles and ascending probably fifty feet, an old lighthouse tower pierced the blank sky. Up close, it was topped with large pointy nests and circled by the dark birds and white gulls. Even closer, Yves could tell they were cormorants, hundreds of them. Some took off from the shore and swooped low over *The Hope*, a maritime lobster trawler he'd purchased years back and painted grey for running on the river and Lake St. Clair. On the lighthouse, Yves

noticed the lantern room glass had long been shattered and some boards along its four sloping walls were severely weather-damaged. The wood had fallen off or blown away in places leaving broad holes in the architecture above its stone foundation. A good storm would bring it down, he thought.

Fixated on the top, Yves' sight tricked him again. The outline of the lone lighthouse keeper perched there above Erie scanning for lost ships, waiting for supplies, and panicking without the light. *Turn back*, the old ghost seemed to say up there. That kind of isolation could drive a man mad, Yves thought. The idea reminded him of Bernadette, who had never left his immediate consciousness.

"I'm going to circle around," Yves said to Luc, who had been snoozing on the bench in the wheelhouse. *The Hope* was empty and too light in the water to have been stopped by the Coast Guard anywhere along the way and Luc had relaxed back while Yves navigated to the middle of Erie's western basin. Alone at the helm with the bow light blinking in the dark, the clock buzz, the miles, and now the navy sky arcing blue, reminded him of time expanding away from his point of redemption. The very space between Yves and home pulled through his chest like a stern line he had forgotten to untether. His shoulders ached. Yves had to get home and he had to make the shipment at Middle. In either direction, lives depended on him. He knew so little about what specifically he was doing out there but very soon it would pay off. It didn't feel like a simple job. The anticipation always killed him. He needed to get face to face with this deal and speed home.

From the north, Yves gave the island a wide berth. Up close, the throaty chatter of the birds became clear through the wheelhouse windows. Trees lined most of the shore but here and there a clearing opened, exposing the low-lying interior. The narrow inlet Joe had advised would

be there revealed itself between two sandbars, but Yves continued around to survey. The hotel came into view facing east. It was two short stories and set back thirty yards off the beach. Luc stood and stretched beside him.

"Get ready," Yves said. There might still be a chance to turn things around, he thought, if they could load up and take off fast.

"Where's the boat?" Luc yawned.

The ship from Gaspé was not there. Maybe they had come, unloaded, and gone already overnight. The shipment needed to be there.

"Merde," Yves said beneath his breath. He revved the engine piloting *The Hope* past Middle's unremarkable south shore, gaining on the battered lighthouse again. He dipped the trawler back south, probably crossing the imaginary border, and powered around. There was no use in wasting a minute. Passing the hotel again, Yves spotted a feminine figure emerge onto the veranda that waved at them. Elon had said nothing about a woman. There was no slip in front of her at the eastern shore and he had been instructed to enter the dredged inlet and dock behind. Yves found the spot, perfect for hiding two or three midsize vessels blocked by a patch of some of the tallest trees on the island, and drifted into the cleave.

Outside the wheelhouse, the birds were near deafening. A confusion of dark cormorants soared overhead and were everywhere Yves looked. Their grim chatter paired with a sharp, noxious smell, which caught in Yves' nostrils. It was hard to breathe in. He plugged his nose. The taste of bird shit on the back of his tongue was rancid.

"*Mon Dieu*, that's awful," Luc said, jumping to the shore with the bow line. "Holy shit."

The woman from the porch appeared at the end of the slip.

"Shit, yes. But not holy." She crossed her arms there, not moving to help secure *The Hope*, not offering any gesture of welcome. They didn't have time for cordiality anyway.

"Where's the Quebecois ship?" Yves matched her tone.

"They don't tell me anything," the woman said, and she turned back to the hotel. Yves and Luc stood a moment watching her go. Her hair was almost black, cropped short in a delicate kerchief. She wore an exotic type of flouncy red pants, the kind Yves associated with Oriental men who wear turbans. The wind picked up, cool from the east, billowing those pants around her thighs and knees. She had a lovely shape. The stench wafted up again. "You coming or not?" she called back.

Luc jogged to catch up with her while Yves paused, taking in the island's interior, peering back down the channel the way they had come. He ran his hands through his hair a few times, jumped back aboard to grab his hat, searched without direction or reason around the wheelhouse, and then lingered in the bow staring up at the hotel. Time stopped. The sun had breached the horizon. Orange and yellow hues entered the sky. Even the bird sounds faded to silence. They were late. It was almost six thirty. There was nothing on *The Hope* to guard but leaving it felt in some way like going rogue. Yves knew they would be anchored to the island for too long.

Bernadette had been in the tunnel seven hours now, and she would have to stay at least seven more. Fuck. Every time he thought of her there his heartbeat seemed to amplify, rattling his ribcage, crushing his lungs, echoing in his head. Fuck. What have I done? He repeated the question so many times in his mind that he even heard himself say it aloud on that painfully long trip out to Middle. What have I *fucking* done?

Luc had waited for Yves at the top of the slope before rounding the building and now was calling to him. Time began again as the furious bird squawking flooded back into his good ear with more force.

"Come on!" Luc cupped his mouth with his hands. "What are you doing?"

Just standing on the boat didn't make much sense and he couldn't simply start it up and head back. The narrow path led to the landing where Yves climbed the few stairs onto the veranda. There, the first sunlight saturated everything in tangerine. A perfect view of eastern Erie spread wide. Pelee Island appeared close and green to the north, but in all other directions calm water blanketed the lakescape.

"They're worse in the mornings," the woman said from where she slouched against the door frame. She meant the busy cormorants flying in wavy formations just off shore but Yves' focus lay on the blank distance. No ships. No sails.

"Come in. I'll make some coffee." And she touched Luc's shoulder as if she had always known him.

"And you are?" Yves asked.

"Nice manners," she said, but the look on her face could have won the worst poker hand. "Ruby Wright."

The kitchen door was left open so that Ruby Wright could still hold audience while boiling a kettle. Ruby asked questions first—Were *they* not from Quebec? But you have French accents? Who sent you?—and expertly moved onto vague and pleasant small talk leaving Yves and Luc with little story to piece together as they wandered about the spacious dining room. The plush hotel interior appeared to have been lifted from provincial France with the harsh island world surrounding it. The furniture was carefully chosen in the vanillas and powdery blues of

French villas, and was professionally positioned for comfort and flow. The light wood flooring was polished to a rich shine, and an elaborately-carved mantel with a great, gold-framed nude painting hanging overhead decorated the largest fireplace Yves had ever seen.

Where they shuffled about the dining room, expensive-looking objects—clocks, porcelain statuettes, glass vases, dishes, a tea set—covered hutches and built-in shelves. Along the open staircase wall was a collection of radios, some mounted on the wall, some set on a long hall table, and one large floor model. Luc tried the knob.

"Those are for show, dear," Ruby said, arriving with a steaming pot and pouring. "If the wind is just right, we pick up a station out of Sandusky." She handed Yves a cup and made no attempt to hide sizing him up. "But that rarely happens."

"Elon sent us to meet a shipment," Yves started. He had no idea who Ruby was to the Brueckner operation, what she would know, or how much he should even tell her, but he needed to get to business. Before sitting at the grand cherrywood dining table, Yves tugged at his vest in an effort to smooth out his appearance. Though it was Ruby's turn to respond and fill in some information, she said nothing, and her relaxed expressionless face revealed little as she folded a leg beneath her to lounge in the captain's chair. A few fine lines wandered along her face but Ruby had a maturity about her that Yves could not place. She was attractive in a foreign way with a sloped slender nose, full black eyelashes and eyebrows, and an earthy quality about her.

"You live here year round?" Luc was enjoying this, Yves could tell. He was perky, newly woken from a deep sleep, refreshed by the open water and unexpected change in scenery. And here was a beautiful woman at the end of the journey. And why shouldn't he enjoy it? Luc had not yet seen much of the world. Yves envied his freedom.

"Mm-hm," Ruby hummed at the back of her throat as she sipped her coffee.

"All by yourself?" Luc came to the table.

"Not exactly."

"So, you're not alone right now?" Yves asked.

"How long are you planning to stay?" Ruby directed at Yves. "We're eight dollars a night."

"That's steep," Luc said.

"You have somewhere else in mind?"

"As soon as the shipment arrives we're leaving," Yves said.

"Then the coffee is twenty cents."

"Put it on my tab." Yves stood with his cup and motioned to walk away, but pivoted back. "If you know anything about the shipment, it would be helpful. We can't wait long."

Leaning into her high-backed chair, Ruby met his stare. "Look, dear. I already told you. They don't involve me. I didn't even know you were coming." She smiled.

Yves could feel her reading his body language and it pissed him off. He wanted to shake the information out of her. In the silence that passed between them then Yves tried to figure her out. How much did she know? Was she part of some diversion? Elon Brueckner had sent them to Middle Island specifically to meet *Petite Hermine* from Gaspé. Joe had given them coordinates for the island and said the shipment might even be waiting for them. Yves tried to pull forward exactly the instruction that Elon and Joe had recited, the exact words they had delivered. Information was missing, and Yves realized it too late on the way. The scene with Bernadette had chopped him up so that he struggled just to keep himself together.

"Has anyone been here in the last twelve hours?" Yves asked Ruby.

"Now you're asking some real questions." She sipped her coffee. "But if there had been, I'm not at liberty to say so."

"This isn't a fucking game." Yves seethed. Now, he wanted to slap whoever she thought she was.

Calmly, Ruby shifted to the front of her chair and placed the coffee cup back in the china saucer. Her fingers were long, the nails painted pink. She glanced at Luc and then met Yves' stare. "Mister, you have your business, and I have mine. If Elon told you a shipment is coming, then a shipment is coming. There's a reason why I don't know anything, okay? And a reason you don't know about me." She placed her fingertips on the table, stood, and looked down at it.

"Can you tell me if we've missed the shipment?" Yves left his coffee cup on the table, punctuating his distaste for this set up.

"No, you haven't missed the shipment," Ruby said, facing him again. "That I know of," she added. "Now, if you plan to wait, which I highly suggest you do, would you like some breakfast?"

Yves checked Luc who looked enraptured by Ruby and her game.

"We don't have time for this shit." Yves paced into the living room. It had the faint smell of floral perfume and cigars. The cushion of a thick pastel rug softened the hardness in his knees. An image of Bernadette crouched on the first step in the tunnel, in that black dark, flashed across his mind. "Fuck," he breathed. What have I done?

"Calm down, Yves." Luc stood. Yves noticed Luc and Ruby watching him pace and mutter, so he stopped. A headache was skulking up the back of his head. Fuck. "You're going to give yourself a heart attack, old man." Yves could tell Luc was trying to make light.



Yves never got worked up over anything and Luc snickered but his look said, What is wrong with you? Reaching out, Luc grabbed Ruby's shoulder mimicking the same comfortable way she touched him before.

"Yes, we'll have some breakfast. Eggs. Whatever you have. I'll pay." Luc looked ten years younger than Ruby under the chandelier, his close-cropped haircut, his round face. "Yes?" He was asking Yves.

Relenting, Yves nodded and headed back outside, leaving them. Unfamiliar with the door, he slammed it harder than he thought. What had he done? I should not have left Riverside. Fuck Elon. Fuck the deal. I should have stayed with Bernadette and resolved the situation.

From the veranda, Yves watched the cormorants swarm and dive in the deep pockets off shore. He held the railing and pressed his body weight forward over it. His armpits were wet. The sun had turned yellow in the time spent on coffee, but still no ships appeared on the water. The plunging birds took minutes to resurface. Their repetitive movements captured Yves' worn attention and he let the blinding shine off the water obscure his sight.

Bernadette woke him from the late afternoon nap he had been taking to alleviate his drunken sickness from the night with Elon, Joe, and Carla. It was somewhere after the dinner hour, around nine, he guessed. She let herself into the house. The back door closing, and her footsteps wandering around his hot, creaky bungalow, brought him to consciousness. They had not seen each other in weeks, but he knew it was her, the way he could sense a Coast Guard boat tucked into a bend in the river, the way he could tell a Hun rustling in the dark from an Allied soldier.

The cotton sheet felt wet on his clammy skin and he removed it, hardly cooler than covered. He stretched out in his cotton boxers listening for Bernadette's movements below. She made a slow, full circle about the house from the kitchen into the dining room, a pause in the hall, possibly a look up the stairs before continuing onto the porch where she stopped for at least five minutes. The waiting for her to move again stirred uneasiness in him. What was she doing? He tucked his hands behind his head and sighed deeply, perhaps not unconsciously urging her upstairs. But Bernadette re-entered the foyer, crossed into the parlour, and passed through his office again, before taking the hall to the stairs where she stopped again. Her hesitation bothered him. Yves had ignored her young age too long. The affair had become a problem. Even though he told her to stay away the last time he knew she would resurface. How annoying to be right in this situation, he thought.

The stairs groaned beneath each of her footfalls. Picturing her at the top of the staircase—her bare shoulders, tanned and glistening with perspiration, the slope of her perfect neck disappearing into her honey hair, limp from humidity—Yves grew agitated. He thought to end the waiting by calling out to her, but he held back. This made him honestly love her. Her ability to dissolve his anger simply with her presence. Because of her youth, or in spite of her youth, and partly because of his resolve to never marry, the part of him that was alive enough to love her did. That is when she appeared in the doorway.

"Hi," Bernadette said.

"Hi," Yves said back. She appeared thinner and her expressive eyes gave away timidity that was rare in her countenance. As imagined, her hair was limp, her shoulders were bare, and a pink dress that fell to her knees hid her figure. She looked eighteen for once. And he hated that

he still wanted to hold her body. Bernadette's eyes found his and then she dropped the gaze, once and twice. His head buzzed and he wondered if he was still drunk.

"Come here," Yves said, moving so she could lie beside him.

In daydreaming, Yves had faded the drone of the cormorants to white noise, but a sudden interruption, a quick quiet among the flocks, snapped him present. He checked his wrist watch. Five minutes out here might as well be an hour, Yves thought. What had spooked the birds all at once? He surveyed the great lake. Nothing had changed. But at the very second he decided it, a massive colony of seagulls entered his field of view from overhead. They scattered wide and appeared to reach all the way to Pelee. He searched his memory for an image of so many gulls flying together but he had never seen such a flock. They continued northeast, flickering white bugs against the blue. And when they were gone, just as before, the cormorants flooded the island with numbing sound.

"What the balls is going on?" Yves heard Ruby ask from behind. Yves had put the door on his deaf side. Placing his fedora back on his head, Yves turned to her but he made the mistake of assuming they had found Ruby alone on Middle. In the doorframe, the most voluptuous girl he had ever seen slouched in green silk pajamas, scratching at the platinum blonde mess of curls falling in her face. "Was that you hollering?" Dark, smeared makeup lined her under-eye. "You scared me right out of sleep."

Yves was unsure how to respond and awkwardly stepped forward.

"Where'd you come from?" She placed a hand on her hip and cocked it out, which emphasized her curves. She brought a bare foot to her knee, balancing in a way he thought looked practiced.

"Riverside," he said.

Rubbing one eye, the girl sized Yves up with the other.

"Well quit your yelling. It's early." She winked at him cleverly welcoming him and scolding him at once.

What is this? A fucking brothel? And the moment he thought it, he knew that's what it was. It made sense, this exotic, floating piece of land, not America but not exactly Canada either. These beckoning sirens. The violent men in Detroit. The confusion in his mind lined up like pinstripes. A grin slipped to his lips. He tipped his hat to the young prostitute, shoved his hands in his pockets, and spun back to the lake view.

Women were easy. Finally understanding the social dynamics of the island, Yves' focus fell again to greater dangers. Bernadette. Her name was a pillow smothering his breath. Leaning his elbows low on the railing, Yves resigned himself again to waiting. She was waiting and he was waiting. Never had he felt so cruel. Even comparing this sin against all the others of his life, especially during the war. Somewhere along the way, he had lost count of how many men he had killed. Truthfully, it was nearly impossible to tell. At first, the sudden jerk and collapse of their bodies was entirely human and he prayed for forgiveness in the idle hours. He and Étienne had confessed these mortal sins to each other in the beginning in the cold muck of the trenches hoping to absolve themselves somehow. But eventually there were too many kills to keep track of and the magnitude of evils he witnessed deadened those early sensitivities. But Bernadette was only eighteen and she was pregnant. Surely, he deserved the damnation of Hell for locking

her away beneath the river. The shock broke in painful waves up his neck and spread across his scalp. He had become the villain of his life story.

As if sensing Yves' vulnerability, the young prostitute joined him at the railing. Her pinky finger expertly grazed the tender skin of his inner elbow.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Yves," he said, drained of the wherewithal to lie.

"Eve? That's a girl's name."

"It's French," he said. It was the same with so many Americans.

"Oh," she said, then giggled. "That's unfortunate."

Yves refused to respond. This girl was making the mistake of thinking she mattered to him.

"French, huh? That's kind of sexy." She would try to lure him playing power tricks and perhaps at some other time and place he would have flirted back. But what she did not understand was how insignificant, no, how she was an utter impediment to all that was actually significant. Not just to Yves, but to every man who passed this way and rolled into her bed. For a moment, he wanted her to understand her own pointlessness.

"I'm Sally," she said.

"Nice to meet you, Sally." Never taking his eyes off the horizon. The late shipment. What the hell were they into? With no approaching vessels, Yves was beginning to think this entire trip was a maneuver. Panic seized him again at the thought of Joe or Elon finding Bernadette in the depths beneath his house. This day is a nightmare, he thought, and dropped his forehead to his hands in a prayer-like posture. Maybe Sally got tired of being ignored or maybe she could not be bothered with the birds, or the hot sun, or the biting stench, but she left Yves there bowing to the

eastern sky. He heard her voice mix with Ruby's and Luc's somewhere behind him, just a muffle high inside his head.

## SIX

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Sunday morning dawned for Lulu with the heavy memory of the missing girl. The six o'clock bells tolled and she found sleep clinging to her as it had all summer long. Where once she could awaken earlier than the sun and be out of doors before Maman put on the kettle, Lulu now sunk back into her hot pillow with tired eyes. In that half-sleep, those soft moments when the mind floats before consciousness forms, Lulu remembered Bernadette Durocher. An image of the girl in a navy blue swimsuit trimmed with white, standing at the edge of the large drainage pipe they all used as a diving platform, drifted forward. She'd met Bernadette before. The idea opened her eyes to a brightening sky in the rectangle of her bedroom window.

Their meeting became clearer with each second. Lulu and Bear had taken the streetcar to the Stop 26 beach a year ago. It was June, she recalled, just after school had let out for the summer, and the beach bubbled with kids even though the water was still frigid. Bear had suggested heading down to the pipe at the brewery to practice their dives, and maybe fish walleyes. Bernadette and her friends were already occupying the platform when they arrived. The Windsor girls and boys, city-polished with a quick way of talking were all taller than Lulu, which was not hard to accomplish. Something about their posture, the way their shoulders pushed back, the easy way their hands found their hips, and how they held their cigarettes, made them appear so much older than Lulu at the time. Now she knew there was only the difference of a few years between her and Bernadette. The ten or twelve Windsor kids cluttered the pipe

platform, lounging on the makeshift bench, or dangling their legs off the edge. They hardly acknowledged Lulu and Bear with a look or a nod, lost in fluttering conversations about people Lulu didn't know.

Lying in bed, Lulu wondered why she had not gone back to the pipe this season. She closed her eyes again, rolled away from the light, and went back to the story from last year. For some reason, her mind played the scene when she and Bear arrived, over and over. Lulu kept seeing her own bare feet balance along the boards, from post to post, out to where the boys and girls became aware of her. She repeatedly noticed the water flowing underneath the planks, muddier at the shore and then the deepening emerald green of the Detroit. The scan of one boy's eyes over her skinny body made her want a new swimming suit. She remembered that embarrassment and as usual also wanting to cut her hair. A year later she had still gotten neither wish. What would Maman do if I cut my own hair, she wondered. Her ugly braid now rested half way down her back. Flo, her sister-in-law, usually cut Lulu's hair and would not unless Maman said so. But what if I just do it myself? How short would I go, she wondered. Once it was done, it would be done. Just suffer the consequences now and I'll be fashionable and free.

These schemes finally produced a full mental photograph of Bernadette. It flashed up so suddenly that Lulu re-opened her eyes. The Bernadette of fourteen from last summer stood at the river's edge dripping and biting her lip in a frozen shiver. In one hand, she held her white swim cap. The other was clasped in a fist, her arm muscles flexed. Beads of water mid-drip waited to drop onto her tanned shoulders from wet, blonde ringlets. In the picture, Bernadette's blue eyes had found Lulu where she was seated on the bench.

Becoming feathery with sleep again, Lulu half-dreamed the rest of the memory. A boy on the pipe platform steadied himself against the corner post, leaned down to grasp Bernadette's



tanned arm, and tugged her up against the landing. She had a long body and managed to get a knee onto the pipe and lift herself the rest of the way out the river. She shook water off her limbs in the sun, breathing quick, and removed her bathing cap.

"Cut it out!" the boy said. "It's cold!"

"Stop your heart," Bernadette said. She squeezed water from her chin-length hair into her hands, and wrung them out at the boy who shrieked.

"Bernie! Your lips are almost blue," a girl said from across the pipe.

Bernadette touched her mouth and laughed again. "They're almost numb."

"You shouldn't go out so long," another boy said.

"It's fine, babies," she said, twisting more water from her hair. Bernie's presence seemed to bring the group together. She shivered and then turned her head—the snapshot moment—noticing Lulu and Bear for the first time.

"Hi," Bernie said, quick but friendly. Then she lowered herself to the platform's edge and sat sideways, hugging her knees into her chest. The back of her bathing suit was completely open revealing the outline of her jutting low spine.

Bernie was so pretty, Lulu remembered thinking. The type of person you stopped to look at. The elegant ease of her movements, the bells in her voice. Lulu was already using the past tense, thinking of the missing girl as gone. Dead, maybe. A disturbance pierced her stomach. Lulu turned back to the little window, and as if to distract herself from the dark thoughts forming, dashed out of bed to her desk. From the top drawer, she produced a pair of scissors.

In her cotton nightgown, Lulu stood before the yellow vanity her papa had made for her eighth birthday. That it was the last thing he had given her was something she remembered each time she opened its delicate drawers. Lulu brought her thick braid over one shoulder and studied

it for a moment resting on her right breast. She was still fairly flat chested for thirteen and she hoped to stay that way forever. In that memory, Bernie filled out her bathing suit like a woman. Her hips spreading just a tad wider than her chest. Her laugh seemed to reveal some kind of knowing Lulu had yet to learn. It was awful to imagine such a lively and shapely human body as dead, stiff, gone. Could she have drowned? Lulu could not believe the notion hadn't come to her yet. Staring at her own fuzzy halo of hair in the mirror, Lulu imagined Bernadette Durocher floating beneath the ships, a bluish white figure passing the bridge caissons down river. What a tragedy it would be if they never found her. The mystery would just go on and on.

Lulu positioned the scissors in her hand, held her braid in the other, and cut it off at the collarbone. Her reflected eyes widened back at herself in the mirror. She was practically panting. With the free braid limp in one hand and the rest of her hair swung loose at her neck, Lulu felt she had just cut her hair for Bernie. Yes, she always wanted short hair, but the risk Lulu was taking, and the punishment that would definitely follow in mere minutes, were for Bernie. This sacrifice did not entirely make sense to Lulu. It had no correlation with finding Bernie, or honoring her memory, but the gesture felt powerful. Or symbolic. If Bernie were suffering out there somewhere, then she would too, as if there were a collective pool of suffering that needed to be balanced and spread onto the shoulders of others. Like Ste Joan d'Arc or Jesus. To shrug off how grandiose and disrespectful comparing herself to the Savior felt, especially on a Sunday, Lulu continued to cut her hair in deliberate snips, shorter and shorter.

The more she cut, the more she liked it. And she did not stop until the longest pieces hit her jawline. Twisting her head side to side, trying to get a peek at the back, Lulu realized it was uneven. She had forgotten to part it to one side. Her hair was still matted from a night's tossing on the pillow. In a last moment of bravery, Lulu found her comb, brushed a section low over her

forehead, and cut fringe at eyebrow length. Now, a frizzy hat of hair sat upon her head—an actual hair-do—that she both loved and hated. It was ugly in a new way but it was off her hot neck, and it was all for Bernadette Durocher.

After changing into her Sunday dress, Lulu tiptoed down the staircase carrying her shoes. She did not like to put them on until the last minute. Plus, they felt like armor, in a way, protectively clutched at her chest. She opened the door and the quiet was alarming. The tick of the living room grandfather clock seemed to vibrate down the hallway. In the other direction, at the sink, Maman's back hunched over kitchen work. She squashed a hard boiled egg on the counter and rolled it back and forth under her flat palm. The egg disappeared back into the sink where Maman peeled it presumably over a bowl. Lulu's stomach growled but she ignored it because she always had to dismiss her hunger on Sunday mornings. Only clear liquids before Mass.

Perhaps Maman heard Lulu's hunger, or perhaps her habitual internal clock expected Lulu at that minute, but Maman glanced over her shoulder then. Just that quick glance, at first, and then she stopped peeling the eggs and turned back to get a lingering look at Lulu's new haircut. Lulu avoided her maman's eye contact. She waited. The wrath, whatever curse or punishment Maman would hammer down, suspended time between the two of them. Lulu placed her shoes on the floor, leaned against a sturdy kitchen chair, and almost winced her eyes shut bracing for the blow. *Bernie, Bernie*, Lulu chanted inside. But her punishment was taking too long and she raised her gaze wanting what she had prepared for. Maman had turned back to the eggs.

"Go find a hat," she said. Another egg was tapped on the counter and the shell rolled into pieces.

"Christ-*ophe*," Lulu heard Maman's favourite swear word as she escaped up the staircase to search for the felt cloche Flo had handed down. *Bernie, Bernie*, Lulu whispered as her toes found each step. Maman's calm reaction was a precarious victory but Lulu felt cosmically closer to Bernie and giddy with the win. Reaching the top landing, Lulu ran her fingers through the snipped tresses and enjoyed the tickle of it on her neck. Maybe things are really changing, she thought.

## SEVEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

About midday Yves had smoked all of his cigarettes. Only twice, he left the veranda shade to investigate the narrow strip of beach for a better view of the north and south horizons. With his nearness, the cormorants lit off perturbed and leaving their reek on the pebbly shore. Nothing was heading towards Middle, except, as the hours passed, a storm in the eastern sky. Yves stewed over it. Likely, this storm was holding *Petite Hermine* at the deep end of Erie. He could not help feeling it a sign, the dark green omen drawing in. The push forward of the Brueckners and the pull back home ached like it would tear him apart. The situation was bad enough. Still, war had taught him that matters could always get worse and he had become the type of man to expect it.

The wind swept in, almost visible in a front of cool air, which nearly took his hat. Up at the whorehouse, the shutters clapped against the siding. A commotion came from inside as the gust disturbed the hotel's delicate bric-a-brac through the open windows. Unbuttoning his vest on the beach, Yves let the air move through his sweat-soaked shirt, keeping his eyes trained east. Occasionally, a darker point would materialize on the surface miles and miles away, but as quickly, it dissolved back into the white caps and storm clouds. The southernmost land, he thought, his hard soles pressing those last stones of Canada down. Out there, the sun was still shining on America, its skies bright blue. The same sky. Same water. Same land. This beach—Middle Island—felt like nowhere. At least, nowhere anyone would want to be.

Ruby emerged on the porch with clicking heels, loud on the wood planks. Yves let it turn him around. Luc was following her, excitedly closing up shutters one by one. He was enjoying their nuanced, feminine company. Another one of them had materialized later that morning—Joanna, a lithe brunette with an accent. Several times, the four of them had encouraged Yves to come in and rest, play cards, and eat, but his mind was set on course. Yves had sunk so much effort into their one plan, the tunnel, that he never considered how their early foray into criminal work would affect Luc.

Until Lulu came along, Luc was the baby of the family. For eight years. The girl was really a surprise. Luc and Michel were what people called Irish twins, often mistaken for identical, and when they were just toddlers both contracted viral polio. Quarantined for a month in hospital, the brothers lived by iron lungs and suffered paralysis in both their left legs. Michel nearly died, but pulled through eventually, though his left side would never be the same. He still walked with a limp and a cane, his left hand and forearm crooked and smaller than the rest of his body. Luc fared better, was spared visible signs of crippledom but wore a leg brace for ankle support and to straighten his one pigeon-toed foot to this day. Growing had been difficult and painful for Yves' two youngest brothers—surgery, teasing, and undignified stares—but the family didn't show them much sympathy. The Marceau way was to laugh through it. Play it up even. From time to time, Luc struggled to hide his disability, but Yves never thought of it as a setback or a weakness until now. Luc could be vulnerable when it came to his self-confidence, especially in the romantic stuff of life.

Bernadette, a vision of her standing at the edge of his dock, a place she would often wait for him, came to his thoughts. Enough was enough. He couldn't sit around doing nothing any longer. Facing the tempest, he realized he had to act.

"Sacré," Yves swore to himself. It didn't matter that he was still nauseated from the empty stomach and the whiskey and had not slept three hours in the last thirty-six. His body surged with so much pent up energy that he could swim back to Riverside. It made him twitchy.

Luc rounded the house again, jumping up onto the porch and landing with invigorated strength.

"Come on in, brother! The water's fine!" Luc cupped his mouth and bellowed down to Yves alone at the shore where the birds repopulated, ignoring the statue-like man.

"Merde!" Yves said, bounding back up to the civilized veranda. "What if the shipment is in the storm and not behind it?"

"They'll make it through," Luc said. "It may not be so bad as you think."

"The fucker could sink, you know."

Goddamn! Together, they watched the mossy cloud formations bloom and grow. His youngest brother's naïvete could be so irritating, and at the present moment, he realized, so dangerous. Not only could they lose the delivery but the ship could go down drowning the crew in rough water. Erie was shallow and filled with small islands in the basin as well. And if the Quebecois runners were at all inexperienced seamen they might end up in the depths, or at some other depot, or in America creating a more complicated sort of problem.

Yves swore again as Ruby took the side steps. The flurry had unloosed her hair from the kerchief, sending it whipping across her face. Her skin was luminescent against those raven locks. He remembered the feeble lighthouse.

"What's your problem now?" Ruby asked.

"Your useless lighthouse."

"It was like that when we got here," Ruby said and headed for the door.

"You never thought to fix it?"

"That's not our business." She headed back inside.

"Of course it isn't," Yves spat as the door closed him out of the hotel.

Luc joined Yves at the railing, crossing to his brother's good side. The sky was split into two opposing, dark and light sides.

"Yves," he said. "What's going on?"

The two of them had been working so close now for four years, at The Shawnee and in the tunnel, nearly erasing the years and distance the war had taken. Luc was only eight when Yves had left. But though they had similar features and were the type of brothers you could immediately pinpoint as siblings, it would have been hard for Yves to pick out his own brother back in '21 on his return from Europe. Luc was only fourteen. But since then, Luc had treated his oldest brother like his very own hero, quitting high school early to join Yves on all his river running trips and together they had discovered every inlet and hidden vantage point of the Detroit's east end. Yves felt his little brother give him the wide berth he usually demanded but the desire to unload onto Luc everything he had done—God, Bernadette—and the remaining hope that he might right his major trespass was warring within him. Instead of saying anything, Yves let the full silence answer.

The cormorants took flight all at once again, an imminent cue, this time seeking shelter in the trees and scrub of Middle.

"We need to give *Hermine* something to shoot for," Yves said. He rounded the hotel, climbed the rocky incline back toward *The Hope*, and stopped at its precipice. Whoever had built the hotel had chosen possibly the highest and sturdiest natural point on the island. From there between the trees, Yves sized up the lighthouse structure. Luc arrived at his side.



"Think we should burn it?" Luc asked. The dark birds and white gulls circled mechanically above the missing lamp like a spooky wind-up toy that never stopped.

"Yeah," Yves said. He rubbed his stubble.

"That's extreme, don't you think?"

"In an hour this island's going to be completely in the dark. They'll end up at Pelee for sure. If they make it." Yves turned all the way around, enjoying the height. "Or in Ohio and that's a different kind of problem." It felt good to have direction. "Come on."

A short way off from the docks and the hotel there was a long shed. They needed gasoline. There would surely be enough dry foliage in the birds' nests to start a fire. The wind picked up, pulling leaves off the trees and sending spray into the air.

"What if they're behind the storm?" Luc called after Yves.

"We can't take that chance."

Luc stood by as Yves rooted around the shed, finally emerging with a half-full gas can.

"What about the Coast Guard?" Luc asked.

"I haven't seen them all morning." The wind picking up whistled through the brush. "And if they do see it, they'll probably think it was hit by lightning." Yves held the gas can up, shaking it, wondering where their main source of fuel could be, and then noticed the lack of boats moored to the island. *The Hope* was the only vessel docked at Middle.

"Probably. But if it draws them here though..."

Distracted for a moment, Yves wandered around the shed searching for a dinghy, a canoe, any small craft, but there were none. Jesus Christ, he swore glancing about. The Brueckners had marooned the women on Middle. What had they done, was his first question.

With the perverse way Elon had of toying with people, imprisoning the girls here only seemed unusual, if not unlikely. It sickened Yves; the girls so precariously isolated.

Luc seemed entranced by the lighthouse across the island, possibly trying to decide which way would get them there best. Yves stood close as if someone were lurking nearby. It was his habit.

"The girls are stranded here," Yves said.

"What?" His little brother did a quick survey of the docks and surrounding area, and back up to the hotel behind them.

"Jesus," Luc said. Yves waited a moment for the gravity of their situation to sink into his youngest brother's consciousness. A mess of guilt and shame, and a confusing sense of pride filled Yves. He paused there reading Luc's face. He pulled Luc closer by the cuff of his neck, and felt whispers of Bernadette in the tunnel on the tip of his tongue. But Yves sucked the urge to confess back in, and pushed it down.

"You see how we can't fail here?" Yves asked. Luc nodded. "So, what do you think? Should we use some of our fuel?" They kept about thirty gallons onboard but there was a chance they could need it. "Or just start it up with this?"

"Merde, yeah," Luc said gravely. "Let's start a fire."

Yves left his vest and fedora on *The Hope*, and after grabbing a five-gallon container, Yves and Luc started the trek across the island with the old lighthouse in their sights, roughly three or four hundred yards away. He felt wild and young with the wind moving through his hair, exposing the blank side of his head to the elements. Middle was denser than Yves had guessed from the lake. The way was thick with rough, sharp sumac, and dogwood and scrub trees. Into the first twenty yards of brush, Luc jumped back, pointing at a long black snake slipping away.

"Sacré," Yves swore. "Watch yourself." Holding the gas can in his right hand, Yves pulled at a sturdy-looking fallen branch and gripped it as a walking stick with the left.

"I fucking hate snakes," Luc whined. As if nature conspired to aggravate him, another thin black one darted across their path. Luc hollered out into the shrub forest as they continued on.

"They're probably just water snakes."

The forest floor opened into waist deep, moss-covered limestone crevices, which they balanced atop. The air was earthier here, less volatile than on the shore. Yves yanked the half empty gas can from Luke and crouched low to even out his heavier load. In the understory, clumps of delicate purple flowers bloomed in the shade and forest songbirds flitted before them. Their warbling calls changed the atmosphere momentarily as Yves used the stick to stand again. The bomb blast that had taken his left side hearing made balance an issue for Yves. It was more often a problem on the water.

Wind moved through the taller hackberry trees funneling a hollow shush overhead. A few at a time, the lake birds landed in perches, some with nests higher up toward the open sky. On a jutting ledge shoulder height, the root of some plant began to shiver and slide revealing itself as another snake.

"Don't grab onto anything." Yves said, pausing to recalibrate their direction. "It's fucking crawling with snakes."

"You think they're poisonous?"

"Just don't touch anything and watch where you step." Using his keenest senses was invigorating. This kind of danger suited him most. It reminded him of Étienne. In these moments, Yves could feel Étienne with him, sweeping the brush with him every crouching step

of the journey. Low-crackling thunder broke above the island. A ways through the swaying canopy, the lighthouse appeared larger and taller with their approach. Yves kept them trained on it, only half-acknowledging that Luc had begun to chatter nervously. A flash of light brightened the woods.

"That's why there's so many birds," Luc said. "The snakes. That, and the fish. It's so fucking shallow here. Shore's probably lined with mudpuppies and crayfish and bottom feeders. Good fishing, probably. We should come back, you know? What are those birds anyway?"

"Cormorants."

"Cormorants? Fucking filthy is what they are. You couldn't pay me to swim off this shore. It's a shame too, 'cause I'd love to watch those girls take a dip. Sally's got some choice tits on her, eh? And Joanna's accent? She's Irish, eh? Makes me want to put her up against a headboard, you know?"

He let Luc ramble. Yves' own familiarity with fear allowed Luc some compassion and space. There had been too many marches like this in France to recall them all, hikes through village and field and forest soaked through with anticipation, even in the deep freeze of winter. Back then, Yves was the talker. Étienne had let him go on and on, said the ceaseless talk calmed him, that it established a subtle alertness, as if the ordinary sound of his brother's voice captured the ease of being at home. Yves' banter had been a mechanism for survival even, when they'd needed to stay awake on lookout, or on scouting missions. Nine times out of ten, Eleanor Ducharme was the featured topic.

In the first year at war, his nervous conversation surrounded plans for the house he would build for Eleanor, his fiancé. He was only nineteen and he had visions of it, the very house he constructed and lived in now on the river facing Detroit. He'd fantasized grand night cruises, just

the two of them, drifting past the lights and rhythms of Boblo Park Island where he'd propose to her again, properly with a ring. Now, looking back, the images were motion pictures, some actor portraying a life. Not his. After Eleanor chose another man and moved to Chicago while he was still fighting in France, his anxiety-fueled conversation changed daily. What was the meaning of it all? What good was love? His grief boiled down to a quiet hatred. He talked for great stretches of time into his own vacuum of heavier and more abstract subjects—politics, philosophy, humanity, violence, wealth, God—minimizing his external palaver to only essential discourse.

Plans for The Shawnee Club were born on a comparable walk behind the western front. Étienne always wanted to do something with the land their uncles would leave them soon. Papa was still alive then, and they were fixing on returning from the war ready with a business plan. The idea of a peaceful, rolling golf course, even though Yves knew little about the game, stayed at the forefront of their future dreaming. How those dreams had soured. One tragedy begetting the next. And none of them could have predicted how prohibition would have darkened their lives in the county. Those plans and dreams seemed to exist in another man's life.

A malevolent and constant whirl of what Yves thought might be a rattlesnake set off somewhere nearby. Yves paused to listen. Not paying attention, Luc bumped into him.

"Tabernac!" Luc swore. Yves grabbed Luc's shoulder for balance as they came against a rocky outcrop and more thorny growth. Through the trees and around the island forest, Yves focused on the lighthouse, only about fifty yards away now. Luc was still rambling about the Middle hotel girls.

"They're pros, buddy," Yves said. "Ruby, Joanna, and Sally? They're whores." With that out, Yves set off south rounding some impenetrable scrub toward the beach. Low-made cormorant nests were filled with birds here that squawked and rustled with the presence of men.

"I wondered," Luc said, following.

"Don't even think about it," Yves called back.

"Sacré bleu! What a way to pass the time though," Luc laughed. "Jimmy does it all the time."

"I don't give a shit. Here in this fucking mess they're trouble."

The bush hike opened up to the beach then. A shiver coiled up Yves' spine from the cool wind pressing in. Yves searched down the length of beach for a way to pass but the storm swell had risen too high. Beyond a leaning tree, a large concrete slab and a pile of layered bricks were nearly hidden by tall grasses.

"Careful," he said to Luc as he lifted himself up.

From the new height, an overgrown clearing lay before them with the decrepit, square-shaped lighthouse pushed back. There was little evidence that the structure had once been painted white. The billowy meadow before them blew sideways in ripples. Lightning broke clear across the lake. In the surrounding trees, the silvery underbellies of leaves whipped in gusts, exposed to the greenish sky light. Luc motioned to set off and Yves reached out for his elbow, holding him back. In the open, with wind crashing through the island now, Yves had to raise his voice.

"You could step on a snake." Yves pointed down into the grass.

"Well what the fuck?" Luc asked.

On the remains of what was probably an abandoned dock support, they turned around to face the southern lake. All around the sky was sick, pushing down with soupy, woolen clouds. Yves scanned for a funnel and felt the first wetness of rain touch his hand. Or was it spray from the slapping waves? It didn't matter. They needed to light the fire before it poured.

"Well?" Luc asked. "We make a run for it?"

Yves sucked in his breath. "Fuck it," he said, leaping from the slab. The ground jumped up hard, especially with the extra weight of the gasoline. His left knee crunched as he sprung back up and took off toward the gaping doorway in the lighthouse foundation. Fuck getting old, he thought trying to ignore the groan in his leg bones. With the wind and the running, and always hollow on that left side, Yves' own sharp breaths pulsed inside his skull. Faintly, he could hear Luc hollering behind him into the weather like an idiot. A few more strides and he ducked straight into the lighthouse through a net of spider web.

Yves' cursing banged around the empty tower, which shot up high and dark, with a shit-covered wooden staircase at the center. A shaft of dim light filtered down from the opening above. Luc bounded in just behind. Storm wind whistled and rattled through the aging boards. Its tall cavity was alive with flashing eyes and stirring in every corner. Animal nests filled every nook, at the stair landings, in the worn-out holes, and way up above where they shed feathers and dried filth, tainting the air with noxious dust. The putrid odour overpowered Yves' throat and eyes.

"Come on," he said, covering his mouth and nose with his elbow. "You go ahead."

"All the way to the top?" Luc yelled.

"Keep going!"

Luc ascended to the stormy blank hole at the summit with Yves limping up behind. He needed to have a look out from the top deck. He needed that ship to be there, drifting toward them on a steady course. The birds up here, more exposed to the gusting elements, huddled deep in their messy roosts hiding their beaks and heads beneath their wings, beneath each other. Yves felt a depraved satisfaction knowing the fire would soon force them out.

The wood planks of the staircase near the top had rotted away in crucial places and Yves had to hold onto the soiled railing to balance on the secure edges of the structure. Luc had reached the highest platform, rimmed thick with a disaster of nests. There was no vantage point. Luc reached down and pull Yves up where the lamplight used to be. A tad higher, Yves could see into but not past the nests. One large bird was folded tight and flat to the bottom of this utmost perch, the throne of the island. The creature uncurled its head from underwing and revealed a severe mask across its shining black and gold eyes. A hawk. Yves thought he could see straight down its throat as the bird of prey opened its hooked beak and hissed.

"Jesus Christ!" Yves shielded his face with his arm but the hawk spun in its nest facing them, hissing again. "Lift me up," Yves yelled over the crashing above. But Luc was holding onto the railing with one hand and the near full gas can with the other. "Sacré!" Yves shouted and the hawk screech-hissed this time.

"Fuck off, bird!" Yves yelled at hawk.

Using an elbow for leverage, and reaching into a nest on the opposite side, Yves tried to hoist himself up. He had no clue the direction he would now be facing. Spiraling up the middle of the lighthouse had disoriented him. It didn't matter. The soft, rotten wood collapsed under Yves' weight and he fell back down onto Luc. A board somewhere beneath them snapped. The king hawk rose above them into the wind, its pure white neck and underbelly plumage gleaming against the dark clouds. It swooped down, claws first into the lighthouse, forcing out an odd grunting shriek, flapping into the small space. Yves and Luc hunched low and away.

"Just spill it," Yves shouted and they dumped the gasoline, taking the stairs two and three at a time. Yves' mind blanked out racing to the bottom, and waiting in the open doorway. Luc was a black figure still moving awkwardly near the apex.



Luc fell to the base of the staircase, yelling at Yves to get going. Yves pulled matches out of his pocket and hesitated. Their pant legs were splashed with gasoline.

"Get back," Yves told Luc and shoved him into the field where it was already raining. In the doorway, Yves wiped his hands against the sweat of his shirt. Once more, he squinted up to the hole at the top of the old lighthouse, imagining a view that included a tossing ship approaching from the east, and struck the match against the dry, inside wood. Chucking it toward the base of the stairs, Yves lunged back. Nothing happened. He took another out and repeated. Again, nothing. It was gasoline, wasn't it, he thought, and panic spread like ice water through his limbs. His mind bounced around those moments in the shed. No boats. No fuel. He sniffed deeply. Yeah, gasoline. He thought to ask Luc but then remembered that their gas can was definitely filled with real fuel. Regardless, the doubts doubled and tripled as he raced to the base of the stairs again to light the shit ablaze.

Yves struck another match against the railing and tossed the flame into a cluster of nests. Fire caught with an instant whoosh up the railing, onto his right shoe, and igniting his pant cuff. He ducked away from the heat, such an oddly familiar sensation, out to the wet field consumed with hot panic. Heat pressed at his back. A phantom flame singed his hair. His pant leg already smoldered in the rain. He threw himself onto the wet grass and kicked his foot against the ground anyway. Wind boomed across the clearing. Luc was over Yves, watching him have a fit.

Luc pulled Yves by the armpits farther out into the overgrown lawn. Above them, the rickety lighthouse smoked black from its cracks and holes. Bird after bird escaped the same way. The fire inside growled low. Burn, dammit. They waited. Here and there, a lick of brilliant orange pierced the dark. When the gales pushed into the island, the fire's roar hushed, and then responded with intensity.

"Can you walk?" Luc asked.

"Yeah," Yves said, trying to stand. He made it up but his joints ached. "Come on." He wanted to keep moving. The heat was incredible against his old scars.

Crossing the glowing meadow, Yves kept glancing back over his shoulder to watch the fire grow. The lighthouse finally blazed. Yves hoped it would pay off. *Hermine* could be out there now spotting their flaming beacon. At the old concrete dock, they watched the south-facing wall detach with a crack, and collapse into the centre. A spray of sparks and smoke broke out through the space. Now, all the way to the top, the lighthouse burned from within.

"It's not going to last long," Luc yelled over the wind. It was true. The fire would devour the rotting wood planks and the storm would snuff it out.

Yves spun back to the lake. *Hermine*. Be there, he demanded. But, he could see no boat on the lake. With any scrap of luck, it would be out there, hard to see, but there. It had been days, honestly, years, since Yves had truly good fortune, but he had to hope for a turn. There was nothing left to do.

"What do you think?" Luc asked into the wind. "Take the beach around or cross back through the snake pit?"

Their position now was the exact opposite corner of the island. The lighthouse fire illuminated the thorny interior, blowing in violent snaps at its heights. Up and down the shore, the shallow beaches were still impassable.

"Back the way we came," Yves said.

## EIGHT

Sunday, August 5, 1928

The Marceaus who lived in the neighbourhood—Lauwy, Flo, their three boys, Michel and his wife, Jeanne, whose new home was across the street next to an old Polish widow, Maman, Pepé, and Lulu—congregated in their church clothes on Shawnee Road. No matter the weather, over the years and seasons, their weekly pilgrimage to Mass at Ste Anne's was a permanent fixture in the Sunday landscape. As usual, Maman led the flock with Lauwy pushing Pepé in his creaky wheelchair just behind. Beneath Pepé's bulk, the chair whined with each wheel rotation. Their church heels shook up the gravel and clacked out a rhythm like a broken toy. There was an oppressiveness about the day, the light filtering through a great hot yellow haze about everything, sky and earth. This contrasted with the sparkle of drama Lulu had created within herself, the new haircut she looked forward to showcasing. She fell into step with Flo at the back of the pack and waited anxiously for her to notice. She did almost immediately.

"Lulu! Vos cheveux!" Flo snatched the hat off Lulu's head and scrunched the locks in her fingers. She played with the volume on top, clicking her tongue. "Qu'as-tu fait?"

Lulu shushed her doting sister-in-law and made shifty eyes in Maman's direction, who was carrying on down Shawnee, shoulders pushed back for the benefit of watching neighbours. Flo cupped a hand over her mouth and crinkled up her eyes.

"Oh, no." Flo wheezed a laugh. Her shiny copper hair was tucked away from her face up under her trim summer hat. Lulu couldn't help the triumphant toothy smile that popped into her

face. Flo tisked again, and then grabbed Lulu's face to kiss her cheek. "Sans souci," Flo said. "We'll fix it." And they strolled arm in arm, despite the sticky sweat pooling in the creases of their elbows and armpits, discussing what had come over Lulu to do such a thing. Though Flo was in her late twenties, a wife and a mother of three boys, she was nurturing in a youthful way. She would create games to sweeten the boring tasks of hanging laundry or peeling potatoes. As usual, Lulu told Flo every detail, down to her innermost thoughts about Bernadette Durocher's disappearance, all the way to Ste Anne's. Flo always listened like a teenage sister, never scolding or judging like an adult.

"I can't wait to hear what Bear has to say about it," Lulu said from such a truthful place it felt naked. To this, Flo grinned with some adult knowing behind her eyes that flushed Lulu's face. She could feel her internal temperature rise as the Marceau group traveled by the Laforêt house. Her step quickened even though it had to be one hundred degrees at half-past the August morning.

"You're in a hurry," Flo teased.

Lulu was never in a hurry to sit in church but the complexity of her emotions took control of her actions. Strangely, she was very anxious to get into that pew and have an hour to mull over these new, curious thoughts, this unexpected excitement surrounding Bear.

Reaching Ste Anne's, Lulu sucked in a lungful of sultry air. A storm felt near. She followed Maman close, away from Flo's insightful eye, shuffling down the centre aisle to the same pew they occupied every week—left side, half way to the altar. Instead of shifting to a reverent focus, Lulu glanced down the rows for classmates. Pausing there in the aisle too long, Lulu found Monsieur Laforêt's gaze. He smiled with a serious manner, perhaps already lost in prayer. Bear's papa only sometimes attended Mass. It must have been a conflicted issue for him,

to leave Madame Laforêt and Bear at home on Sundays. Lulu knew Bear hated Mass infinitely more than she did. He once said he had attended enough Masses to last three lifetimes and would not give a nickel to enter into that version of Heaven.

Lulu felt Flo's hand at her shoulder maneuvering her into the seat. Even though it was Flo, Lulu shrugged her off. In church, at home, at school, she always felt as if she were being made to fall in line, to be ushered into place, to sit still. If only she could be forever outside. She knelt to pray.

“God is in the trees,” Papa used to say. The idea used to astound Lulu. That something so colossal as God existed just there in places she could reach. As a child, she would press her cheek against the maple bark and listen for the sound of Him. In the small void between her eardrum and the trunk, Lulu heard the vast emptiness in the sway of branches, the scuttle of insects and animals, the reassuring hush of leaves touching one another. Maturing, she connected with Papa’s saying, especially after he passed away. Now, Papa was in those natural places. The rough skin of his hands was birch bark, smooth in places, rippled in others. His temperament was the wind, unpredictable and strong at times whipping in the fields, gentle and whistling through marsh reeds. Crow and jay caws were Papa’s laughter. Lulu wondered how Maman could cope with missing him since she hardly left the house, or the perimeter of their yard.

“I think my papa is here,” Lulu told Bear last summer holding their fishing rods out over the Shawnee rainbow trout pond. “He told me, God’s in the trees, so I think he must be here, too.” This seemed to sit just fine with Bear. He only continued to stare into the dark depths nodding, as tiny water bugs jumped across the clear water. There is a lot of time to think with fishing line drifting in the weeds.

All through Mass, Lulu wanted to reach up and play with the damp ends of her hair but she willed her arms to lock against her sides. Zeph, Lulu's youngest nephew, sat between her and Maman, but her scent, the musk of her, hair powder, a dab of woody perfume, and the enduring note of the anti-pain ointment she applied religiously still wafted over each time she moved. Placing her fingers lightly on the pew's rise, Maman craned her neck back to the front entrance. She acted like a different woman at church, her eyes more luminous, her voice almost airy. Still, Maman had that smile that looked like a frown. Though Lulu had not planned it, cutting her hair on a Sunday proved an advantage. Lulu felt her maman's eyes rest on her uneven haircut between searches for the family, though she made no comment, verbally or otherwise. She was looking for Yves and Luc. Maman waited uneasy for them every week, but they would arrive. All the Marceaus would come to fill up their pew and overflow into the one behind.

She never trusts us kids, Lulu thought. Her empty belly gurgled. Maman had never once expressed it explicitly, but they all understood these were her few hours when all of her living children and grandchildren must gather around close. Why did it matter so much to her? No one ever argued. Her brothers and their families would saturate the house with banter and tobacco smoke, teasing Lulu, often bringing her little gifts—penny candies, lures, books—and wrapping their childhood home in an embrace made of the old music of their lives. Naturally, they would drift back out Maman's door at the end of the sacred day and into their own concerns again always leaving Lulu behind like a doll you could set down and forget a while.

The light and colour drained from Maman's face as Mass trudged along. Yves and Luc had missed before. She worries too much, Lulu thought. All of the time. They were rumrunners. Lulu was fairly certain Maman knew this. And runners kept irregular hours unlike everyone else

in town. The whole family thought Lulu didn't know, but she did, and she relished this knowing something they were unaware she knew.

*Bernie, Bernie, Bernie*, hovered at the edges of everything. She could not wait to tell Bear who Bernie was, that they had actually met her last summer.

At the close of his sermon, Father Charbonneau lead a special prayer for Bernadette, that she may be found unharmed. Lulu clasped her fingers tighter, as if the added energy would give more weight to the prayer. Mass ended with Bernadette, too. A woman from Ste Rose de Lima Parish in Riverside was called to the podium. She read a quick statement from Bernadette's parents and Lulu sat up straight, straining her ears with special attention. The woman was large and round with blueish hair and a booming voice. She read slow, enunciating each word with the hint of British accent.

"Please listen carefully to a statement from the Durochers of Riverside." She cleared her throat loudly. "As you may have read in the paper or heard on the radio, our daughter, Bernadette Durocher, has been missing since Friday evening. She is a tall fifteen year-old, with short, blonde hair and brown eyes. She was last seen by our youngest daughter, Pauline, leaving the house shortly after dinner. She was wearing a pink short-sleeved dress with a white flower pattern, white stockings, and grey shoes. Please note her Easter picture in yesterday's newspaper and go to the police with any information, anything at all, you might have of her whereabouts. Tomorrow, Monday August Sixth, the Windsor and Riverside police departments will launch a door-to-door search for Bernadette. Please volunteer if you can and help us find our beautiful daughter. God Bless You. Monsieur and Madame Durocher." The woman bowed her head to the giant crucifix, to Father Charbonneau sitting like a king at the top of the altar, and returned to her seat.

Lulu bit her lip, waiting. She wished Father Charbonneau and all of the servers would race their way down the aisle to the back of the church. Now she didn't care about her stupid haircut. Bernie Durocher was all that mattered. Bear would remember Bernie, remember that day last summer on the brewery pipe. He had the sharpest memory of anyone she knew. Together, they would be assets on the search.

Outside, the bells rang overhead. Their divine clamour bounced around making Tecumseh feel more significant than it ever was, or would be. Bear was there, on the fringes of the crowd, hands in his pockets, waiting in the sidewalk shade of Laramie's Hotel.

"I figured it out," Bear said, when they met on the crunchy brown grass of Ste Anne's front lawn. "I saw her photograph in the paper."

"She was one of the girls on the pipe that day." Lulu had to say what she was waiting to reveal since she woke.

"I know." Bear matched Lulu's excitement. "She was the one swimming."

"Yep." Lulu smiled. She loved how their minds could sync up. "Should we volunteer for the search, or..." In public matters, Bear could not exist. The ghost of Tecumseh.

"I guess you could," Bear said. "Find out where they're going, and we'll map out our own search route." And then the cheery expression dropped from his face. He stepped back and looked hard at Lulu. "Something's wrong."

She paused. Perhaps it was something he had read in the paper. She regretted not finding the article yesterday but she'd been so upset about the stolen bicycle it was forgotten. Bear appeared older without a grin in his eyes, more like his stern French father.

"What's wrong?" Lulu asked.



Bear's hand darted out fast and swiped the felt hat off Lulu's head. She reactively shrieked and grabbed for it. Solemn heads turned from the crowd of milling parishioners spread across the church lawn. Maman was one of them.

"Merde," Lulu murmured. Strange how in a crowd of so many, a daughter will find the eyes of her disapproving maman.

"You get me in trouble every time," Lulu said, curling a section of hair behind one ear.

"You get yourself into trouble," Bear said, giving the hat back. "You cut your hair? By yourself?"

"It was an act of sacrifice." Lulu tucked her hair back under the hat. She ignored his quizzical look, and he didn't say anything. He seemed to always stop teasing before she could get angry with him. This was how they worked. "Flo's going to fix it." Lulu added.

"It looks good," Bear said. "You look older."

Not knowing what to say next, and hating the empty pause that lengthened after his compliments, she repeated, "It was an act of sacrifice for Bernie."

Bear seemed to understand what she meant, or at least declined to comment or question her motives, and brought his hands to his hips, ready to plan.

"You should go sign up right now." He looked around the church lawn. "Before lunch."

"I don't think I can," Lulu said. "Maman's got her skunk eyes trained on me."

"Explain it to Lauwy," Bear said. "He'll help you."

"They should all help," Lulu said, though she couldn't picture her five brothers scouring the county, the river, and the city for one girl. The Marceau brothers were a force, connected in ways Lulu could only imagine. But she didn't think they would bother where it wasn't their business. "But I think they're too busy."

“Luc will join the search.” Bear seemed sure of it.

It was definitely something Luc would do, Lulu thought. “He didn’t come to church,” Lulu said. She took the hot hat off her head and waved stale air in her face.

“That’s going to take some time getting used to.” Bear snickered and pointed at her head.

She looked away, not wanting him to see even the faintest sense of his opinion show on her face. A truckload of pigs drove by on Tecumseh Road, stirring up a dirt cloud and kicking up sharp, sticky smells. Lulu searched the faces of the parishioners and found Maman's again, who beckoned with a cock of the head. There were potatoes to peel, apples to slice, ears of corn to husk. “I gotta go.”

Bear nodded. “My papa’s here somewhere.”

Lulu skipped back to Flo where Maman could see her. She turned back to watch Monsieur Laforêt catch up with his son. He put a hand on his shoulder. Bear looked taller. His steady and confident gait with the white sun hitting his dark head and the crisp shoulders of his good shirt gave Bear the look of a person who could do anything and go anywhere. The fact that he was dead for now would not stop him, Lulu thought. Then father and son disappeared around the corner of the hotel and just the idea of them remained. This was Bear’s time to wait and grow. He was becoming an eagle in her eyes; no predators, no limit to where his mighty effortless wings could take him.

Lulu had always felt like a mouse underfoot. A rabbit, she corrected her thoughts. Though, she had not been trampled. Lulu learned to dart fast and hug the shadows. And she was his best friend. An eagle and a rabbit, she thought. It was a fitting match. Bear could lift her up in his impressive claws, and together they would soar above the lakes and rivers and forests, and find the girl.

## NINE

Sunday, August 5, 1928

The storm considerably darkened the day when Yves and Luc, savage fire starters of the island, returned to the hotel. Ruby stood firm on her veranda gripping a shotgun in her hands ready to use it. Open flame flicked a glow into the windows of the hotel lobby behind her.

"Get in your boat and go home," Ruby said, lifting the gun almost to aim.

Yves instinctively raised his arms, hands to his shoulders. He had no idea if this woman was actually capable of shooting a man. Yves felt Luc stiffen behind him.

"I had to give the ship something to aim for," Yves tried.

"You could've burned the whole island," she yelled, keeping them in the heavy rain.

Losing his footing on the slick, rocky slope, Luc staggered into Yves.

"Maybe," Yves said. "But I would've taken all of you with us. Off the island." He felt like a wild man. He had no way of knowing what kind of effect this suggestion would have on Ruby, if the women were in fact held there against their will, but it was a shot at winning her over. She was hard to read, head lowered, stock still, the storm whipping about and hiding her features. Yves lowered his hands slowly.

"Go on," she said. "I'm not letting you back in." She stepped into the shadow of the hotel to retreat inside.

"Ruby, wait," Luc appealed to her. "What if *Hermine* does come, and we're not here?"

She paused. The Brueckners would be none too happy to hear she had interfered with business over the old, useless lighthouse. Only her hand holding the door was visible. One of the girls' soft voices murmured something from within, barely audible above the storm. There was a long pause between the weather ripping the island apart and what was being decided in the hotel.

"This is fucking crazy!" Luc screamed, laughing almost maniacally into the volume of the crashing thunder. In better circumstances, Yves would have laughed with him. He was thinking they would wait it out on *The Hope* if she didn't invite them in.

Ruby came back to the threshold where lightning flashes revealed her face again. She looked Yves directly in the eye and her posture softened, lowering the gun. A slight tick of the head said they could enter. She pulled the screen door open and the wind banged it flat against the wall before Yves could catch it.

In the apricot light of the hotel lobby, they found Joanna and Sally curled on the furniture like house cats. Still in their nightclothes, the girls watched them enter the room with glassy eyes. Ruby swished in her silky pants, wet in patches, to the edge of a sofa, where she perched on the arm. She rested the muzzle of the shotgun on the creamy carpet. Her slippered foot dangled.

"You could've burned the island," Ruby repeated, meeting Yves' look, but her expression said nothing. He couldn't tell what that might have meant for her.

Not daring to upset Ruby again, Yves returned her vacant stare. He wasn't sure how to proceed, but despite the boom of the storm, the hotel was a balmy and fragrant oasis. The unfamiliarity of the room was almost disorienting. There was a raw burn on his leg but it was manageable. Resolving to wait meant he had to swallow all the hours more that Bernadette

would be stuck in the tunnel. He wore all of it like a lead cloak standing there. In the lamp glow, the girls watched for his next move.

"I had to do something, didn't I?" Yves used an apologetic tone.

"We'll explain it to Elon," Luc started, but Ruby held up her hand.

"I don't care what you tell him about that," she said.

Ruby's sentences were cryptograms. What *did* she care about? Who was Elon to *her*? Who was *she* in the organization? Yves had exhausted his capacity to posture and riddle. Rain water dripped from his hat brim. He took it off, ran a hand through his long hair, and pretended the whores were not regarding his scars. He was an utter mess. I deserve it, he thought. For so many reasons he could trace back to enlisting too many years ago to think about, he deserved all the bad luck that came his way now. A flicker of lightning through the kitchen window caught Yves' attention, and he staggered toward it, leaving the suffocating sitting room and all in it.

The kitchen was cooler. All of the marble and metal surfaces held no heat. The room was darker as well, lit only by one central light fixture. A lengthy sigh released from deep in his gut. The headache he'd forgotten stabbed inside his skull in all directions. His stomach growled. Yves tossed his fedora on the counter and dragged himself to the sink. As Yves held his fingers under the stream waiting for the water to run cold, he wondered who had built the hotel, and who came here. Likely, it was an exclusive club. Servicing the Brueckners, and the Ohio rum-line. He ducked low and splashed his face, trying to wash fatigue from the back of his neck. Water entered his dead ear, filling it easily without the outer architecture. He shook his head to the side to clear it and slumped down against the butcher-block counter.

The dimness challenged the focus of his eyes. For a second, the kitchen went fuzzy as if everything were too close to look at. A random urge to removed his shoes came to him. But

bending down proved a problem. With his balance off, Yves fell into the solid island behind him. It gave him the idea to lie on it. Instead, he pulled his torso over the clean wood, and rested his full weight on it, his scarred cheek and temple flattened down.

Under the hanging pots and pans, Yves thought of Bernadette. What might she be doing right now? How deep was her despair? He couldn't fathom how things between them could work out now. Too many hours had passed. He wondered about her health. I hope, he thought, she had the smarts to remain calm and sleep the hours away. The idea that he would project how she should handle his completely irrational reaction caused such a strong wave of self-hatred that he thought he might retch. It might have been the fracturing ache in his head.

The day they met, for the second time—her, all honey thighs and curls—on Stop 26 beach, it was the first truly warm weather in May. Or was it June? He could see his own heavy leather boots pressed and sinking into the spongy lake sand. Down the way, a glossy bunch of teenagers readied a sailboat. Its white sail filled and folded. The sunny glint off the water pierced his eyes. Yves pressed his fingers against his burning eyelids. How many hours had he been awake at that point? He couldn't remember the last time he did something simply for fun. Shooting maybe, in the first thaw of the spring season.

The air smelled of minerals and buds. He let the sailing group steal all of his attention—the boys, skinny with cropped haircuts and rolled pants, jutting elbows and quick movements, and the girls, already wearing their belted swimsuits and sun hats, linking arms and clustering together. Only some of them could fit into the boat, and he watched them push off. The vessel tacking back and forth into the northeasterly mesmerized him.

"Hey, I know you," came a voice from his deaf side.

Yves turned to Bernadette, a stunning young woman. "What's that?"

"I can't remember your name though," she said, shielding her eyes from the sun's glare with a hand at her brow. "Don't you remember me?"

Yves couldn't place her. She smiled wide, dropped the hand from her face. Her eyes were copper like pennies emphasized with short dark lashes. She motioned for him to wait. Her vitality seemed to exaggerate his exhaustion, his poor hearing, his weak memory. He felt like an old man in comparison. Too many explosions, he thought as she walked away, back down the wet sand fifteen feet. Then she turned her long body back to him. Yves traced the shape of her pale legs, bare from the hips. She laughed too loud and ran at him at top speed, then brushed right passed him, grazing his arm with her shoulder. She spun back.

"Remember me now?" she asked.

"No." Yves heard himself chuckle. "But I wish I did."

The golden girl brought her fists to her hips and frowned. "Ste. Rose Church?" She raised her dark eyebrows. "A few months back?"

The memory crested then. This was the same little girl?

"That was you?" he asked.

"That was me." She pointed a dancer's toe out into the sand and then crossed it behind, curtsying on the beach. Yves reached up and tipped his fedora in response, and her smile seeped into him.

"Bernadette," she said.

"Would you like something to drink?" a girl asked from the doorway. Yves didn't move to find out which girl was attached to the voice. He didn't care.

"I'd like something to eat," Yves said. He pushed himself to his elbows and held his head in his hands.

The girl was at his side then. Joanna, the Irish one.

"What's this then?" she asked, handling his body.

"I have a headache. My pant leg caught fire."

As Joanna collected items around the kitchen, Yves watched her body move in the dark. She was smaller than the other two, more boyish in the shoulders and arms, a leaner jaw and nose. Her loose garments, a filmy blue sleeveless blouse and matching bottoms, seemed to conceal empty space more than flesh and bone. When Joanna dabbed at his bloody wound, tisking all the while, her reaction reminded Yves of Maman.

"Bit too impulsive, are we?" she said with a melody. "I need more light," she said to herself, and then found a lantern, lit a match, and brought the flame close. She was quick and exact in her movements. A skinny squirrel with a task. He closed his eyes.

"My ma was a midwife," Joanna said.

He didn't want to hear it. There shouldn't be small talk with Bernadette locked away.

"Aspirin for the headache?" she asked. "Hair of the dog?"

"Food," he said. And the knives behind his eyes forced him to lie his head back down.

Joanna stroked his wet hair, tucking it around his good ear. Bernadette did the same. He let her kiss his scars, too. For no reason, he remembered how she had cooked him an omelet once. Tears itched his sore eyes. He probably loved her. What does the shipment matter anyway, he thought, compared to the mother of my child locked away? He would go back now. He would



suffer the Brueckner's consequences and protect his family later, but right now, he needed to be with Bernadette. A weak wave of urgency felt like sudden madness washing over him, and he tried to stand.

"Whoa," Joanna said from across the room. "We should lie you down."

There was no way he could leave at this minute, though. Hearing the wind still gusting across the island, Yves registered that it wouldn't be smart to leave now. Mon Dieu, he thought. If they perished along the way, so would Bernadette. No one else knew she was there.

Bernadette. Her name was combustible.

"What's going on in here?" Luc asked.

"You can't smoke in the kitchen," Joanna said to Luc. "Ruby says it flavors the food." Joanna lifted a platter she had arranged with a block of cheese wrapped in paper, a hunk of ham, sliced bread, and a bowl of blackberries. "Set yourselves out there," she said, then looked over Yves again. "You still look poorly," she told him.

He lifted his head again.

"What's wrong with you?" Luc asked.

"Headache."

"Go on," Joanna said. "Sit down."

"We're going to leave as soon as the storm lets up," Yves told Luc in French. He stood erect and tucked in his shirt.

"Pourquoi?" Luc asked.

"This is bullshit." Yves sidestepped Luc in the doorframe. "We go back and finish the tunnel ourselves. Fuck Elon."

The lobby smelled of beeswax. Several candles had been lit, offering more light to eat luncheon by. Ruby was bent over, pouring drinks into beautiful gobblets. The outline of her undergarments added shape to her figure.

"We drink brandy in the afternoon," she said. "Does that suit you?"

"Why not?" Yves wondered what had rubbed away her hard edges. He sunk into the unoccupied sofa and a tide of comfort melted some tension in his body. The release in his back, his knees, his shoulders manifested in a long moan. He took his time chewing a piece of slightly stale bread. He enjoyed a sweetness in it, even though he felt as if his jaw might break apart. The little things. With only one bite, Yves closed his eyes. It felt mechanical, his arm dropping too, onto his pant leg.

"Poor man," Yves heard one of them say. A moment later, he felt the furniture shift with the weight of another body, and a set of dainty hands grasping his shoulders. Her breasts and belly pressed against his arm. It was Sally, he guessed. The musky perfume of her set him further adrift while she kneaded the rigid muscles at the nape of his neck.

"Lucky," Yves heard Luc pout. Someone else said something. Yves didn't bother to decipher.

"Here," Ruby said. Yves opened his eyes for a few seconds to a glass of brandy floating before him, but no, he wouldn't drink, and his eyes dropped shut again. To enjoy anything while Bernadette was locked away in the dirt felt like a mortal sin. He attempted to shrug Sally's massaging hands away but the minor effort only seemed to encourage her.

"Relax, baby," she whispered in his ear. The body's natural reflexes won, and he sunk into her. "Poor Yves," she whispered. He let her caress the rough scars at his temple and jaw with a touch so faint he confused it with his imagination.

In late soggy winter, Yves ducked into Ste Rose de Lima Church in the damp, grey dusk of the day. He had walked there, wandered really, from the ferry landing downtown. The heavy, red brick church anchored the street just blocks from his own home. And lately, when he passed by the steeple, he wondered what the view would be like from up there. How much of Belle Isle could he see? He thought to investigate. In the entranceway, the hollow hush of air passing through the parapet steeple overhead traveled down, pushing him subconsciously further in. He removed his woolen tuque. The familiar frankincense and wood polish perfume drew him to the font where he absently dipped his first two fingers, crossed himself, and paused near the back pews.

"He should eat something." Joanna's Irish accent was like whiskey effects on the nerves. His body was a hollow shell on that sofa.

In memory, the church was empty; the lofty domed ceiling exaggerated its loneliness. Yves found the stand of unlit votive prayer candles in the shadow of the Blessed Virgin statue beside the sacristy. The only electric light in the building illuminated the crucified Christ statue in harsh white light above the altar, contrasting with the faint way the stained-glass hues tinted the dark wood. The suffering figure reminded him of something. Is it March thirteenth? Yves wondered. He calculated the dates of the weekend. Yes, Tuesday, March thirteenth. Papa's been gone six years today.

Yves rubbed his face—Jésu, he was always tired—and returned to the votives below the Mary statue. He lowered himself, one creaky knee at a time to the kneeler, struck a wooden match, and lit three candles: Papa, Étienne, Mémé. They flickered before him, dancing in red glass holders. Even as he clasped his fingers, leaned his lips against them, and closed his eyes, Yves wondered what he was doing. He had not prayed since the war. *Ava Maria, gratia plena,*

*Dominus tecum.* It cleared out the tangle of anxiety overgrowing inside. What were they really doing under the river? How would the passageway work in actuality? Had they only built a problem without a solution? Or something purely useless? Yves had not known what to do with his half-dead self since the war. Since Étienne. And the tunnel was focus.

In the Middle Island hotel lobby, Yves could barely decide what to try and control—his limbs, his thoughts, or his will—but he let himself repeat the *Ava Maria* silently. If there was any divine mercy in the world, any forgiveness, it would come from a woman, the holy Mother. But he wanted to think of Bernadette.

The west wing church door opened to his right in fantasy, sucking a draft of incense-perfumed air toward the outdoors. The swish of a person dashed past behind him, bringing the cold in. A girl. Her boot falls and sharp breaths echoed into the dead space, bringing it to life. She rounded the front pew and turned down the centre aisle. Reaching the building's centre, she stopped, doubled over bracing her hands on her thighs, and heaved laboured breaths. Then she straightened up and dropped her head back, releasing a joyous bellow.

"Sanctuary!" she cried, and her voice sped along the lines of the dome, bouncing off marble surfaces. The reverberating sound tickled inside his good ear before it was absorbed again by the overbearing silence. She laughed, still catching her breath. Yves stood, watching the tall girl in bulky layers, an evergreen pea coat and a white knit tuque, as she took in her surroundings. Then, she noticed him.

"Desolé! I didn't see you there," she said. She genuflected at the first pew and then laughed again, loud, as if she were simply releasing pent up energy. "I'm so sorry." But she could not reign in her giddiness.

"You're all right," Yves said. And then he heard himself laugh, which was always a strange sensation, a staccato vibration trapped under his skull. Sometimes it crackled in his good ear. She was disarming, this adorable, sweaty thing, not much older than Lulu, he guessed. She drew him closer.

"I was running from my sisters and the neighbor boys," she explained, sniffing. "The Tessiers? You know them?"

"No."

"They're hellions. They try to lick my face," she said. "Don't you live around here?"

"Oui, I do. Do you?"

"Yes. We moved here from LaSalle before Christmas." She extended her right hand, covered with a wet mitten, advancing toward him. "Bernadette Durocher. People call me Bernie, but I don't like it."

"Yves Marceau." He bowed slightly. Closer up, she seemed to sense his thoughts, or notice his scars for the first time.

"Were you in the war?" Bernadette asked. There was discordance about her—woman-like in her height, in the contours of her cheek bones, and the way her face featured her lips, but child-like in her unabashed disposition. "Sorry. I guess that's rude."

"Yes." Yves said. "I served in the war."

"You got hurt." A simple observation. He liked how she addressed his obvious malady without reservation. How could he remember every word? Every intonation of their first conversation?

He had nodded. "I did."

"Do you live on the river?" she asked.

Yves paused. She was chatty. Lulu would make a good companion for this one. He pictured them talking over one another.

"Oui, I do," and he told her where.

"Ah, bien. We're neighbours then. We're just off Ottawa, near Jefferson. You should come for supper. I have three sisters." The noise in that house, Yves thought. He leaned back, felt her drawing too close.

"I'm sure your mother wouldn't like you inviting strangers home," Yves said.

Bernadette delayed her answer, taking a half spin around nervously, her eyes trained on the elaborately painted ceiling. "But, you're not a stranger..." She trailed off and stepped back. The easy expression on her face faded, and a shade of concern passed across her eyes, as if some sixth sense were kicking in. "How come I've never seen you in Mass? You're not Catholic?"

"I go to Ste Anne in Tecumseh," Yves said. It was true. He sat in church each week for Maman's happiness only.

A breathy whistle pulled their attention to the front entranceway.

Was it a kettle in the kitchen?

In his dream, in life, she'd turned to it a half second before. In profile, Yves could see her jaw clench, her chin jut into the blue glow of stained glass.

Back on the bright spring beach of his dreams, Yves watched Bernadette—some loose locks brushing over her cheek and catching in the crook of her eye, her hands, the unpolished fingernails, as she squeezed her hip, her pretty teeth, slightly crooked on the bottom row. He wanted to be with her again. He wanted her there at his side. He noted, instead, the salty scent of cured meat and the pleasure of Sally's soft thigh under his right fingertips.

"It's Bernadette, right?" Yves asked that fresh face in his mind.

"That's right," she said. "And you're Yves."

"I thought you didn't remember."

She looked out over Lake St. Clair, squinting into the glare. "Sometimes I lie. I don't know why."

"Could be dangerous," Yves said.

"You think?" She narrowed her eyes, flirty-like. "That's an idea." She cocked her elbow and made like she was holding a gun with her fingers. "You think I look dangerous?" Then she pointed her pretend gun out to the waves, aimed it at the vanishing sailboat, and pulled the imaginary trigger. She yanked the hand back, blew the invisible smoke from the hot revolver. When she laughed her voice was French horns and red wine. Yves wanted to touch her skin.

"You seemed much younger in church," Yves said.

"Did I?"

Yves nodded, wondered how old she actually was for a second. She dropped her head, stepping toward the shore's edge, squishing the wet sand through her toes on the way. She knew what she was doing, allowing him an uncensored moment to look her up and down. Her belted waist was high. The navy blue bathing suit hugged her hips but there was room there, where the fabric ended at those thighs made for racing around town. Sixteen? Seventeen? Yves drew a deep, stinging breath into his lungs. The ability to breathe deeply had never returned.

"I'm eighteen next month," she said, her back still to him.

"Happy early birthday."

"You never came to dinner." Her voice was distant, still facing the lake.

"You never invited me."

"I didn't want to appear too forward," she said. At this, Yves laughed. She was a beautiful contradiction. "What?" she whined.

"Nothing."

"Tell me!" She bounded toward him, connecting with his bloodshot stare. She grabbed his elbow. "Tell me."

"You're hardly shy, Bernadette," Yves said.

The lapping of waves seemed to quiet as she lowered her gaze. "That's true." She sounded disappointed. "I need to learn to be more mysterious. Au revoir!"

She sauntered back toward her girlfriends who were sitting on the sand now, presumably waiting for her, or the boat, to return. Her narrow hips shifted back and forth. Her heels left deep depressions.



## TEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Luc let Yves sleep. He lay against the rest of the sofa, breathing deep and heavy, not quite rousing a snore. He'd been considerably crankier than usual and killing Luc's enjoyment in the adventure. His oldest brother was almost always on edge, having to lead and control the family, but with all the unplanned events of the morning, Luc guessed he'd reached some internal breaking point.

That curvy creature, Sally, had curled up next to Yves, settling her blonde head on his lap. From there she kept watch, in a protective way, a beautiful servant. Yves hadn't slept much that night, or maybe not at all, while Luc had managed four hours on the boat. He was such a baby. All that motion in *The Hope*, or any vessel, the constant rocking always coaxed him toward sleep. On every run, it was a problem he tried to hide from his brothers. But they all knew he'd be a little drowsy in the quiet bobbing. That Luc could be counted on for his easygoing temperament was a benefit of this mild narcolepsy.

Conversely, Luc knew Yves suffered from insomnia and tried to hide. Their houses were only a few lots apart on the river and Yves' lights were always still on when Luc turned in. They'd lived together while his bungalow was under construction, too, and Yves could be heard moving about the house at all hours of the early morning dark.

They couldn't be more different, he thought. With Yves snoozing, he took point on the job, jumping up at intervals to scan the stormy lake from the veranda. If only for a little while, he

was captain. Doing business on Lake Erie made him feel like they were pirates, true-to-life smugglers running operations on a veritable blustery sea, and each time he left the living room to survey the waters for *Hermine*, he faced the wind with a broader chest.

"You might see more from Versailles," Ruby said, advancing toward him in the front entrance. Her oriental-style pants shone in the lamplight like the gem of her name.

"Versailles?"

"Sally's room," Ruby said. She rounded the staircase that landed at his feet. "Come on. I'll show you."

Suddenly interested, Joanna rose and scurried toward them. "You can see my room, too," she said. "Shanghai." She lowered her voice an octave to give the word seductive mystery, and gave him eyes through her lashes.

Yves was right, Luc thought. High fashion prostitutes with bedrooms named after exotic places. A gentleman, Luc waited for Ruby and Joanna to take the stairs first. This afforded him a stunner of a view—a peek at Joanna's white thighs. Each lift up the stair sent the flimsy pajama bottoms swishing from side to side with her hips, betraying the high curves of her lily inner thighs. From this angle, a pink corset that trapped her torso was visible beneath the material. In the low light, his view was so suggestive that Luc had to look away, and he glanced over the banister to where Yves still slept soundly.

At the top of the stairs, Ruby struck a match and lit an extraordinary blue glass finger lamp, which illuminated the long, confined hallway in faint light. In the wallpaper, metallic flecks glimmered with the impression of being underwater as they passed along. Luc almost commented absently but checked himself. It was best not to break the padded quiet and allow the

dreaminess to float on. With Ruby in front and Joanna behind, Luc was ushered to the northernmost end of the hotel. Joanna tapped a red door on the way.

"Red room, Shanghai," she said in the mysterious voice. "Versailles' ahead. Morocco, at the other end." She was a child showing off her family home to a new friend. Her act felt real, and it charmed him.

Ruby opened Versailles and entered the dark room. The room came to life in crystal detail. Periwinkle walls trimmed with buttercup and gold leaf filigree encased an oversized four-poster bed, crowned by a headboard of layered floral tapestries. The fine dresser, vanity, and armchair were perfectly chosen and arranged, as if by some royal Parisian designer of the times. So opulent, and feminine, and ornamented, Sally's Versailles room was like living inside of a French country bouquet. His inner vision swirled with erotic snapshots.

"Over here, Luc." Ruby waved him to where she pulled back heavy drapery.

Joanna followed him, landing arm-to-arm at the window. He waited for his eyes to adjust to the lightening storm outside. He savoured the girls flanking him close, enjoyed the tingle on his skin. The smell of powder in their hair and the silken fabric on the back of his hands, his wrists, was just as intoxicating as the brandy. He thought about what he'd said crossing the jungle interior of Middle, about mashing Joanna up against the headboard a few times. His body tightened. Joanna leaned into him, shifting her weight his way, as if innately reading some barely perceptible sign, or seducing purely out of habit.

Through the windowpane, Middle Island was a confusion of flailing limbs, tossing in too many directions to make any sense which way the storm was heading now. But in the grey-white caps of the churning lake, two small lights glowed. *Petite Hermine*.

"Merde," Luc inhaled, half in wonder that the boat had found its way, half deflated to cut this little fantasy tableau short. He stalled a moment, deciding what his first move should be.

Wake up Yves. Ready *The Hope*. Flag *Hermine* into port.

"You better get moving," Ruby said. "You need to meet them on the water."

Luc turned, meeting her eyes almost too close to focus. Joanna grabbed his elbow.

"Why?"

"Because as far as I know that ship isn't scheduled to stop here." Her brows furrowed in annoyance.

Luc stepped back into the deep carpet of Versailles putting the game strategy together in his head. "Why didn't you say something earlier?"

"Because I work for the Brueckners. Ray specifically." Ruby said. "And what do I owe you?"

"What do you owe them?" Luc asked too quick. Merde, he swore inside. My impulsive mouth makes me sound like an imbecile sometimes. "No, I apologize," he tried to correct himself.

"Look. They've done this once before." She communicated something to Joanna with her eyes that Luc couldn't read, then she stopped holding back. "You're going to have to jack it."

Ruby waited for Luc to reply, and when he didn't, she darted past him. "You have to get going."

Downstairs, Luc shook Yves awake as calmly as he could. The news would be a tough blow.

"It's coming," Luc said. "*Hermine's* coming,"

"Why'd you let me fall asleep?" Yves pushed his Sally cat off, and his body shuddered in an alarming way.

"Yves." Luc stood over his brother. Luc didn't have a clear enough mind to put it lightly.

"Elon set us up."

Yves sat erect with an expression that Luc and the other brothers tried hard to avoid. There was a shadow version of Yves that lived just beneath his skin. Unexpectedly, the light would drain from his eyes, and their brother, Yves would drop into a void. What seemed left in his place was just the negative of the man, the lack of his being moving along in his form. Something sinister. This was the look.

"Are you drunk?" Yves asked. "What do you mean? Exactly."

Luc knew Yves wanted the base amount of information to deal with.

"They're not scheduled to stop here," Luc said. "They're expecting Jaques Lapin. But Jacques Lapin must work for someone else. Not the Brueckners. Anyway, that's my guess."

"It's true." Ruby came forward. "You have to go."

Yves lurched to his feet, and crossed the living room to her with a fierceness shocking to witness. He just about grabbed Ruby's throat. The danger that hummed under everything that day punched up to an ear-splitting siren. Joanna reacted as if she could hear it too, her hands shooting up to her cheeks.

"Don't," Sally called from the sofa.

"All this goddam day," Yves said standing over Ruby. "You fucked us..." Spittle flung from his lips and he searched for the end of his sentence. With his hair falling about his head in greasy strands, Yves' rage was overblown and misdirected, Luc thought. But he had sensed there was something Yves was concealing on the voyage. He was shorter tempered than usual in every way.

“Yves.” Luc needed to calm him down. “Come on. She’s not part of it. Come on. Where’s your hat?”

"Fuck this." Yves glared at Ruby. “Allons-y,” Yves said to Luc disappearing into the kitchen.

Luc felt the pent up energy in his body deflate. Was Yves giving up? Yves had never surrendered, and it took Luc a moment to adjust. He had mentioned it before in the kitchen, to leave and go home, but Luc didn’t take him seriously.

"What do you mean?" Luc had only imagined returning victorious. "We need this. I don't have to explain to you what's going to happen if we fuck it up."

"It's not just about that anymore, Luc." Yves returned to the dining room and stopped. He bowed his head and ran his fingers through his hair methodically, three, four times. It’s what he did when he was knocking something heavy around his skull. Luc understood then there was something more eating at his brother. Then Yves’ back stiffened and he addressed Ruby.

"Give me your guns," Yves said. The dark thing ruling him now snapped into action. Luc both admired and feared it.

Ruby shrank. She almost retorted, but Yves cut her off. "Just get them," he said.

After handing Yves the shotgun still leaning against an ornate end table, Ruby went to the front closet, pulling a key out of her pocket. Yves pumped it. The sound thrilled Luc. He shook out his arms and bounced on the balls of his feet like a boxer, ramping himself ready. Give me a gun, Luc chanted in his head. We're going to take *Hermine* on the water. Like pirates. Give me a gun.

From across the room, Joanna caught his eye with a cheeky smirk. Luc winked. Ruby returned with a rifle and a pistol, holding them to her body. Sally knelt at the back of the sofa watching them work.

"You have to return them," Ruby said to Yves before offering them up.

"No problem." Luc snatched the rifle and aimed it into the kitchen, getting a quick feel of its weight and contours. He had a crafty thought. On a night off real soon, I'll return them myself, and spend the night in Shanghai.

"Fully loaded?" Yves asked, and Ruby confirmed. "You ready?" Yves turned to Luc who nodded back. He loved their partnership. They had dissimilar dispositions, but they moved together like two wolves hunting. Yves always made the perfect decision, and Luc was always ready. Their precision and success had created a reputation in the last few years, and Luc enjoyed the respect it commanded around town, and the access it gave them in Detroit. This betrayal was something they hadn't encountered before, but they'd shown their hand with the tunnel. Luc recognized that mistake at The Chop, but it was too late to do or say anything about it. The Brueckners were likely in Riverside at the moment, looking for its entrance. Tricked by the weasel.

Before leaving the sweet shelter of the hotel, Luc turned back to Joanna. He wanted to say something slick. Instead, he saluted her like a soldier. It felt smart and stupid at the same time. Giddiness bubbled inside with that last whiff of perfume. And he couldn't wait to get back and pay for his wish.

A vast canvas of blustery grey stretched before them, trailing southwest. The lightning and thunder had progressed Ohio-way. To the east, the sky lightened. Yves raced almost gracefully around the hotel and across the rocky hill. Luc tried to match his brother's agile gait

against the rain, the wind, and the newly familiar terrain, but he his brace slowed him down. On board the damp old *Hope*, they struck out with the efficiency of routine.

"*Hermine*. From the east?" Yves asked.

"Dead on." Luc reversed the boat and brought it about for the channel. "You have any ideas about this?"

"I'm thinking," Yves answered, pulling the only pistol they carried on the boat from the wheel compartment. He checked the round and handed it to Luc, who tucked it into the front of his pants. As far as Luc knew, Yves had never commandeered a vessel in transit. He really didn't know how to begin here either. Fire first and come alongside? He should have paid more attention to the pirate stories of his youth.

They needed another man, at least. Why had they come alone? He and René had been pushing for more artillery for a while now. Yves only thought it would escalate the violence. He said they'd beat them at the mental game, and with their fists, if needed. Luc thought they needed to be carrying all the time now. It seemed more than foolish not to have a few Tommies on hand.

When *The Hope* approached the end of the natural wharf, Yves yelled back at Luc to stop before they entered the lake. Luc yanked the throttle back to neutral and steered their drift toward the softer bank. The trawler scraped bottom first, then bounced off beach. Yves crashed against the side of the wheelhouse. The wheel dug into Luc's ribs thrown over it.

"*Sacré bleu*," Yves swore. They'd stopped flat in a matter of seconds, more suddenly than Luc had intended.

Yves left the shotgun and his hat behind on the bench and ducked out into the wind with the set of binoculars that had become an extension of his own limbs. "Turn off the lights," he threw back.



Feeling a useless first mate, Luc waited at the wheel as Yves abandoned the boat and jogged ahead to the end of the grey beach. Swirls of stormy gusts carrying island debris barreled down the channel, smacking the hull, and wheelhouse glass, yet his own breath seemed to echo inside, alone and calculating. How would they overtake *Hermine*? Should he follow Yves onto the shore? The speed each step required overloaded Luc. He simply couldn't think fast enough, even with this pause. Hijacking *Hermine* didn't seem possible.

Bounding back onto the boat, Yves was soaked through, a determined look in his eyes. "Take her to that southern spit and run her aground, up the beach." Yves folded his arms across his chest leaning his forehead against the front window, peering east. Luc could feel Yves' plan, but thought it was a bit hasty.

"What if it's not them?" Luc rarely questioned his brother, but the consequences of running the boat aground gave him serious doubts. If they incurred any damage to the body, they'd be stranded, even if they managed to secure the shipment. And again, what if the ship out there wasn't *Hermine*?

"It's them." Yves waved Luc to sail on. Luc's hesitation brought Yves about. "Just do it," he commanded. "The storm's been coming all day. A crew with any sense won't be out there."

"What if it's the Coast Guard?" Luc wanted to filter through all the possibilities. Yves seemed not to be himself. It felt shortsighted to injure *The Hope* without knowing all these variables, unless Yves planned to take *Hermine* completely, crew and all, and abandon their trawler. It would be an impressive maneuver, but he doubted they could manage it, just the two of them. How many would be aboard? Yves was in his face then, gripping the wheel.

"It's not the Coast Guard," he said with intensity. "It's the fucking *Hermine*." Yves slammed his fist down onto the instrument panel. "Listen to me. Bring her in just fast enough to

hit bottom but slow enough to minimize the damage. You want me to do it? We just need them to believe we're in distress. I'll send up a flare when we get there." Yves slapped Luc's arm hard, as if spurring a horse.

Without a better plan, and without a guiding spotlight, Luc obeyed his partner, and edged *The Hope* onto the lake avoiding the flanking sand bars. The anonymous fish tug was out there, to the right, between the dark shadow of the island and the blurry shore of Pelee in the background. She was aimed to pass north of Middle.

"Hurry, or they'll miss us," Yves shouted. "Go around south."

Rebounding, Luc steered the trawler around the island with sharp turns. They circled the island fast, came about starboard to the north again. Luc aimed for the length of colliding white caps at the northwest end. Underneath it lay the shallow spit. He slammed the throttle, let it ride high for a count of one, two, three, four seconds. Wave spray hit them in sheets.

"Don't bring it head on!" Yves shouted.

Luc ignored him. This was something he wouldn't fuck up. His instinct was to skirt the shoals port side, and wedge them into the clay, gingerly. He really didn't want to lose *The Hope*. She was fast and they would need her hidden bays on the voyage home, and they had no idea what kind of a joke *Hermine* might be.

Luc jerked the hammer back, steering starboard simultaneously. Yves hit the window hard, fumbling at the seams, trying to keep himself steady to watch their ascent. The boat tipped low, taking water on deck and then coasted diagonally toward the crest. The keel grazed bottom for a quick half second, without slowing. Luc held his breath, and they skimmed bottom again, the wheel held taut to its right limit. The boat finally shushed, hitting sand bar and groaning a

long crack as if the hull would split apart beneath them. A great jolt meeting solid shore slid *The Hope* along the spit lengthwise to a trained stop.

"Holy shit," Luc breathed out.

"Turn the radio off," Yves said, searching for *Hermine* out the front window. He didn't waste time with the flare. *Hermine* bobbed northeast of them under a thick and low sky. Beyond, way over the mainland, the weather filtered to a hot, bright day. At the bow, Yves raised the pistol over his head and shot a red fireball into the sky. The island shore materialized for a sustained note, thrashing on the water and wind, like a child's nightmare world. The fish tug came to life low, far off in the white caps. Luc wondered what his brother could see through the scopes. There was a pause as the crimson light faded. Then, Yves shot another flare and the lakescape reappeared in an angry glow.

"Lay on the horn," Yves shouted back and Luc pressed it for a continuous blast while checking the floorboards for potential damage. He couldn't see where any of *The Hope's* real problems would be, below deck. But more water than usual sloshed around his leather boots.

Luc joined Yves at the bow where the rain had begun to fizzle, but three and four-foot waves still crashed against the gunwales at their waists. Together, they scrutinized the movement of the fishing vessel they hoped would be *Hermine*. The tug seemed to hesitate. Do they see us? Are they turning? Are they coming? The questions screamed so real in his head Luc thought he might actually be asking them aloud, above the wind. But there was no reason to say anything. *Hermine* flickered a spotlight toward them.

"Go lay on the horn again," Yves ordered. Luc turned to find his own faint shadow moving against the wheelhouse wall. *Petite Hermine*, unfortunately for them, had found *The Hope*. Yves was right on top of him, behind the wheel, searching, then he was out again, taking

the flashlight with him. In front, Yves was a shipwrecked sailor, waving his arms overhead, signaling with a pulsing flash, and surveying the tug through the binoculars as it closed in. From Luc's point of view, in *Hermine's* spot, Yves had anchored himself like an actor center stage, the Tempest's hero manipulating the elements and the story to his will. Luc met him on deck again.

"It's them," Yves said, still studying *Hermine* through the binoculars. "Fucking fish tug. I can't tell how many onboard. One man stuck his head out the side."

Yves handed the binoculars to Luc, telling him to get a good look.

"There's two cargo doors. One on each side. And a pilot door at the stern somewhere," Yves continued. Through the lenses, the grey tug jumped into the scene. Its covered, rounded architecture concealed any hint at what could be within. Meeting each wave crest with sturdy forward motion, *Hermine* came fast like a small and powerful ferry.

"Stick with the plan. Jacques Lapin." Luc surprised himself with his measured action. He thought for a second they might actually make it work.

"Right," Yves said. "Let me lead. Don't mention Elon."

"Right. How do we get aboard?" Luc asked, lowering the binoculars. Around the boat, the water depth was near impossible to tell beneath the muddy waves. Though, passing the spit early that morning, Luc had noted Middle's sandy shallows when all the lake birds had occupied the beach. He wondered if they could walk out to *Hermine*. Yves must have thinking the same.

"The dinghy?" Luc asked. Yves checked the tug's progress and agreed.

"I think it's our only option." Once again, Yves waved his arms overhead at their opponents rapidly closing the gap.

The dinghy was mounted against the wall on the stern deck. The thing was only an eight-foot pine-planked boat with a simple centre thwart, but still, the dinghy was cumbersome to

unlatch and lift. Yves had ducked into the wheelhouse, and after flagging *Hermine* once more from the bow, he raced along the trawler back to the stern with a canvas bag. Together, they lowered the dinghy into the lake.

"Sacré bleu," Luc swore, lifting himself over the transom into the bouncing dinghy below. A transient moment to reflect on what they were doing passed. Leaving *The Hope*, a vessel that had given them countless successful runs for over three years, was disappointing. Her faded dark green script, shaded in black, slid up and down before Luc as he tossed with the dinghy. He wondered if they'd come back for her, and then overcome with fleeting sentimentality, he decided that he definitely would.

Yves was in their lifeboat with a jump. Side by side on the centre seat, Yves and Luc rowed to the spit's end. Over his shoulder, Luc observed the tug switch its drift to meet them in the deep.

"You board first," Yves instructed. As Yves spoke, Luc felt his nerves electrify. "Don't pull your weapon. Wait for me."

Meeting from three different directions, the waves collapsing against the dinghy set it off course easily. But Luc's arms were twice as strong somehow. Each stroke came from the gut. He felt his abdomen work in unison with the strength of his back muscles, pulling on the oar, his shoulder blades meeting.

"If things go wrong, we separate them. I'll grab one," Yves said. Luc felt the pistol press again his groin. It would shoot his dick off, he thought, if it happened to fire with the motion of his rowing.

Distancing themselves from *The Hope* and Middle, the island spread forth, wide and wild. Color drained back into the blowing foliage with the encroaching sun. The birds took to the

skies overhead again, circling, and surely searching for their former beacon, the relic of a lighthouse, now smoldering ash. And *The Hope* was wrecked on its sandy reef, an injured and anchored soldier, deserted.

There wasn't time to think. A man already hung out *Hermine's* open cargo door, waving to them, waiting to make an address. It was too late to object, but although Luc had his misgivings about leaving *The Hope*, he was ready for the jack. He'd been ready all morning. Fighting to steady themselves, Yves and Luc positioned the dinghy alongside the tug, colliding and tipping in the jostling swells. The crew member reached down to clasp Luc's hand and pull him aboard. Luc didn't even look over his shoulder to the interior of *Hermine*. Once both feet had landed on deck, Luc spun around to receive the canvas bag of guns Yves held out. Slinging them across his back, Luc gripped Yves hand and leaned back into the cabin, pulling his brother aboard the vessel they'd been anticipating since for two day and nights.

"Thanks brother. This goddam weather," Yves rambled in French with the patter sounds of the border cities. "She was tossing pretty bad and then we saw the blaze on this island and set our course for it. But Erie and its shallows, you know?"

The single crewmember searched Yves face as he spoke. The man didn't feel like a fisherman, or a rumrunner for that matter, except that he was dirty and carried the stink of hard labor. Nubby and fat, he looked more like a pastry chef lost on the sea, his oily black mustache accompanied by a few days worth of stubble, the hair on his balding head combed back neatly. A cowlick of loose hair punctuated his appearance, spraying upright at an angle at the back of his head. The plump baker wore a tight undershirt, brown trousers, and shoes unfit for slick decks. He took his time giving them the once over.

“Jacques Lapin.” Yves held his hand out to shake with the craggiest of poker faces. Luc watched.

"Guy!" the baker man hollered suddenly. "Ils sont des Yankees!"

Luc almost laughed. Could this be an outfit of amateurs? He'd been expecting a crew of five or six wiry, hungry Quebecois armed with knives and an arsenal of machine guns. It was the first, and likely only time he would ever be mistaken for an American.

“Non, non. Canadiens,” Yves corrected. “Avez-vous des papiers?”

Feeling a pause in the action, Luc took the opportunity to digest *Hermine's* cargo hold. Cavernous, and lit by a single swinging lantern from the sunken ceiling, the bay was empty. He had not expected a fully exposed shipment of whiskey cases or kegs of beer, but the tug was bare, without a load of fish even. Was it all underneath? He wondered for a second, as another crew member emerged from a cramped corridor, if the Brueckners had got their information wrong, if *Hermine* was part of the waiting rum row, and not a running vessel.

The sailor who met them in the cargo was visually the distinct opposite of the first. Taller by a head, stooping forward with an ear to his shoulder to clear the ceiling, this man was almost skeletal, with a long mane of greasy ginger hair. He bit a pipe between his brownish teeth. Side by side, and anywhere else, they would have made a good knockabout act.

“Merci,” Yves continued, “for turning around. I thought we weren’t going to meet up.” Luc's fingers itched to grip his gun, or start swinging. “C’est Thomas.”

Guy and the baker man looked at one another.

"We've been stuck out there for two hours," Yves said. "Did you see the fire?"

Yves' banter gave Luc time to back up and peer into the dim corners of the tug. Straining his ears, Luc listened for any human movement on the vessel, but it only whistled and groaned against the weather.

"How was your trip?" Yves kept yammering on, even while the men continued not to respond. "How long does it take? From Gaspé?" The chunky one pet his mustache with his index finger and thumb, and gave the one called Guy a sideways glance. Surely, Guy was not happy they'd steered off course to pick them up.

"Where are you sailing from?" Guy asked, narrowing his eyes at Yves.

"Windsor," Yves improvised. It was a broad enough port.

The misfit sailors weren't very good at hiding whatever shifty business they were about. Any Coast Guard would have seized the vessel with one look. Yves stepped deeper into the cargo hold and shot the most imperceptible cue at Luc. In one fluid action, Luc ripped the pistol up from of his belt, cocking the hammer, and advanced into his new persona, the gangster he'd been transforming into.

"Vien ici," Yves instructed, having drawn the whippet on *Hermine's* duo. "Où est le booze?"

Hardly reacting to the gravity of their situation, Guy and the baker man shuffled tiredly into the centre of the empty hold. Guy removed the pipe from his teeth.

"C'est un faute." He tsked a few times, still hunching ear to shoulder, still staring at Luc with crazy eyes through stringy hair.

Behind Luc, a hollow creak escaped down the dim passageway. Spinning on his heels, Luc heard the unmistakable click-click of the cylinder revolving a bullet into its barrel. Before he



could make the entire rotation, a deafening blast and a burning blow to the chest swiped him backward off his legs.

Immediately, even before his body crashed the deck, the droning ring deafened his ears from inside out. Jerking on the ground, Luc grasped around for answers to what had happened, what was still happening. The burn intensified up his neck, down his torso. Luc realized he wasn't breathing. With Yves dropping in beside him, Luc tried at a deep breath but it only caused the fire to spread.

"Luc! Fuck!" Yves screamed in his face, "Luc!" but his voice was distant, cascading under the drone. Luc's body bucked against Yves, who pressed his entire weight down onto Luc's upper right shoulder. "Fuck!"

The others, Guy and the fat baker, were on top of Yves then, lifting him. Luc heard Yves holler away into the wind. The burn pulsed through his chest to an absolute limit, as though his skin would melt apart, and then a consuming gulp of cool air entered his lungs. The liquid pain intensified in a new way. As the men of *Hermine* grabbed at him awkwardly, the shot felt like a knife slicing deep in every direction. They were handling him, dragging his twitching rag doll body to the open hatch where they had come aboard not five minutes ago.

Behind the drone, Yves yelled from below somewhere, but the bullet spinning fire obscured everything. He was airborne next. Open your eyes, Luc said to himself. Is my brain working? he wondered. Did I really get shot? Am I still falling?

The lake washed into him and his body sunk quickly. Luc kicked his legs against the current. He was a strong swimmer. I am a strong swimmer, he thought. I'll find the surface.

## ELEVEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Maman never raised her temper over the haircut. Instead, worry crawled across her forehead, etching deep crevices with its claws, from her patchy eyebrows to her hairline. Lulu waited for some sort of reaction, some look or demand, but, "Go find a hat," was all she got early that morning before Mass. The afternoon wandered hazy and sporadic like the ribbons of oily air hanging in the field's heat. It looked like every other summer Sunday—the tables were carried outside into the humid shade of the great maples in the back yard and set with a week's worth of newspapers held down with plates and glasses and pots and bowls—but it was not an average day.

The southern sky looked stormy on the horizon, and thunder threatened the county with rain, but it never came. Maman, Lulu, and the daughters-in-law filled the tables with fresh bread and butter, boiled corn cobs, fresh field tomato slices, pickled dills, onions, and beets, deviled eggs, strong and creamy cheeses, and rich salted ham. Two lean stray cats—one marmalade, one tabby—sulked around the legs of the table, chairs, and humans. Her brothers descended. Inch by inch, the feast was consumed, the table emptied, until the newsprint was polka-dotted in greasy clear circles and spilled red wine stains. As if to remind them of time, cicadas sang to each other in the trees overhead. And into the afternoon, the distant pop-pop-pop of the skeet shooting range reminded them that work wasn't too far away. That they opened the Shawnee range for a few

hours every Sunday painted the Marceaus in a controversial light around town, but the Americans loved it.

After, Lulu indulged her niece and nephews in a half-hearted game of jacks that ended fast because it was too hot, and she wanted to keep an ear trained on the adult talk. Maman interrogated Lauwy, René and Michel at the corners of conversation, while Pepé picked kernels from his teeth at the head of the table and deedle-dee'd a tune at random. Without Yves and Luc, the family felt uneven. For a second, thinking about this, Lulu caught a fleeting sense of what it must have felt like to lose Étienne. But the idea was too immense to hook into.

Old Madame Dupuis hobbled up the drive at one point with her whining twin three-year old grandsons in either hand, wanting a healing. Both of the little towheads had oozy green noses and terrible ear aches. It was Sunday, and it was Lulu's duty as a healer, the seventh child of a seventh son, like her papa before her.

"Bonjour," she said, looking each one of the boys in the eye.

Lulu took the Dupuis boys aside, and knelt in front of them, holding their flimsy arms in her hands. She bestowed her ritual silent prayer. First, she prayed in Latin as the nuns had taught, as they did at Mass. Second, she sent up her own brief plea.

"Emportez la douleur, Jésus." Jesus. Take the pain away.

The Dupuis boys calmed, their four identical watery eyes softening in front of Lulu. Madame wanted a prayer as well. She had brought some tea for exchange but it wasn't necessary. Her hip was in constant agony, she said. At least for a few days, Lulu could be her pain pills, especially since she could feel that Madame would contract the same sinus infection as her grandchildren.

Later, with baseball tuned onto the radio, the men gathered in the swath of shade on the back porch to listen. Over and over, they rolled cigarettes and drank cream ale. It was rare that the men gathered together without working. Collectively, the women cleaned what was left of luncheon, and then returned to the bare tables to drink iced tea laced with apricot brandy. Here, Lulu was always included.

"Let me clean up this mess you've made," Flo said, entangling her fingers in the curls at the nape of Lulu's neck. Maman made no acknowledgement of Flo's comment. "Go get the scissors." Flo pushed Lulu toward the house. "And wet your head!" she called after.

When Lulu returned, she feared Maman would finally lay down some punishment, like a cruel witch bidding her time with poison in a fairytale, but she only got up from the table and ambled along the drive to the road, where she lit a cigarette and paced in the gravel. Maman hardly ever smoked. Flo draped a sheet around Lulu's shoulders, fastening it with a clothes peg. From Lulu's perch under the tree, practically purring under the sweep of Flo's comb playing through her hair, she watched Maman who was still waiting for her boys to come home. Did she know something the rest did not? Lauwy, Michel, and René were unaffected, so Lulu thought her maman should relax. Maman was a difficult woman to understand from such a distant generation. She seemed not to have a desire in the world, except to play cards and enjoy the occasional cherry pie. The house where they now lived had always been her home since she was a child. So what had Maman seen of the world? She didn't even care to read.

Without Maman in the circle, the sisters-in-law, Flo, Terese, and Jeanne, gossiped freely, guessing at where Yves and Luc could possibly be, while Flo clipped and shaped Lulu's new bob. Jeanne said her husband had mentioned a possible woman in Yves' life. She said Michel had told her that Luc had seen a girl coming and going from Yves' riverside bungalow.

"*Really*," Flo said, more like a doubt than a question. She continued parting sections of Lulu's hair and snipping expertly.

"That's what Michel said Luc saw. He saw Yves and the girl on the dock at night."

"Lauwy never said a thing," Flo said.

"Rene didn't mention it either." Terese sipped her tea. They were pretty girls in a plain French way, dark eyes, dark hair, with slightly square jaws and slender necks. Terese wore a little more weight on her hips from birthing two children. Jeanne had dimples and hair cropped close. Flo was the beautiful and stylish one with the blue eyes and tiny waist, even after having three baby boys. They kept her running, Flo would say. And she was the best dancer of them all, too.

"Anyway, that's what Michel said. But that's all he said, even when I pressed him," Jeanne twirled a lock of curl around her finger. "You know these men." She raised her eyebrows and crossed her eyes at Lulu, including her in a way. After all, the women were discussing her brothers.

"A mystery woman, eh?" Flo rolled the syllables around her mouth, chewing on them. Flo's reactions were always Lulu's gauge of truth in the world. Whatever Flo believed, whatever specific opinion she might have about an issue, or the way she might process some bit of information, this is what Lulu wanted to see. In compromising situations, Lulu sometimes found herself asking the sky, what would Flo do? Or say? Or think? And the way Flo hung onto each word signaled Lulu to think about Luc's information a moment longer. It could be true. Yves courting a woman. The idea of this new woman, a mystery girl, fizzed in Lulu's overactive brain like soda pop bubbles. But unchaperoned? Coming and going from his house? Where could they have met?

"Who could she be, you think?" Excitement sparkled in Jeanne's voice, too. The summer had been endless in its long days of high humidity, the brothers working tireless hours, and something this effortlessly new, practically arriving on the wind, was as refreshing as a carnival ride to each of them in its own way.

"Luc said it was the same woman?" Flo asked. "Every time?" Lulu tried to hide the shock in her face at this thought, that the woman could actually be a different one each time.

"I guess so. Michel didn't say," Jeanne said. "I never thought of that." She laughed, though. "Imagine?" And then she paused, imagining.

"You know Yves," Terese said. "If it is one woman, he won't bring her around anyway."

"Mm-hmm. And we'll never know," Flo added.

"Really?" Jeanne asked. "He's really secretive, eh?"

"And he definitely won't marry her," Terese said.

"Why not?" Jeanne asked.

In all Lulu's years of snooping, she didn't know why either, why her eldest brother had never married, never even paired himself with a girl. And he was the handsomest of the brothers, she thought, even with his scars, even though he was getting to be old. Of course, she'd wondered why he remained alone, each time Pepé or Michel would tease Yves about women, but she was finally at an age when it didn't actually make sense. Didn't everyone want to get married and have children?

The marmalade cat returned, grazing his hind side between Lulu's sticky bare legs. She shooed the grimy animal away. She thought of Yves forever solitary like a stray, as the orange cat trotted away into the neighbour's yard. Yves had always been alone in her mind, and might always be. For the first time, she felt its gravity, that kind of lonesome sadness.

"Michel never told you?" Flo asked.

"No, tell me." Jeanne shook her head, and scooted to the edge of her folding chair. "Now I'm curious." She poured another glass of apricot tea. More for each of them. Lulu always enjoyed when the girls had time to get tipsy.

"Oh, it's sad." Terese put a hand on Jeanne's knee.

"I want to sit in the grass. Come on," Jeanne said to Terese, who complied. They moved their chairs under the table and arranged themselves in the thick grass, kicking off their shoes, and tugging at the hems of their Sunday skirts.

Behind Lulu, still working through her hair, Flo continued the story. "Yves was engaged once, before the war. You know the Ducharmes? On Lesperance? Well, yeah, it was their oldest daughter, Eleanor."

A clamor of the men's hoots and clapping pierced Flo's story from the porch. Maman had disappeared from the road, into the house, probably to telephone the club.

"Yves and Eleanor were sweethearts in high school. And before he enlisted, Yves proposed to her. Actually, I think he wanted to have the wedding before he and Étienne left, but she didn't. I don't know why. But, she didn't wait for him. After Yves was gone for a while, Lauwy said she met some American busy body and married him. I think he said they moved away to some place like Cleveland, or Chicago."

"That is wicked," Jeanne said. "What a witch. Poor Yves. Makes me want to squeeze the old guy."

"I know. Sad, eh?" Terese said again. All of the kids zoomed by then, panting and sweating, moving like a gaggle of geese.

"That actually happened to my cousin." Jeanne continued on all while the children circled the trees, playing some mimicking game where each followed the next, repeating the same gestures. Flo and Lauwy's boys—Thierry, Benoit, and Étienne—fell in line from oldest to youngest, with Terese and Rene's Zeph, right behind, and trailed by Juliette, who was older than her brother, but alas, a girl.

"She was a nurse in the war and her beau was a soldier. But the talk was they just got engaged because they were afraid, you know, of dying and never, you know..." She trailed off, smirking. Lulu adored her newest sister-in-law but she was a tad overdramatic sometimes in the run-on, chatty way that teenagers can be. She was only nineteen anyway. "They both made it through, and then he called off the wedding. She's married now with kids. They live in St. Catherines."

As little beasts passed the medley of women, the game lost Juliette, who dropped to her knees beside her mother, asking for the apricot tea. Terese shushed her and gave her a sip of her own.

"Well, anyway, Lauwy said Yves changed after the war. Like he is now." Flo brought the conversation back around. "He used to be different. Happier. Lauwy says Yves and Étienne used to be real pranksters when they were young. I knew him so little before. You know, only from church." Flo crouched in front of Lulu to examine her work. "This one here was only a baby then." Flo winked at Lulu. "But you know, the boys lost Étienne over there, too." Flo gave Lulu a sweet frown. "Just a bit more off your fringe, I think."

Flo always wore red lip stain. Those rosey lips made her teeth look big and white from far away, but up close, Lulu could see how tobacco had yellowed them slightly.



"Well, I hope it's true. Yves needs a woman," Jeanne said, lying back on the grass. Juliette climbed onto her aunt's stomach, digging her bony knee into Jeanne's hip. "Jésu! You're getting heavy."

Terese shushed Jeanne about her desecration.

"Well, maybe he's found one," Flo said. Lulu could not measure the honesty in Flo's tone, whether or not Flo really believed it.

"She'll have to be some kind of girl to keep that one faithful," Jeanne said.

"Hey!" Flo snapped. Lulu knew it was for her benefit, some information Flo thought a sister of nearly thirteen should not yet know.

"You just mean, she'll have to think fast to keep up with him, is all," Terese covered. "He's a restless soul. Always on the go." Lulu could read the subtext but kept quiet, not comfortable yet with the girl talk to add anything anyway.

"That's all I meant," Jeanne said, lightly tickling the skin on Juliette's arm, running her fingers back and forth slow. "Lay beside me. You're too hot."

"Can I have a glass?" Lulu seized the moment to ask and receive. She knew Flo would give her one as a way to balance the scales. Slippery adult knowledge had spilled from the bucket and somehow a glass of apricot tea would fill it back to level.

"Don't tell Maman," Flo said, and bopped Lulu on the head. "Finis."

Flo put the scissors down and poured Lulu a half glass.

"Tu es jolie, Tante Lulu," Juliette said, peering up through her wispy eyelashes from where she rested against her other aunt, Jeanne. Lulu posed at the edge of her chair like the model in the soap ads, chin down, shoulders pushed back, and took a dainty sip of the tea. The ice had already melted.

"Merci," Lulu said, to the compliment and to Flo, both for the clean new haircut and for including her in the drink. Without any consequences, she got what she wanted. It didn't even feel like a sacrifice anymore.

## TWELVE

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Coursing the waves toward Luc, Yves felt completely empty. He found Luc's body fighting to stay afloat. He slipped an arm around Luc's middle and surfaced. The dinghy was lost. One after another, the next tossing wave was too high to find it. Below, the current circled erratically, pulling his legs down. Yves swam backwards to the end of the spit, feeling for the sand to jump up and reach him. He kicked the shoes right off his feet. The frenzy rushing through him pushed the throbbing pain out of his head.

Yves' elbow touched bottom first, and finding his feet, he crab-walked up the spit to where the waves met in a mohawk spray. He pulled Luc up between his legs. His youngest brother murmured something, but for the moment, Yves needed to ignore him. The bullet had entered the high right side of Luc's chest, under the collarbone. Since Luc was breathing, spasmodically but still breathing, Yves' guessed it hadn't punctured his lung. Turning to every direction, Yves had to locate the dinghy. *Hermine* had already passed Middle, heading up the west coast of Pelee, its menacing stern light receding steady. But he had no time to reflect on the botched encounter. Bearing Luc's weight against his legs, Yves stood on the spit bracing against the crashing surf. The sky had brightened, but the wind still buzzed across the water. Luckily too, the dinghy was there, banging against Middle's western shore.

"Can you hold here?" Yves asked. He took Luc's left hand and imbedded it in the sandy clay. "Hold on."

Yves traced the route by the clashing waves back to the stable beach of Middle, pausing to strain against *The Hope's* beached hull. Just as he thought, the trawler was solidly wedged ashore. Probably wouldn't have budged for the two of them, he thought. Meeting the dinghy at the shore's edge, he was relieved to find both oars still in the boat. It had taken on a lot of water. First tipping it and righting it, Yves then dragged the little boat through the shoals back to where Luc was struggling to stay put. The attempt was difficult, but Yves got Luc into the dinghy, laying him back and cramped against the bow. On the bench, Yves took up the oars but then floundered on where to take him. Blue sky snuck forward over Canada. Pelee Island turned green in the scattered sunlight. The hotel was closer yet there was likely a doctor on Pelee. But what would he do when he got there? His arms made the decision for him. They paddled with every shred of energy available around the stranded *Hope*, and aimed for the coiling channel back to the women of Middle.

Ruby, Joanna, and Sally swarmed Luc, directing him through the lobby, removing his shirt, and positioning him with maternal care on the butcher block island in the kitchen. Where the room was cool and dim not an hour ago, hot patches of sun filtered through the spit-shined windows and an accumulation of sweat already collected on the marble surfaces. At his head, Joanna combed her fingers through Luc's wet hair. Sally flitted in and out of the way, cupping a hand over her mouth, as Ruby and Yves washed the gunshot wound in Luc's shoulder. They lifted him carefully to see if the bullet had passed through his body. No such luck.

"You really don't have a boat here, do you?" Yves asked.

Ruby shook her head. "Not even a canoe."

"Fuck!" Yves paced away, barefoot, to the sink and slammed a fist against its metal edge.

"What happened to yours?" Sally asked.

He did not have time to explain it. "Let's get a bandage on him, eh? Keep pressing down." Yves paced. "I don't know what I'm fucking doing now. The bullet's got to come out and I don't know how to do that. Do you!?" Yves realized he was screaming at Ruby, and he held up a bloody hand as apology. A stray, gasping sob escaped from his gut.

"How'd you get back here?" Ruby asked.

"I rowed the dinghy."

"Row to Pelee. There's a doctor."

"Where?" Yves heard how pathetic he was starting to sound. "Fuck." He leaned over the sink, turned the tap on and drank straight from it, thinking. He glanced about the kitchen, hoping to land on some answer. "Can you see Pelee from the second floor?"

Ruby answered with a swift swish across the kitchen, beckoning with a waving hand.

In the corner of a sultan's tent upstairs, two wide windows opened over Middle facing north where Pelee sprawled like a great dog sleeping in the sun.

"Have you been there?" Ruby asked.

"Not really." *The Hope* had met sprinters from the rum-line in the crannies of Pelee once, and he had drinks in the tavern at Scudder Dock on a fishing trip as a teenager, but he didn't know the island to navigate it. What was he supposed to do? Run crazed through the brush screaming for help? Were there even roads? Ruby grabbed Yves' shoulder and pulled him close, almost cheek to cheek.

"You see that jut to the left?"

"Yes." She smelled faintly of brandy and flowers.

"That's Fish Point." Ruby grabbed the reigns. "Head to the left of Fish Point. There's a few cottages beyond the point on that west shore. I see their lights at night. Go there and tell whoever you find to call Jerry Mahony."

"Who's Mahony?"

"He's got the only automobile on the island," she said, backing away from the window to a satiny curtain. "And an airplane too." Ruby tugged a golden tassel hanging from folds and folds of vibrant, glossy fabric. The curtain opened, revealing a closet into which Ruby half-disappeared. When she twisted back around, she held a pair of men's black slacks and an expensive-looking pair of polished boots.

"They're Ray's. They probably won't fit you. He's got small feet and a short inseam, but it's all I got."

Yves took the clothes and paused. "You don't have an airstrip, do you?"

"No. But you might need a surgeon. The only doctor on the island tends to influenza and pregnancies. I don't know if he can help Luc much."

"Jesus Christ," Yves swore again and unbuckled his belt. As he peeled the wet pants off his thighs, past his knees, and the touch of burn, his hands picked up purpose. The panic rush smoothed him out and pumped through his veins like motor oil priming an engine. He could suddenly feel how long it would take to reach Pelee, find the doctor, and get him back to Middle. And Luc needed Yves' every last subtle movement, every spin of the shoulder, flick of the wrist, every step, every stroke, to work for him. Battle instinct finally took over.

"You got morphine?" Yves asked. "Ether? Opium?" He zipped up the too-short dress slacks and squeezed his feet into the borrowed shoes.

"Maybe." Ruby hesitated. "Heroin, we've definitely got."

"Give him a little something. Make him comfortable. Straining through the pain isn't going to help."

Yves took the stairs three at a time, bounding back through the lobby as the sky fully released the sun, saturating the hotel in late afternoon light. Luc lay still, eyelids closed and fluttering, with Sally and Joanna at his side standing vigil. Joanna's hand was covered in blood, pressing down on the wound.

"Frère," Yves spoke into his brother's ear. "Ne quittes pas. J'aurai raison en arrière. K?"

Luc nodded without opening his eyes.

"Ne baisez pas les putains, eh?" Yves said. Luc grinned and turned to look at Yves, who shushed him. "Je ferai ce bien." Yves kissed Luc on his forehead and left him resting on the table.

Crossing the channel took the better part of an hour. Middle Island shrank away and the tempest flew south. With his fedora tilted to one side, Yves shielded his eyes from the late summer sun throbbing now in the western sky. Yves' watch had filled with water and was frozen at a few minutes past four o'clock. Hustling in Erie's rolls, Yves heartbeat ricocheted around his ribs for Luc, and still for Bernadette. A deep sting formed in his right shoulder. His logic told him the pain came from an aging war injury, the bomb force crush of his right side colliding with the length of an advancing tank at Bullecourt. To the elbow, his arm had swollen fast, almost immediately, the skin expanding and ballooning to grotesque limits. Étienne had ripped him from his jacket and cut the sleeve from his uniform. Half his chest and the full arm had turned red, and then black, and eventually faded to maroon and yellow in the weeks after. He could

barely hold his rifle, and definitely couldn't withstand the kickback. Yet, the injury did not warrant a leave. He learned to shoot from the left. The stretch marks still mapped him like the trenches and rivers of France, but he toyed with the idea that his shoulder ached for Luc, as if he could take on the trauma for his little brother.

Guilt pushed bile upwards. His temples pounded again like they would turn to mush. He could not lose Luc. It was not possible. There was no way he could live with another brother lost on his conscience. Yves still could barely look Maman in the eye over Étienne. He had been gone almost ten years. Unbelievable, the hole he left in Yves' heart. Luc would take the other half, he knew.

And his girl, Bernadette, did razor blade pirouettes in his chest. The tether manifested again, that invisible connection reeling him painful and slow by invisible gears, backward to the basement under the river. It divided his attention from the present mission. Bernadette. Bernadette! How many hours had she been down there now? Sixteen? Seventeen? He rowed harder trying to suffer like her, to feel her anguish and confusion. Will she ever, *ever* forgive me? My child! Mon Dieu, the sins I have sinned, he tried to repent on the water. Each piercing row was an offering, a punishment, but he couldn't decide if there really was any divinity that could absolve his sins. In the wicked lake, between two useless and remote islands, under a merciless heaven, God did not seem possible. If I live through this... If I live through this... He was unsure how to finish the sentence. His heart leaned toward renouncing his faith, turning his back on any idea of God, for life. What good had come of his faith? What God could take away these ultimate sins? They could never be undone. Nor did he even want to be forgiven. He would carry the weight forever. This was true penance. He would suffer.



The darkness built with the minutes crossing the channel. It cascaded in a downward funnel bringing forth hallucinations of two funerals. Three dead bodies laid in a row, in the dirt, in the same week. Because of him. One already rotting for a decade in a French graveyard in Belgium. Because of him.

I must look a sight, Yves thought, jogging through a shorefront meadow toward a petite, orange brick farmhouse nestled in the last bit of Fish Point's shady canopy. He rolled the cuffs of his pants to the knees and left the shoes in the dinghy. They were almost three sizes too small. Ruby had said they were Ray's shoes. Ray Brueckner. Yves had never pictured him to be a small man. The name, the idea of the man, and all he stood for, conjured up the face of his brother, Elon, his fucking badger face. Yves thought, after this is over, I'm gonna kill him. From his vantage, on some stupid island hobby farm with the situation Yves' had been put in, or rather had put himself in, the night at the Coliseum seemed a year ago. All that had transpired in the past few days? Jésus. All he would have done different now sickened him.

"Hello!?" Yves yelled, approaching the house. Like wings, filmy white curtains rippled through windows left open, but the house was dark. "Hello!? Anybody home?" Yves knocked on the front door but didn't wait to see if anyone would answer. He dashed around the side yelling into the windows. "Hello!?"

Coming round the back, Yves found a woman, round and roughly in her fifties with fading terra cotta-red hair pulled high onto her head. She was in the process of setting a table on the trimmed back lawn. She spun around and faced him as he skirted the house. Holding a plain white dish in front of her, the woman waited for Yves to speak.

"I'm sorry to bother you, M'am. I need Jerry Mahony, or the nearest doctor now."

"Are you all right?" She gave him a once over.

"I'm fine. My brother's been shot." As the sentences galloped out of his mouth, he realized he should lie. "We were hunting. Please. I don't have a moment to waste."

"They're out in the field." The woman pointed to the block of land behind the lot. A swath of harvested wheat rows striped the land with a wide belt of golden winter wheat left hugging Fish Point forest. "They're almost done."

"I can't wait. I need the doctor now."

"Go on. They got the tractor."

Yves took off at a sprint, finding the wet mud between the cut stalks juicy and warm between his toes. A ways down as he ran, Yves spotted a horse-drawn wagon and a tractor pulling some kind of automated harvester-wheel near the end of the field. The men materialized one by one. A man atop the tractor wearing a peculiar broad-rimmed hat stood from his seat. Yves responded with frantic wave, much like flagging *Hermine* earlier.

"Hello!" he screamed as loud as he could manage. His own voice crackled in his good ear. He knew he sounded manic. "Hey! Hey!"

The tractor man pulled the clutch, stood in his seat, and brought a gloved hand to his hat, probably looking for some recognition in the running man. A boy, maybe twelve, emerged from the shady side of the wagon, grabbing the horse's reins. He cocked his head dense-like to one side.

"I need the doctor!" Yves heaved breath into his lungs, halting yards before the horse. "My brother's been shot."

Another man pushed through the rows of gold wheat, skinny but broad chested. This man gave Yves the once over, and then asked, "Where's he?"

"On Middle."

"You on the rum row?"

"No." Yves returned the skinny farmer's earnest look. "We were hunting. Just got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"You a Yank?"

"No. I'm from Riverside."

"It have anything to do with that fire?"

"Fire?" Yves blanked, and then remembered. The lighthouse fire. "Sort of," he answered. "Look, I got no time. Please, I need the doctor."

The skinny farmer looked Yves over again. In the tight, wet, cropped pants and bare feet, Yves knew he looked more like a shipwrecked sailor than a crook. More like an idiot who went in search for some rumored snatch during the worst thunderstorm of the summer of '28, Yves thought.

"Go on. Saddle up Jester for him," the skinny man said to the boy. "Take him to the Doc."

"Thank you." Yves sighed out all the breath he had been holding.

"Hurry back, Clive," the skinny farmer called after them. "Don' t waste time in town."

At first, the farmer's boy raced his steed ahead without checking back for Yves and Jester, who trailed behind barely at a gallop. Jester was finicky probably not too keen on the feel of such an inexperienced rider atop him saddle. She resisted Yves' commands, relenting after a light contest, and suddenly jolting at a clip without warning. Soon, Yves had him chasing Clive's

horse ahead, finding his gallop. It had been years since Yves had ridden, but it came back. Five minutes passed following the shore road. Ten. Then twenty. The hope he had been juggling became a painful twist in his heart. Twenty-five minutes, and they were still hugging the western shore. How big was this island? At thirty minutes the horses began to fatigue. Yves felt like throwing up. Am I hallucinating? he wondered. They had not seen another person since leaving the farm. Like a revolving motion picture trick, the landscape rolled by over and over, the same boxy lakeside cottages, the same lonely farmhouses, small stoic barns, miniature clusters of cows in the distance, sparse flocks of birds taking flight. Field, after grove, after field, after grove. Going on forty minutes, the trip was an endless gallop into Hell.

When Yves had just about given up, just about released that hold on his heart, he jerked back to promise. Clive coaxed his horse away from the shore, angling through a wet, harvested field. Across the cleared land, an enormous building appeared in the haze. They were aimed for it.

Five more minutes riding, and they found the most action Yves had seen on Pelee in a clump of modest houses and buildings hugging the main road. Erie's waters broke through the view again. Must be the north shore. Yves looked about. New sights and thoughts refreshed his will. Clive slowed his horse to a canter and whoa'd him to a halt in front of a two-storey red brick home. The detailed trimming gave the home a gingerbread feel. For the first time in days, luck was on Yves' side. The doctor was home, lounging with a book on his front porch with a woman, presumably his wife.

Relief blurred the next moments. Yves heard his own voice muffled up in his head recite the story again. At this stage, he no longer felt anything like himself. He watched the doctor's face react with the same suspicious looks as the missus on the farm. Doctor Stewart was his

name, a trim, black-bearded fellow with spritely eyes, and he wasted no time, thankfully. After collecting a large red box, Doctor Stewart met Yves back in the front yard.

"Where's your boat?" the doctor asked.

"I was hoping you would take me back," Yves said. "I had to row over in a dinghy."

Doctor Stewart shook his head. "That must've taken hours. Jesus. Come on." His limbs seemed almost pointed, his elbows, shoulders, knees, hips, forming a jagged person. He took off in the direction of the massive building on the north dock, a hulking grain elevator that seemed to have surged forth from the bottom of the lake, towering alone over the trees. Approaching the dock, Yves was hazily aware of the activity there. Farmers and hired hands dashed about making an honest man's living pushing around wagons, and tractors, and horses. Harvested wheat dumped from the wagons. The workers hopped inside to sweep it forward. They shouted precise commands to each other to move the day's work along. Stretched, flat, green boats, one berthed along the concrete foundation, and the other drifting inside the break wall, waited to receive wheat loads.

Yves barreled forward, on the doctor's heels, taking up a jog toward a few vessels moored to a lone slip down shore.

"Where'd the bullet enter?" the doctor asked.

"Right shoulder," Yves said, automatically.

Aboard the doctor's unusual vessel, an enlarged, lacquered wooden child's toy complete with three round portholes, Yves watched a man at the pinnacle of the grain elevator with tired, blurry eyes. The unforgiving sun glared down from just above the worker's peak, where he spun a wheel and called down to others on the busy dock. A long metal arm released with a jerk from the sidewall planks and hovered above the awaiting wheat boat. The entire scene shifted as the

doctor pulled his craft around the breaker into Erie proper. These men, and their lives. How could the sun still be up and shining? This day had stretched to a week.

"What time is it?" Yves shouted over the wind.

"After seven," Doctor Stewart said.

Yves counted in his head. Bernadette had been in the tunnel twenty-one hours. It was sickening. For a selfish moment, he wondered whether he was worse off, bearing the guilt of her captivity and Luc's grave condition. Yves sunk back and let the spray sting his eyes as they sped past the shore that had taken him so long to traverse on that stupid horse. Erie continued to toss, abysmally grey under the unrelenting sun, and Middle grew fast again on the lakescape.

"Head port side around the coast." Yves waved a hand in a half moon shape, indicating circumnavigation, and the doctor complied. For the second time that day, Yves approached Middle Island from the water, his aspect so changed from that early morning. The island was a familiar beast now. He knew its hateful secrets, its writhing and festering from within. It had clawed and burned him, made him question himself. Yves took it all into his body, the knotting tension in his shoulders, in his swelling brain. He had been stretched past pain. The nerve endings in his finger pads even felt numb.

God, let Luc live, Yves prayed habitually. He had no clue who he was talking to.

## THIRTEEN

And, still, the hours passed. With no indication of time, no access to sun or moonlight, Bernadette couldn't figure how long she had been in the passageway. So many phases of emotion had risen and fallen. The moment after Yves had shoved her into the dark space, she felt briefly relieved. He had never been so frightening. She never, ever, thought he would harm her. Yet Yves had chased her through the house, savagely, with mad eyes, careening into the banister, slamming into door jambs, finally grabbing her hair and gripping her like he wanted to squeeze her dead. At first, separated from him behind the door, she had felt safe. But it lasted only a second.

Mon Dieu. The blankness of the space absorbed her.

"Yves!" Bernadette yelled, heaving chaotic breaths. "Yves! Open the door! I'm scared, Yves!" Calling out to her violent captor felt absurd but she had little choice. She banged her hands against the solid wood. She strained her eyes against the void. "Please! Open the door! Yves! Please!"

Tabernac, come on! The door was too thick. Or he plainly wouldn't answer. He was hard of hearing but neither could she hear anything from the other room in the basement. Feeling along the wall, where the door had slammed shut, Bernadette's fingers found what felt like raw earth, stone, and then a plank of wood. She sensed narrowness in the space.

"Yves!" she called again, facing away from the door, confronting a blackness not found beneath any open sky, day or night. Her quivering voice travelled. "Yves!" she screamed long and sensed a decline. "Yves! Please! I'm sorry! Open the door!"

Bernadette continued to slam the door with her fists. Could he not hear her desperation? "Yves!" she bellowed louder and louder, breaking into sobs.

How long had she called to him? She couldn't make time make sense down here. Blind, Bernadette turned again to the shapeless black, slid the tip of her foot forward, and with horror found the edge of a stair. What if she had fallen backward? How far would her body have dropped? Her gasp of surprise was the first time she consciously heard her own breath in the space. It was the beginning of an awful silence that would push her limits of sanity in the hole. She gripped the wall and crouched down to sit on that top step. How many more fell away below, she wondered. What was this place? A cellar below the cellar. It was cool and stuffy just like a cellar.

"Yves!" Bernadette screamed again. More anger collected in her throat.

He needed to cool off. This is what she told herself. He would take some deep breaths, compose himself, maybe even figure out what to say next. And then he would open the door and take her in his arms. She waited. She cursed herself for racing to this dead end. Tears pooled in her eyes and wet her face. The dark smelled like standing water, like wood and mineral. She closed her eyes. It almost hurt to keep them open as they continued to scan for light. She sighed deep, trying to relax the muscles of her body, but she couldn't unclench the tension. Her fingers found the sore spots on her arms, probably already bluish bruises forming, where Yves had seized her in his monster hands. All that running. And when he shook her. That stuff was bad for the baby. Despite the nausea, Bernadette had not even felt pregnant yet, but now it was something to worry about. She folded her arms across her belly. Did that kind of comfort work when the baby was still in the womb?



"Yves," she called out, just to hear some sound. "Please." Her breath and sniffles were disturbingly loud.

She'd provoked him. She knew it. Why do I have to be so dramatic? The fight had escalated fast, blasted into a realm she had never intended it to go. *You're a pig. Let go of me.* Bernadette heard her own voice like a static-fuzzed radio play in her mind. *My Papa's going to kill you. He'll go to the police.*

She didn't know where the lip came from. That wasn't the plan. All she wanted was for Yves to love her. To forget what she had seen, for him to be faithful, and to love her. If Bernadette really thought about it, and if she could take it all back, she didn't even care if he married her. Girls were doing that these days. Cohabiting. What did it matter as long as he saved all of his love for her, and for the baby. And she really needed his help. I'm only fifteen, she heard her own words call out in her head. I'm only fifteen, and look where I am. Locked under my lover's house.

As if Yves, or someone outside had heard these very thoughts, the click and hum of electricity brought a glow into the space. Raw bulbs affixed to solid wood beams came to life from the filaments out, illuminating the nightmarish place. Indeed, she was perched at the precipice of a long wooden staircase, angling steep to a landing far below. I would have broken my neck, she thought and wanted to hate him. Now, she could confirm the walls were mostly stone and packed dirt, shored up at intervals. Above, the ceiling came together in a patchwork of steel screens and wires. Her brain worked hard to find a reason for such a place. *Sacré*. Where did it lead? The curious mix of wonder and fear felt familiar. Hadn't Gretel or Hansel, or some damsel like Beauty, found themselves trapped in such a dungeon? Afraid of what she would see below, but unable to stop herself from going, Bernadette took each step with care.

The scent of earth, water, and some faint, burnt, metallic smell intensified as she descended the stairs. Going down, steadying herself with a hand against the wall, she realized she was still crying. Between her spittle wet lips, the question escaped over and over. "What is happening? What is happening?"

Though she could stand upright in the passage, Bernadette felt the need to duck slightly when the rugged ceiling grazed and pulled her hair. Reaching up, she ran her hand along the rough steel. Is it an old mine? How would that make sense? Halfway down, she wondered how far underground the stairs were leading her, but she had no concept of measurement. It didn't matter anyway, she thought. I can't get out.

But that simple defeat triggered another thought. What if there was a way out on the other end? Bernadette picked up speed, taking the stairs with urgency. The way ahead became clearer. The landing continued on just as narrow but a set of metal tracks appeared sloping down and away. Ten or so steps from the bottom, she heard the door moan open, way above and behind her now.

"Bernadette? You okay?" Yves called out to her.

"Yves!" she screamed. "Wait!"

Her heart plunged and she turned to claw her way back up the stairs, using her hands and knees as well as her feet, anything that would propel her upward faster. But the painful sound of the door shutting and locking again broke her. She collapsed on the stairs in a heap, wailing.

A mechanical whirl kicked on. The lifeless air changed instantly, blowing now through the dead space. Somehow, the fresh air pushed her to continue climbing. Bernadette was out of breath by the time she reached the top step where Yves had left a half-filled milk bottle and a jar of strawberry jam. She banged on the door again.

"Yves! Please! Open up! Let's talk! I promise to..." Bernadette trailed off. He wasn't going to answer. And she didn't know how to fill that blank. I promise to... be good? To calm down? Kiss your cheating bastard feet? She wiped her wet face with the back of her hands. She wanted to swear at him again. Lying bastard.

"Please," she said, meaning it but with lost will.

Bernadette leaned back against the door and considered the milk and jam. Bowing over, she sniffed to see if the milk was sour. It smelled fine. He's leaving me here. A panicky flutter skipped through her body. She wanted to scream unholy curses into the bottom of the cellar until her throat muscles tore. Instead, tears pierced her eyes again, and she collapsed back into crying, an ugly and desperate yowl. After giving into it for long enough, she told herself to stop, that crying was useless. Next to her, the white milk and pearly red jam looked unappetizing under the peculiar glow. Milk and jam. They also mean he's coming back, she told herself. He's going to be gone for a while. Maybe a long while. But he's coming back. The lights and the air filtering pointed her to the same conclusion. He didn't leave me in the dark, or suffocating in the stale air.

Willing herself to believe this, Bernadette moved the milk bottle and jam jar to the next step in the far corner, and then lay herself across the top stair, resting her head in the crook of her elbow. She pulled her knees in tight, squeezing her body into the cramped doorframe. The rosy silk chiffon of her fanciest dress was sullied with dust and dirt. One of the ruffles had ripped near the knee. The dress, which was her best option a night before, the collar even sporting pink and silver beading, was terribly suited for sleeping in this squalor. But, Bernadette tried to ignore the discomfort. She had no choice but to wait. And the events of the past day and night before had exhausted her to a limit she had never experienced before.

From her vantage point, Bernadette could see the very last step far down below. She began to count the steps from the bottom, but she reached a point where the staircase was uneven at twenty-three. From there, it was hard to tell. She closed her eyes, crying softly again. She'd only meant to run away for the night, to follow Yves into Detroit for a good laugh and some dancing around town before telling him about the baby, to spend the night upstairs making love and plans for a happily ever after life together, and now it was probably close to midnight again, a whole day later. Her family would be worried sick. She cried and prayed for them silently. And she fell asleep before she thought to pray for herself.

How long she slept, Bernadette couldn't tell. Sleep had been unsound, half-waking countless times, her body aching as if beaten. But now she was more awake again. She pushed herself to sitting and stretched her legs out along the staircase. Perhaps she'd slept the whole night. It would be Sunday. Nothing had changed, except her left hand, wrist and forearm throbbed with darkening bruises. She ached more when she moved. Lying there, she would have heard, would have felt too, the door opening behind her if Yves had returned. The milk and jam were still there. She grabbed up the milk and smelled it again out of habit before drinking. The warm liquid coated her dry throat and she wished she'd drunk it before, still cold out of the icebox.

The milk in her belly triggered hunger. She hadn't eaten in hours and hours. She couldn't even remember how long. Bernadette ran her index fingers under her eyes and found flaky black mascara that had bled with her tears. I probably look like raccoon death. It was a term she used with her sisters and friends, and thinking of it made her miss them in a desperate way. Those easy summer days seemed so long ago. She used the hem of her dress to wipe away more make

up, attempting to clean herself a little. Unscrewing the jam jar, she realized she also had to pee. Without a toilet though, she ignored the discomfort, stuck her fingers into the goo, and scooped out a juicy gob. Sweet and tart. It was delicious. Probably his maman's work. Bernadette had never met the woman, but she conjured the likeness of her from one of the only photographs in Yves' house. It was a family photograph, taken several years ago, before his father had died. It hung in Yves' office. She had studied it there many times. His maman was slight with a stern, or solemn, look to her features and posture. Bernadette couldn't tell which. Yves was younger in the photograph, but somehow more shredded than he appeared now. The photographer had been careful to camouflage Yves' scars in shadow, but if you knew what to look for, you could see them there. So many boys in the photo. His maman and a little girl, his sister, the only females.

Bernadette swallowed some more jam and gazed beyond her scuffed grey shoes into the tunnel. The stairs seemed steeper than before, like an underground cliff in a system of caves. Jumpins, she thought, it didn't feel real. Her mind took sides on whether to leave the high-perched nest or explore the mole hole below. As usual, boredom and curiosity won out. And Bernadette was certain she was alone down in her cavern. Besides that industrial hum, the only constant sound was her breathing in and out. So loud in the enduring silence, she was annoyed with herself.

At the staircase bottom, she was not entirely surprised to find that the tunnel stretched far, toward a black destination. Electricity flickered the lights near the blind end giving it the appearance of a distant and fantastical gas lamp-lined street. A drip of something hitting pooled water somewhere alarmed Bernadette. As far as she had seen, the tunnel was dry. But as she walked on, between the low sloping tracks, she discovered glistening wetness seeping along the

stone in places. A few buckets and the end of a long rubber hose rested by one wall. In the creases and edges of the tunnel, dirty water accumulated.

Sudden fear petrified her. Am I under the river? she wondered and instinctively looked up. That's exactly where I am. Mother of God. She held her breath listening for rushing water. Mon Dieu. What if the ceiling crashes in? A flood of questions spilled into her mind then about who had built the passageway, the probability that it was Yves and his brothers, and what they needed it for, where it would lead... She pictured Belle Isle, the view of it directly across from Yves' dock. She picked up the pace, still swirling internally with images of gushing water collapsing in, drowning and crushing at once. Bernadette needed to see the end, though. She had to know where it lead. Know for sure there was no way out.

When she reached the last flickering bulb, this one temporarily hanging from a wire on a nail, she paused. She couldn't see much of anything past that point and she could no longer hold her water.

"Jésu Dieu." She squatted next to the wall. It was a good distance from the staircase and seemed to be her best option. She had peed in the woods before but something about this felt degrading. Down a ways, Bernadette noticed a dark, boxy shape hunkered in the dimness. She shivered, noting how the temperature had dropped again even here. Could the air have stopped moving? Bravely, Bernadette took measured steps, her shoulders half-twisted back toward the light behind her. Narrowing her eyes helped. It focused what light entered. She was nearly ready to run back to the light when she finally saw the object—some kind of machine with interlocking wheels. But she didn't stop to inspect it. She kept moving. Slow, even steps. Her breath was fierce and loud here. Constricting her ribcage, she tried to inhale and exhale soundlessly. She listened hard and raised her arms out in front now. Wanting to look back for the light, Bernadette

shortened her steps. Shuffling, traveling like some creature from the grave, she inched forward. After what seemed like minutes, much too long under the river, her shoe grazed something on the ground. It was light enough to move. Teetering as if on some precarious high branch, she bent low to feel the object with her hands and strained her eyes against the nothingness. Her fingers found glass bottles in a cardboard box. It felt like a small case of cola, or beer. Lifting it, she could tell it had the weight of a few unopened bottles. If it was anything she could drink safely, it could come in handy. Bernadette tucked the box under her armpit and continued on, now with just one hand feeling out the way.

Any time now, she thought. How far could the blankness go? But the longer she was in the dark, and the more comfortable it became, the more she needed to continue. What horrifying end would she find? Even another locked door would chill her blood. Perhaps someone would enter from it? And then there it was. Her fingers found more earth, more stone. The ceiling rounded low. She searched the limit all over with her one hand and was crestfallen to both be reassured there was nothing and no one this way, but also that there was only one way out, controlled by Yves. Turning back, the light offered the most unforgettable sight. The darkness she had traversed lengthened out before her. The lights that brightened the tunnel's beginning seemed a mile off. The stairs weren't even visible with the slope concealing them from view. She stood holding her breath in the dead end.

Without planning to, she burst off into a sprint toward the light. There was no need to spend any more time shrouded in such black mystery. Bernadette collapsed at the base of the staircase, catching her breath. She had come far fast. Resting against the uncomfortable wood, staring back the way she came, she wondered if it was as long as a mile. She tried to imagine the same distance above ground, standing on Yves' dock. Only weeks ago, he had held her on that

very spot when they watched Detroit's Fourth of July fireworks burst in the twilight over Belle Isle. The island seemed deceptively close there, a length she would swim except for the dangerous current. Yet massive freighters passed that channel daily. It had to be half a mile, at least. And deep, n'est-ce pas?

Three empty and three full bottles of beer were the contents of the box she held in her lap. The label was disappointingly simple. *Superior All Malt Lager Beer*, it read. Then she read it meticulously again, out loud.

"Trade Mark. Superior All Malt Lager Beer. Walkerville Brewery Limited. Walkerville, Ontario." All in cursive. "More than eight percent proof spirits. Contents not less than eleven ounces." She looked for more writing on the case itself.

What was she going to do with all these waking hours? I should make myself happy, Bernadette thought.

"I shall make myself happy," she said out loud to the tunnel. She stood and cautiously chipped the cap against a sharp stone edge on the wall. Eventually, she was able to bend and pry it off against a stair tread. The beer was refreshing and cool, with a faint taste of sweet bread, slightly burnt. It was so much better than the bourbon she had ordered Friday night. The memory upset her again.

She had wanted to surprise Yves, meet him at one of the Detroit speaks he sometimes mentioned. Bernadette wanted him to see her as an adult, a beautiful woman, before she gave him the complicated news. Thinking she could somehow meet with him in the city, she had made herself up in the ferry landing washrooms and crossed the river with a list of all the places she would try. But arriving downtown alone, Bernadette's mission was more complex than she fantasized. It was hard not to feel like a child swimming the sea of elegant city dwellers,



automobiles, and towers. Scanning faces, she felt silly hoping to bump into Yves on the street. Though, she looked for him anyway.

She ducked into places called The Dry Goods, and the Hold Fast, searching the early night crowds for Yves' familiar body. She listened for the Marceau brothers names in fizzy conversation. They were notorious most places back home, but in America they seemed to be nobodies. The night chugged on. It was alarming how easy it was to slip into these places, to shuffle in with a group, or ask an older gentleman to escort her. No wonder they were raided so often and so easily. By the third spot, she was a natural, not needing any help to find her way in. A cute knock, or a wink and a curtsy, was all it took. Bernadette became the type of young woman she needed to be to dance in these circles. The small town Canadian girl of fifteen years faded away amid the tapping shoes, the jazzy hands, and the whiskey laughter.

"How far is the Deutches Haus?" Bernadette asked Mr. Knipple, the young man who had joined her in the bar's nook. He had introduced himself, "In laundry and uniforms."

"It's all the way on the east side." Mr. Knipple tucked into her ear and hollered. His ashy, boozy breath tickled her nose. "I can drive you there."

Detroit swished by in marble and chrome, as they zipped down wide, parkette boulevards in Mr. Knipple's modest Dodge. Bernadette felt the largeness of life spill into her watching the scenes go by. Her baby problem receded from worry to a blessing, a joy. And the liquor brightened her vision. All seemed possible. Good seemed possible. The last of the day's sun bathed the town in peachy tones, the concrete and glass, the leafy gardens and the rainbow of skin colour. But when Mr. Knipple rolled upon the stately Deutches Haus building on Jefferson, with the river on the right, the joint was dead.

"I heard there was a raid last weekend," Mr. Knipple said.

"Then why'd you bring me here?" Bernadette asked.

"I had to take a chance," Mr. Knipple said. "Whatever pleases the lady." He rested his hand on her shoulder. His nose was very pointy.

Bernadette didn't respond. Instead, she stared through the windshield and told him to drive on to The Chophouse.

"Let's get a room at The Metropolitan," Mr. Knipple said. "I got some friends driving in from Toledo. We'll make our own party."

She had the impression that his sophistication was supposed to thrill her, but she only folded her arms and waited. The man was nothing compared to Yves. As he spun the car around, Bernadette caught a distant glimpse of Belle Isle glowing emerald through the passing apartment buildings. It made the river look turquoise.

"Drop me at The Chophouse," Bernadette repeated.

The dinner club was dimly lit with shiny gold accents. The high tinkling of expensive glass peppered the low notes of serious conversation and a moody four-piece jazz ensemble. At the center, an oval-shaped bar separated the dining room from the lounge. Both geometrically detailed areas had views of a half moon stage. Bernadette entered before Mr. Knipple, shaky with nerves. The Chophouse felt like the type of place Yves would prefer.

"Let's get you another drink." Mr. Knipple hailed the bartender, picking the lounge side. "What'll you have?"

"Bourbon." Bernadette had been practicing this order. "Mint Julep," she said to the Coloured bartender in a tuxedo.

"Two," Mr. Knipple said.

All of the staff there wore tuxedos, she noticed. All Coloured. No women. Small and light, she felt exposed and outnumbered. Men filed in as if they had been lined up outside. Women filtered in like random birds accidentally trapped inside. Perhaps it was the difficult music, so hard to dance to, that kept the fairer sex away. Perusing the clusters of drinkers, Bernadette found Yves absent again. Only a few difficult sips in, Bernadette motioned to leave.

"Where you going?" Mr. Knipple grabbed her wrist.

She pulled her arm back discretely. "To the ladies," she said, tossing her curls one way and the other. She needed to collect her patience, or a better plan.

Up a carpeted staircase that curved along the stage, Bernadette was relieved to be alone again. She took her time, reapplying pink lipstick, smoothing out her locks, even accepting a cigarette from the attendant. She dropped into a soft sofa to smoke and think. The reel she had played in her head of how the night would go was nothing like the evening she was having. How disappointing real life could be. It scared her to think Yves wouldn't react to her news as she had dreamed would. In fantasy, Yves had laughed when he saw her sitting so perfectly posed at the end of the bar. "Gorgeous," he said, smiling. His hands found the small of her back, and led her to the dance floor. Hugging her body into a slow one, Yves let his lips graze her earlobe. Their fingers entwined. Safe. That's when she told him she was pregnant. His response was to squeeze her tighter.

In the tunnel, Bernadette wished she could take back that entire evening. If she had only left before that point she would have missed Yves, or she might have run into him on the street outside. But she couldn't go back and change it. A lot of things, she would take back, make different, if she could. Retrospect was cruel. She wished for a pack of cigarettes. Yves should have left some, at least to pass the time. She took off her shoes and stretched her long legs

against the underground staircase. The beer was easy to drink and made her life seem a little easier for the moment as well. She finished it off and broke open the second.

As Bernadette returned to The Chop lounge, she spotted Yves with Luc at the entrance. They were scanning the wall of banquets. A golden dream! Life would match up with her expectations. She watched Yves from the shadows as he found the darkest table in the back corner. His beautiful posture, maybe the tallest man in the barroom, telegraphed importance to anyone who laid eyes on him. She adored the way he kept his hat tipped low, how he wore his hair on the long side like a real Frenchman, concealing the odd hole where his ear should have been. A secret she knew and cherished.

"What happened to you?" Mr. Knipple was suddenly at the base of the staircase.

Bernadette used him as a screen to slip back to the bar. He said something about a watered down drink but she tuned his voice away. Between the bottles of liquor stacked in the middle of the round bar, Bernadette could watch her love without detection. And her excitement only expanded, her chest vibrating with admiration for the man. The father of her child. Observing Yves in public roused a new passion in her. She soaked in their private moments, his consuming mouth, his quiet confessions, as she spied on him across the bar feeling ownership.

Mr. Knipple's voice kept tick-tacking away like keys on a typewriter while Bernadette fantasized about how she would approach her lover. Distracted, she finished her drink fast and her companion was ready with another before she could refuse. She was thirsty, so she drank, and the bourbon's effect ballooned in her head. With glossy eyes, Bernadette counted out a minute. Another drink and she would go over, feeling the boozy confidence she'd come to enjoy. But the time was cut in half. A man and two women arrived at Yves' banquet. They all appeared to know each other. The strawberry blonde bounced along the bench and tucked herself into

Yves. He kissed her on the lips and lingered longer than it made sense to Bernadette. The girl wiped his lips of the red from hers in too familiar a way. Each gesture, each subtle flick of the eyelash tortured Bernadette. Mr. Knipple rubbed her arms with his feminine hands and said something she ignored. Yves' face was still inches away from the other woman's. A strange burn of anguish and anger swirled upward in Bernadette. The bourbon distorted everything but especially any sound thought. Should I confront him? Or slink away? How could he? How stupid could I be? The questions came faster than she could actually think them. She twisted a fist into her gut. What am I supposed to do now? Bernadette cursed her inexperience.

The beer brought those first feelings back. Bernadette trudged up the dusty wooden staircase, noticing her hope start to seep away, as she took them slow and deliberate. That night, in The Chophouse, Bernadette had left when the redheaded woman brought her open lips back to Yves'. She couldn't watch anymore. After, the woman whispered something in Yves' good ear, the ear Bernadette had caressed many times, she needed fresh air to breathe in. Whatever the woman said must have been hilarious. Yves laughed, loud, in a way Bernadette had never heard. The cadence of it traveled across the dining room reaching her perch. Back in Canada, Yves rarely smiled. This was not the same man she knew.

In the last twenty-four hours, she had seen two new sides to her lover—this merry, cheating bastard, and a sadistic brute of a man. Bernadette met the door again at the top of the tunnel, turned, and descended. What else could she do with these hours but climb and descend? The quiet lurked just at the edges, and the rhythms of her feet against the stair kept its terror at bay. But eventually, she grew tired again, and she curled herself at the bottom of the devil's staircase. She didn't trust herself this time not to tumble off in sleep, or even throw herself down in the throes of despair, for any great hopes that she had had grown dim as the passageway. Her

sleep was plagued with jarring dreams. Hazy sweet futures were cut short by waking into her evil reality, her face so close to the dirt. She sweat through nightmares that swept a translucent blue Bernadette along the riverbed above her, gashed by sunken cars and broken pipes, wrapped and tangled in reaching, mushy weeds.

Hunger began to wake her too. And each time she made the trip up to the landing for a sip of milk and a few strawberry globs, Bernadette doubted more and more that Yves would return. Sleeping had messed up time in the hole. She could have been there five hours, or forty. She plainly could not tell any longer. Real danger was an issue now. The idea of it was followed by sadness. Parching thirst came when the milk was gone. Considering the last bottle of beer brought Bernadette another small fortune. Folded inside the beer case, Bernadette found an automobile advertisement with a whole paragraph of copy.

"April. Nineteen twenty eight." Her dry throat cracked. "Smart performance and smart appearance. Both you will find in a Buick." She read the ad over and over, in her head and out loud, until she would never forget it. Standing, she pretended she was reading for radio, or a newsreel, straightening up, pushing her shoulders back. "After all, there are only one or two headliners in every field who *have everything*." She practiced placing the emphasis on different parts of the sentence to highlight the Buick's features. "Beauty and ability. A smart and spirited drive with alluring style. And that's why a Buick is the car for you." A photograph of the yellow convertible Buick parked in front of a handsome brick home was faded and creased beneath the advertising slogans. At the top, an illustration showed the car speeding head on, a man in the driver's seat, and a woman in goggles with a scarf drafting away behind her on the passenger side. Their features were too tiny to read, but Bernadette made believe they were racing away from something dangerous. Perhaps she had broken him out of prison. Maybe they had robbed a

bank. Bernadette knew though, that they were fleeing a life, racing toward another, together.

Katherine and Kenneth, she named them, zoomed to their destiny.

"I should write stories," Bernadette said to no one. "Katherine and Kenneth. Kenneth and Katherine." Her own voice was a bit of comfort.

Heartbreaking hours lingered long and lapsed in silence. Bernadette stuck her tongue into the round jar to reach every last smear of jam. Desperation sent Bernadette to the black end again, searching for something she could use to smash the upstairs door off its hinges. In the dark end, she noticed the water had spread, puddling in the tunnel's centre. Mon Dieu, the sight was alarming, but the pain in her belly told her she would die of starvation before the water rose high enough. Perhaps I could drink it? She knelt low, examining the clay mud, but decided that time had not yet come. How many days would that take? With flagging strength, she dragged the heavy metal machine down the long path, and tried to take it apart. The task was a fool's errand. The heavy wood door opened out anyway. The hinges were on the other side. Perhaps one of the machine's limbs could break off the handle. But after what felt like hours working at tight bolts with nothing but her hands, Bernadette's fingernails had shorn and split, her fingers rubbed to bloody tips.

And so, she was forced to rest. She still had the one bottle of beer to savour though she had lost the heart to hope. Am I so easy to forget? Her mind circled over and back over the question. I am a human being. I am human. I will die. Hunger, thirst, and weariness ebbed and flowed. She wept as if mechanically, expending no energy at all. Bernadette's mind escaped her control for intervals of time.

Someday, the door will open, she thought. God, she prayed. Please, let me be alive when it does. Send Yves back to me? She crawled onto the ground, rolled onto her back, and closed her eyes.



## FOURTEEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

After the fullness of the day, Lulu found herself on the road to the Shawnee Club. She was not even quite sure why she'd wandered away from the group, but she didn't feel like herself anymore. Under her Sunday shoes, Lulu toed the larger stones in the gravel, tapping them into the tall overgrowth in the ditch. The heat along the country-end of Shawnee Road tasted like the river, mixed with the apricot and sugar and rum, and made her deep breaths feel gummy. Her empty head wanted to swirl up into dream but it could not decide where to go.

Out of habit, she only took the road when the shooting range was open. Maman and her brothers forbid her to wander through the adjacent woods while an inexperienced shooter might happen to misaim. She had not heard a shot for at least an hour. It was too hot for most to stand directly under the sun on the shadeless range for a full game. Ahead, the Shawnee Rod & Gun Club sign loomed in the haze. The forest that connected her Tecumseh neighbourhood to the concession where they built the club seemed to drift back and forth on the rails, in the corner of her vision, as she walked along. Faint and sporadic frog song drifted through the branches. It was settling to be alone, walking without another human being in view in any direction. Here, there was space.

A change, a rumble, came from behind. Turning, purposely whipping her short locks back and enjoying the newfound sass of the haircut, Lulu found a dust cloud engulfing an approaching automobile. The whirling dervish came quick, and when it was almost upon her,

Lulu jumped into the steep ditch, shielding herself with a raised arm. She climbed back into the gravel road, eating swirling dirty air. Up ahead now, the shiny maroon automobile with a yellow Michigan license plate sped into the drive of the Shawnee Club. Dinner hour was just beginning. The boys would relocate from the back porch soon to oversee the Sunday steak and escargot crowd. Yves and Luc would be there. She wanted to see them there.

Xing, the house manager, was already worked up into his usual state of happy stress. Watching him, Lulu realized she'd never seen him look any different. He was always there, dancing through the dining room into the kitchen and back again, wearing the same trim black suit with a short stack collar. A heavy man with a round face and shiny, slicked-back black hair, Xing always wore a red carnation in his jacket pocket and a sober smile. He seemed to rule the all-Chinese staff with a strict hand, but it was hard to tell. The difference between the smoothed out, sing-songy way Xing conversed in English and the clipped syllables and sounds of his Chinese were miles apart, like China and Canada. But Lulu adored Xing, and the rest of the staff, and the friendly way they made the Shawnee Club feel like a new world.

"Hi Xing," she said, unconsciously matching his grin.

"Hello, Mademoiselle Lulu." Xing always held her hand like she was a lady. "Dining with us this evening?" She liked how his pronunciation could remind her of the meaning of words, like *eve-en-ing*. Day was in the process of turning to night, the world "evening" the space been light and dark.

"No," Lulu said. She twisted her head side-to-side, jutting out her chin. "Notice anything different?"

"Of course, I notice. A chorus girl, you, Lulu Blue." Xing nodded his approval. "You look beautiful. And very grown up."

Something about the way he said, "Very grown up," made her feel younger. Even so, she thanked him.

"You like some ice cream?" Xing thought of himself as a prankster, offering ice cream every single time she came into the Shawnee, whether they had it or not, so that it was hardly funny or surprising. The ice cream punch line was that sometimes Xing served her garlic mashed potatoes in a dessert dish. She was too old for the joke now, but the little ones loved it.

"Maybe later," Lulu said.

Xing bowed his head. "And now, I must work. Your brothers will be here any minute, I think."

Lulu curtseyed back. No one else in the world treated her more formally than Xing, and she enjoyed the etiquette of the exchange. Outside, the cello song of frogs harmonizing below the trill of the cicadas was enough to push away any unease. The sprawling ponds were filled with water lilies, white and peach and yellow, and rimmed with cattails and other flora. Arching wooden bridges painted white cast shaded patches on the water and the birch thicket beyond dropped a cool blanket of shadow to the north. A few yellow rowboats lazed on the stagnant surface. The dense layer of duckweed was a green carpet. This was where Lulu felt most at home.

To the east, a pristinely manicured skeet range stretched out to the woods. A team of three men readied themselves for a game. The deep green lawn of the gun club matched the luscious hues of the pond. Here, the landscape was fresher than any place Lulu had been for the past month. The range was Lauwy's pride. Off station, between two and three, the group of men in their stylish suits and hats appeared out of place. Only one of them had a shotgun. As Lulu wandered toward them, curious, keeping in their blind spots, something about them felt off. They

were not sportsmen. That was certain the closer Lulu stalked the group. None of them wore the standard vest.

"Hey kid," one of them yelled to Denis, the trap boy Lauwy had hired for weekends.

"When you gonna pull it, huh?"

Americans. Lulu recognized the aggressive Detroit accent. Denis did as he was told. The clay pigeon soared across the range, arcing in the familiar way. But the man holding the shotgun didn't raise his weapon. Instead, the short one drew a pistol from his waist, aiming with a straight arm and shot twice, missing, of course. Lulu started at the odd sounding pow-pow of the gun. The trio snickered loud, wheezing like sick dogs. Her skin prickled. Her body held onto its breath.

"I wasn't ready." The short one wiped his nose with the back of his hand, still holding the handgun. He sucked snot up into his head. Lulu reached the shadow of the high house and leaned into the hot metal siding.

"Sir? The standard firearm is a shotgun," Denis called from the high house window.

"Yeah? Why?" the short one called back. Denis said nothing. From where she stood, Lulu couldn't see Denis' face, but she could picture him, sixteen, freckled, intimidated into speechlessness.

"Like I give a fuck," the short one mumbled. "Step back," he said to the other two. When his face passed Lulu's direction, she almost gasped. It was a face she would never forget, like a muskrat twisted in stiff death. His pale complexion made a horror out of large slices of bushy dark eyebrows that nearly met on the bridge of his nose. Even at this distance, Lulu could see his unfortunate mouth, crooked and overcrowded with teeth as if he'd been punched countless times in his life. The other two were not quite so terrifying. The man with the shotgun was plump, the

skin of his face flushed and stretched, but jolly and inviting. The other appeared to be fit physically with a manly, broad chest, and although he was well-dressed, he was too tanned and funny to look at. She was sure they were the type of American racketeers she read about in the newspapers.

"Go again," the muskrat yelled at Denis. The skeet hurled in the same sweeping crescent. Still holding a cigarette in one hand, he pointed and shot three times with the other, missing again. The three of them wheezed together.

"Again," the muskrat called. It flew. He shot twice. This time he nicked the pigeon with his second bullet. Together, they howled.

"Not bad, bossman," the plump one said.

"Fuck, Joe! Let's see you try," the muskrat said. He held the pistol out to his buddy.

"Nah," the plump one said, changing places. "Shotgun."

"Pussy," the muskrat said, stepping away.

The not-quite-handsome man sniggered. "Fucking joker," he said to Muskrat.

"Move down here." Muskrat pointed with the gun at station four. "Put down the damn shotgun. Come on. All at once. Take out your piece."

The men huddled now within the boundaries of the station, shoulders almost touching, their skin greasy with sweat. Each of them produced a pistol, holding it up to the blank space above the range. Muskrat, on the end, signaled to Denis, with his silver pistol. The gun's platinum plating reflected the sun with a quick white flash. Entranced by the glimmer of the gun, Lulu was alarmed again with the eruption of power and sound as the trio shot round after round at the clay pigeons. She recoiled but the action drew her out of her hiding spot to watch, still gripping the corner of the high house. This time, one or more bullets found the spinning disc, and

it blasted into pieces. The Americans guffawed, ugly and loud. Like gargoyles come to life, Lulu imagined. Buffoons. Are they drunk? Still, they had not noticed her.

"Closed!" Xing yelled, appearing on the back lot, waving his arms. "You use shotgun or leave!" From where he stood, Xing made eye contact with Lulu and waved her over. But Lulu only mistakenly took another step into the exposing sun on the range. Altogether, the racketeers turned from Xing to find Lulu fixed to a spot.

"Who's this?" Muskrat said at Lulu.

Xing halted on the gravel lot, looking shiny and exasperated. Lulu stepped fully into the harsh sunlight, feeling stuck in between. The Muskrat was sucking a long last drag on his cigarette.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

The Muskrat smiled wide revealing those nightmarish teeth and moved toward her, flicking the butt. "Hi, I'm Elon." He extended a hand for her to shake, and exhaled the smoke from his wide and hairy nostrils. Lulu stared at the hand a moment too long. It seemed normal enough, yellowed and tough and male, with dark hair on top. "What? I'm gonna bite you?"

"That's not the way to play." Lulu forced herself to look him in the eye.

"You're insulting me." Elon looked down at his extended hand and back at her.

She didn't want to touch it, but Lulu placed her hand in his to shake anyway. Elon turned it, held it delicately like Xing. The touch felt rotten. As she pulled her small palm away from his, Lulu sensed his grip lightly holding on, feeling her fingers as they slid away. She leaned back.

"You know how to shoot?" he asked.

Lulu nodded. She was unsure why everything about the man felt dangerous, or why she was deeply uncomfortable under his gaze, but it was undeniable. She had the instinct to run away

home even, but this was not the type of person she met everyday. She lingered. He fed off her hesitation.

"Really? Wanna show us?" He hunched over her, grinning. He must enjoy looking down at someone for once, Lulu thought.

She felt Denis behind her and glanced back at him. A scrawny loner, Denis seemed perfectly happy spending his days alone reading newspapers in the high and low houses on the skeet range. For some reason, Denis' concern angered her. What was he going to do? She inhaled deeply. She would show them all she wasn't scared. Shifting into her shooting persona, Spotted Rabbit, the Shawnee Warrior Princess of Tecumseh, Lulu jumped to where the shotgun lay on the ground behind the stations. She checked the back lot with the stare of a huntress for Xing. He had disappeared back inside. All right, she thought.

As Lulu reviewed the gun, she sensed the Americans watching her. But Spotted Rabbit ignored them. They were imbecile cowboys. The standard Baker single barrel twelve-gauge rental gun was longer and heavier than the shotgun Lauwy had taught her to use. The fit was off but Spotted Rabbit could handle it. She could kill cowboys riding bareback at thirty miles an hour. Grizzlies and wolves were her worthy opponents. Spotted Rabbit was swifter, more cunning than these dummies. It was as the Shawnee Princess that Lulu competed in the first annual youth skeet competition in June, coming in second behind Bear Laforêt, a true half-Indian.

Spotted Rabbit stepped into station two, typically the hardest to master, and narrowed her eyes at Denis. She nodded and he obeyed her, ducking back into the high house. She exhaled deep. In one fluid motion, Spotted Rabbit stretched her arms and the gun in front of her chest and brought the butt back against her shoulder, nestling the smooth walnut against her cheek. Her

trigger finger hovered above the side lock. Focusing down the barrel felt natural. She had been there only last week, practicing. Still, she needed to hit the first skeet to prove she was not a girl to mess with. Spotted Rabbit released the lock, breathed in her nose, and exhaled through lips pursed in an open O. Gun speed to target speed, she thought. Follow through.

"Pull!" she called.

The bird sailed. Spotted Rabbit pointed, tracked, and shot. Orange clay burst over the hot range. Behind her, the American gangsters howled and clapped. Her shoulder ached from the unfamiliar gun's kickback, but she didn't let on. Spinning around, Spotted Rabbit lowered the barrel and choked back a smile.

"Nice shot, girlie," the plump one said.

Elon, the muskrat, scanned her body up and down. "Jesus Christ," he said to the not-quite-handsome man. "Who taught you to shoot like that? Your daddy?"

"My brother," Lulu said, feeling Spotted Rabbit's presence subside. She gripped the gun at her side.

"Well, we could sure use a weapon like you on our crew." Elon stepped forward.

"Whaddaya say?"

"I have my own crew." Lulu didn't know where the cheeky remark came from but as a barely perceptible breeze caressed her bare neck, she blamed it on the haircut.

Elon laughed and clapped his hands together once, the smack almost an ear-splitting treble after the heavy bass shots. "I like you." He stepped closer. "I really do. What's your name?"

"Nice try," she said.

He snorted. "Who do you think I am?"



She thought a minute. Shrugged. If she had to have an answer, that was all she could give. Elon, a muskrat man, an American, probably a gangster, dangerous—there was no proof he was any of these things but neither did she want to give him a reason to believe she was thinking too hard about it. She settled for, "I don't know."

"That's right. You don't know." Elon took another step toward her, his hideous features losing the creepy cordiality from a moment ago. "You like to swim?"

"What?"

"You've got legs like a swimmer," Elon said. "I've got a swimming pool bigger than Ford's." The other men flanked Elon in her view, back against the edge of the range, watching. They were smoking, and the strange-scented smoke of American cigarettes wafted forward. "I got a son about your age, too. Twelve?"

"Thirteen, next week," she said, reactively, and immediately wished she had kept quiet.

"Well, close." Elon cocked his head to the side. "Happy Birthday." He looked into her eyes a little too hard. His black nostrils flared. "The steaks as good as they say?" He pointed a thumb toward the clubhouse.

Lulu nodded. It seemed like a simple enough question.

"You eat here a lot?"

"In the winter."

"Oh yeah?" Elon's hand moved to his belt resting it against his gun. He shifted his weight awkwardly to one hip, shortening on one side. The posture gave the impression he was crippled. The way he lingered over her, without saying anything, without seeming to want a response, made her feel the most uncomfortable. The hair on her arms bristled up to her collarbones. It was time to leave.

"I have to go." Lulu remembered Bernadette. What if men like these had done something to her? Hidden her away? Killed her? But then she thought about these gangster dogs following her home. It was a long walk back alone.

"Oh yeah?" Elon said again. "Going home?"

Lulu channeled Spotted Rabbit again, gripping the gun across her body. This man was a filthy cowboy outlaw. A man who had killed her people. She ground her molars together. She should just shoot him now. Sinful thoughts sprang into her heart. Men like this were unpredictable. In the Wild West, she wouldn't have thought twice. Pow. Problem solved.

"No. I have to wait here for my brothers." Her voice carried a cavalier tone. "They own the Shawnee."

"Jesus Christ," the plump one said, a plume of cigarette smoke escaping his mouth with the shape of the words. He blew the rest out with a laughing phew. The muskrat smiled, closing his lips over those fangs.

"Well, honey," Elon said, "that's why we're here, too."

Lulu held a dead stare trying to hide the shock from her face. She was right. These were the very men her brothers called their "associates." These were the American mobsters who bought the booze the boys ran across the border.

"Yves and Luc, they're your brothers?" he asked.

Lulu fought the urge to ball up her fingers into fists. She blinked back hot tears.

## FIFTEEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

The owl was close and active, calling hoo hoo hoo hoo hoo, sometimes near the bedroom window, but that wasn't the only thing keeping Maman from sleeping. Her mind played the same two scenes over and over in her head as she tossed against her flat pillow. Throwing the sheet off her body, Maman opened her eyes and watched the black leaves flutter against the starry sky through her blurred vision. She couldn't see anything these days without her eyeglasses.

In the room across the hall, Pepé stirred in his creaky bed. The mattress has been sagging lower under his weight. She'd been wondering how to keep him from getting too fat. He's probably awake listening to the owls, she thought. She closed her eyes again, ignored the pain in her shoulders, and told herself to relax and go to sleep because tomorrow was Monday, the busiest day of the week. When do we slow down but for Sundays? Though, even today was tiring in other ways. Where were Yves and Luc? They were grown men but their absence felt like something more today. From the moment she opened her eyes this morning before Mass, Maman knew by sixth sense things weren't right. Heat wave, itchy brain, she thought. They needed rain and autumn to come. Lulu, and that haircut. Her teenage phase had started a few days early.

The springs and frame of Pepé's bed complained from across the hall. Maman listened to him scuffle around more and then to the tinkle of his urine hitting the bedpan. Dieu merci, that

man can still take care of that business. Maman sent up a thanks to God for the life and mobility her father-in-law still had in him.

“Ma fille,” Pepé called from the other room.

I spoke too soon, she thought, getting up and crossing into his room.

Pepé was still sitting upright in bed in his sweaty undershirt and boxers.

“Aidez-moi à ma chaise. S'il vous plaît,” he plead. “Je ne peux pas dormir et je veux regarder les hibous.” He couldn’t sleep and wanted to watch the owls from the back porch.

“Tabernac, Papa.” Maman feigned a protest with a sigh, but she relented easily. The owl was hooting again nearby. It’s probably cooler outside anyway, she thought.

Pepé swung his arm around Maman’s shoulders when she bent down. She strained against his bulk and managed to lift and shift his bottom into the chair. He wasn’t completely crippled yet. Pepé’s skeleton could hold him up for a moment, but his muscles were for the birds. Pepé grabbed his thick, black-rimmed glasses from the night table and maneuvered his wheelchair into the hall. Maman grabbed her eyeglasses too, and followed him into the kitchen in her cotton nightgown. The clock above the kitchen table said quarter past three.

Outside was still but much cooler than the stifling rooms inside. Any light breeze dropped Maman’s temperature by a few degrees. She yawned, searching the trees for the owls, and leaned against the house. Through the cotton, she could feel the warmth the siding still held from the sun. Pepé positioned himself in the corner. He looks nuts sitting there in his underwear, Maman thought, watching him strain his eyes into the black woods. We must look nuts. Heat wave, crazy town.

The owl made a low barking noise, one that Maman had never heard. Pepé whispered to her that it's a call the bird makes when it feels threatened. He said there could be another predator out there, competing.

The predator is us, she thought. Je m'excuse, Monsiour Hibou. Sorry for butting into your business. In the quiet that followed, Maman's mind slipped back to the late evening, the thing most bothering her—the Durochers entangling Lulu into their tragedy. Playing the night over in her head was what truly kept her from sleep.

After Sunday luncheon that day, into twilight, Maman sat with the stew pot, a bucket of ice, and newsprint on the kitchen table. She tied a tattered apron around her waist and sat down to clean the legs for tomorrow's dinner.

"Fille! Changez la station au base-ball," Pepé grumbled from the porch.

Before soiling her hands with bullfrog juices, Madame leaned over the back of the chair and fiddled with the dial. The announcer's tinny voice tuned in through static pops. She leaned farther over to tinker with the antennae, until the channel came in as clear as it would, and then turned back to the dead frog bodies.

Slicing through the first creature just below the guts and standing to place weight behind the chop of the spine, Maman wondered how many nights she'd spent performing the task. As a teenager, she learned from her own grand-mère at the same table. Since then, countless summer evenings passed separating rubbery legs and bodies, through years of babies and growing boys, of men and their fiancés, wives, and now grandchildren. Peeling the skin back down over the knee joints and cutting the webbed feet off at the ankles, Maman felt the years crash forward. In

a year, she would turn fifty. Fifty. At once it felt nearly impossible to cram in all the stuff of childhood and childbearing years into just fifty, and yet not enough time to become all those years old. She pictured herself at the same table in five years, ten, twenty years. Would her children always surround her and keep life busy? Maman wondered if there would be a time without frog legs to lop off and skin.

A rapping at the front door pulled Maman out of her meditation. Neighbours came to the side door, like family. She stood and wiped slime down her apron, twisting the fabric around each slick finger. A fat bead of sweat rolled all the way from the back of her neck to her waistband, tracing her spine. The clock read just after nine-thirty. She pushed the wisps of grey away from her temples, brushing it with her dirty fingers, to where it mixed with the chestnut brown curls in a bun. Reaching the screen door at the front of the house, and thinking it was too late to have a look at herself in the mirror, Maman found the grave faces of a police officer, a man, and a woman when she flipped the porch light switch.

"Madame Marceau?" the police officer asked.

Madame nodded.

"Good evening, Madame. I'm Officer Beausoliel with the Riverside Police. May we come in?"

She nodded again, unlatching the screen door and pulling it open. Panic seized her chest. With strangers in her home, the stench of work on her body felt amplified and Madame felt slightly embarrassed. Was this about Yves? Luc? She tried a light expression, a smile of inquiry, but their faces were grave to an extreme.

"May I sit?" the woman asked. She appeared sick to the point of collapse.

"Oui, of course," Maman motioned to the most regal piece of furniture they owned—the tapestry settee—and switched on a lamp. The small, stone-faced man perched along the settee with the woman. The two of them embodied mourning. The police officer stood in the open door, blocking whatever breeze might drift into the living room. Maman remained standing as well, on the other side of the room, as if guarding the passageway to the kitchen. She pushed her shoulders back, waiting.

"Anglais?" Maman asked.

"My wife doesn't speak much French."

"Bien. Can I help with something?" Maman met the gaze of both men while the woman sat catatonic.

"Yes. We hope you can." Officer Beausoliel cleared his throat in three short ticks. "Or rather, we hope your daughter, Louise, might help us."

Maman's mind went blank hearing her daughter's name come out of the strange officer's mouth.

"Hm. This is difficult." Officer Beausoliel spread his forefinger and thumb over a short moustache that didn't quite reach the creases of his lips. "This is Monsieur and Madame Durocher. You must have heard about their daughter in the newspapers? Or on the radio perhaps?"

The missing girl. Maman nodded again. Even in that moment, facing the officer and the sad Durochers, Maman's thoughts jumped from Lulu somewhere out in the dark night, to Lauwy, wondering if he was next door and if he had seen the visitors walk up the drive, to Yves and Luc, wherever they might be.

"Our daughter, Bernadette," Monsieur Durocher addressed Maman. "She's been missing since Friday night."

"I heard. I'm very sorry."

"Every minute counts," Monsieur Durocher said in a robotic tone. Words someone had given him.

"I suppose you don't have any information on her whereabouts?" Officer Beausoliel brought his hands to his hips with an air of interrogation. Madame Durocher looked up at him then, feeling the shift in his energy, and over to Maman with an aim to correct him.

"We heard your girl has a gift," Madame Durocher said. "That she can see things?"

"Pardon?"

"Louise. She's a healer. Yes?" Monsieur Durocher asked. "This is what we heard."

Both Durochers held Maman's gaze as if they could suck results from her.

"Yes, she's a healer," Maman said, pressing a hand to her heart. Her body ached. "She heals."

"Please. Could she help us find our Bernadette?" Madame Durocher clasped her fingers together in a tight fist, praying to the other mother.

The house creaked somewhere, presumably from expanding in the night heat. Maman searched for words but they did not come. She was listening listening for Lulu's footsteps coming home, and trying to get at Madame Durocher's request. What could her Louise do for them? Their girl was missing, not sick, not suffering in pain. Hundreds of times Maman had watched her youngest, the seventh of child of a seventh son, place her deceptively powerful hands on another and relieve affliction. She remembered the first time her husband, Zephyr, had explained his supernatural talent, also a seventh son of a seventh son, a few weeks before their



wedding. A family with a four-month-old baby weakened by whooping cough arrived just after Sunday mass at her busy inlaws' household. Zephyr, her then young fiancé, hugged the baby to his chest for just a few breaths, said a prayer, and then handed the baby back to the anxious couple. That infant's calmed face returned to Maman's thoughts often in that first year of marriage. The baby had recovered quickly after the ritual, and the small miracle bathed her husband in a strange light. To Zephyr's large family, the gift was commonplace, a duty bestowed by God. Maman thought his gift no more than the fulfillment of their collective belief. But miracle-by-miracle, Maman grew to respect the gift deeply, and throughout her married life, she entertained healing visits every Sunday, and sometimes during the week for particular emergencies.

When her seventh pregnancy produced a baby girl, Louise, all but Maman had been disappointed. The extended family believed the natural born legacy would end with there. To Zephyr's family, the seventh gift could only pass to a boy. Maman was secretly relieved for her girl. Her baby would not be burdened all her life to soothe the sick, wounded, and dying, not bear the weight of heavy hearts. Time and again, the ill would recover under her husband's hand, but there were many who needed more than the healer's touch.

When this happened and Zephyr was young, he believed that he had failed, not prayed or concentrated hard enough. But as he grew in wisdom, he would put it simply, "Je ne suis pas Jésus. I cannot cure. Only can I push them towards life."

Lulu discovered her gift when she was only six years old. She healed the broken leg of a pet raccoon, with Albért Laforêt and her brother Luc as witnesses. Zephyr spent the following two years teaching her the gift. And since her father's death, Lulu had continued the tradition, healing with her hands and answering pleading letters and phone calls with tranquilizing

thoughts. Each time it worked. Babies stopped crying. Relatives died peacefully without pain. Veterans with achy bodies breathed easier.

"Where is she?" Officer Beausoliel asked for the Durochers. "Couldn't she help?"

"She heals," Maman said finally. "That's all she can do."

"Could you ask her?" Monsieur Durocher asked.

"Is she at home?" Madame Durocher asked.

"Non." At once, Maman was relieved and upset that Lulu was still running about in the night. What could she do for these people? Surely, she wanted to help these suffering parents, but she first would protect her own. So late, she thought. Evening would stretch on.

Officer Beausoliel made the triple noise in his throat again. "We'll wait until she returns, okay?"

"Bien." Maman could not refuse.

Being outdoors in the early morning damp, settled some ease into Maman. She came to the porch steps and sat carefully. Her knees ached all the time now. Resting her temple against the railing, Maman closed her eyes and listened for the owl. The soft wait, the natural silence, brought another yawn to her throat. Perhaps she could get just a few hours tonight, she thought.

Hoo hoo hoo hoo hooo, the owl called, and Maman opened her eyes just as it swooped through the yard, dipping at the weeds along the side fence, and scooping something up into its claws. The little beast looked significant hanging in the large bird's grasp. The owl flapped its exquisite dark wings twice and soared up into the largest maple.

"Sacré bleu," Pepé whispered. "Ca c'est bien. Bien."

Underneath the maple trees, half hidden by the car shed, Maman noticed something white on the lawn. Had they forgotten a table cloth from luncheon? She lifted herself with the help of the porch railing, and peered through the dark. What was there? She lit the candle in the porch lantern and grabbed it off the hook. Maman stepped barefoot onto the dewy grass and crept upon the white thing lying in her yard. Large brown moths beat their wings against the hot glass, flapped back into the dark, and dove again at the flame. They loved the heat and light so much they would burn for it.

Slowing as she neared the object, Maman understood that it was a person, wrapped in a white sheet. An icy ripple went through her veins. Her first thought was Bernadette Durocher. But then noticing the familiar little foot, Maman washed with relief to know it was Lulu. Maman took another step to make certain. It was Lulu, sleeping soundly wrapped tight in the sheet.

Why is my first reaction to wake the girl, Maman wondered. After all, she and Pepé had also wandered outside for the refreshing air. Maman backed away, careful not to make the slightest noise. Lulu had a tough encounter with the Durochers. I need to let her grow a little, Maman thought. Turning back to the house and the porch, she discovered Pepé snoozing with his chins resting against his barrel chest. For some reason, she leaned her head back and looked for the moon. She couldn't find it. The thought crossed her mind to leave Pepé there too, but instead she wheeled him back to bed.

## SIXTEEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Up the porch steps, Lulu strained her ears for any hint at conversation in the kitchen. Pepé was no longer sitting in the dark outside but she could still smell his pipe. She pulled at her blue Sunday dress trying to compose herself.

“Go on,” Lauwy said from the lawn behind her.

Lulu wished she were wearing shoes. Her feet were not just bare, they were filthy.

“I have to wash my feet.” Lulu turned around. There was time, she figured, to wash them at the spout behind the car shed. Lauwy folded his arms across his chest, waiting to make sure she wouldn’t flee again. If she was in trouble, though, Maman would be furious but she’d be angrier still with Lulu for showing her bare, muddy feet in front of strangers. Lauwy knew it. You look like a wild monkey, Maman would say. After wetting her feet, Lulu dragged them along the tall grass, drying them a little.

“Come on, Lulu. I need to get going.”

From her vantage at the screen door, Lulu could see Maman stripping bullfrog bodies. The mess spread out in oozing piles, soaking through the newsprint on their round kitchen table. There was the perceptible shuffle of people inside, but Lulu could not see anyone else from there.

"Vien ici," Maman said, looking up. The overhead light cast a halo about her head and shoulders, but her features were darkened through the screen. Loose, grey strands of hair shone silver in the light. "Hurry up."

Lulu relented, entering the stifling kitchen, head bowed, with the flimsy door's prolonged creak announcing her. Maman never stopped working her short knife into the frog skin. Along the far wall, a police officer pulled his shoulders back and wiped his brow with a handkerchief. Next to him, a couple around Maman's age looking sullen and pale sat side-by-side in chairs pushed against the wall that Maman had likely set there to keep them out of the way. The electric desk fan on the hutch pushed the smell of pond scum and Pepé's pipe smoke around the room in humid swirls.

"Hello," Lulu said to the officer. She hunched her shoulders, already admitting some kind of defeat. She pushed the limits of right and wrong so often that she was certain they'd caught her in some sinful scheme, but she couldn't think of what it might be.

"You're Louise?" the officer asked.

Lulu nodded. It was always strange to hear her formal name. Only at school was she called Louise.

The man pushed himself up and teetered like he was elderly, wiping the sweat from his dripping temple. He held a hat in his hands and looked as if he had slept in his clothes. The woman was worse. The wrinkled skin around her eyes was a hateful red, almost purple in the creases.

"I'm Monsieur Durocher," he continued. "We're Bernadette Durocher's parents." The name recognition must have spread across her face because the man's expression changed as well. "You've heard about our Bernadette?"

"Yes. She's missing."

Maman pulled a frog bone from its hip socket, and the Durochers winced at the popping noise. "Did you find her? Is she okay?" Lulu asked.

Perhaps Lulu sounded a little too hopeful. Madame Durocher hiccupped into her hand and wept openly as if her daughter were already dead. Monsieur Durocher continued to explain himself but Lulu had heard it all before. The Durochers had no idea how wrapped up in Bernie's disappearance Lulu already felt.

"We heard you can see things, Louise," Monsieur Durocher stammered on. "You're the seventh child of a seventh son, no?"

Few people had ever discussed her healing directly. She nodded. The phenomenon had always been addressed as an unspoken acknowledgement. A screaming baby had just been placed into her arms with a nod. Some phone call would come with a request for Lulu to send peace to a dying loved one. Or a parishioner would grab her arm at Mass with a blessing and an aside about gout or knee pain. But Lulu didn't know what to say here. She had never been asked about 'seeing things.' From beside the icebox, Pepé cleared his throat and knocked his pipe against the inside of the sink. The sound brought her attention to the alcove, where the crucifix hung above the window, as if she might discover some meaning there.

"We heard you have visions." Monsieur Durocher met Lulu's gaze.

"What visions?" Lulu asked. "Who said this?" She knew it sounded harsh, but they had cornered her. The Durochers exchanged desperate looks. The husband placed a hand on his wife's shoulder as she shuddered with sobs. "I don't understand," Lulu said.

"We're losing time. With every hour that passes, we have less of a chance of finding her..." He let his sentence trail off, but Lulu and everyone in the kitchen knew the next word. Alive.

"I can make a wish for healing, but that's all. You know, for if she's suffering..." And Lulu let her sentence taper off in the same manner. It was too much to admit aloud. In plain fact, they were discussing the life and death of a girl, not much older than Lulu herself. Despite the heat inside, Lulu felt like a cold spider was climbing up her back.

"Come on, aller," Maman said to Lulu from her frog mess at the table.

Monsieur Durocher glared at Maman. She appeared uncharacteristically accommodating, finishing the last of the frog gutting. The pungent scents of all the frog bodies, their opened limbs leaking fat and slime, rose up. Madame Durocher gagged a little and motioned as if she would heave into her hands.

"I'm going to be sick," the poor woman said.

"Louise, s'il vous plaît," Monsieur Durocher begged. "I'll bring you a reward. Must there be some type of exchange?"

"Just do whatever you do," the police officer said. "Be a good girl."

"No," Lulu said. "No reward or exchange. It's better that way." Lulu pursed her lips together and nodded. Then the notion bubbled up slow and thick because she had been suppressing it for days—What if Bernie were dead? Would she feel her lack of life and know for sure? Before now, Lulu had not thought to use her gift on Bernie. The girl had just been gone, not sick, not hurt, just missing. If she actually conjured a picture of Bernie in her mind and prayed her ritual like always, she would know beyond doubt whether she was alive or dead. Lulu would feel her.

"There's too many people in here," Lulu almost whined. She didn't like the unbelieving look on the officer's face, and wondered why he had come at all. It was also an excuse to buy time. She could heal with a thousand people in the room.

Without acknowledging Lulu's statement or what was about to happen next, Maman grabbed the handles of Pepé's wheelchair and pushed him across the room.

"Je prierai pour votre fille." Pepé rested his hand on Madame Durocher's as he passed her. Pepé was the father of Papa. He had been a healer, too. Why had he stopped receiving miracles? Lulu forgot his story. The ancient man's light touch appeared to calm Madame Durocher. She took a deep breath and sighed tension out of her brow. And then Maman wheeled Pepé away into the hall, and she turned, ordering the police officer to join them in the living room.

Before leaving the kitchen entirely, the police officer gave Lulu an authoritative look. "If you heard anything about where she might be, you would tell us, wouldn't you, Louise?" The officer's tone suggested that Lulu had access to some underground information. Of course, she would help them. She would tell them anything and everything she could, if she knew. Lulu nodded earnestly. Didn't they understand how closely she could relate? In every quiet moment, Lulu could picture herself in Bernie's situation, missing from her life, needing a friend.

Lulu took a moment. She was still unsure if she would actually perform the act. Knowing for real would be a serious burden, irreversible information to take on. Already, Lulu felt responsible. Either way, if she could feel Bernie dead or alive, the answer would come from her and the consequences would spread out like flood water filling the low lying fields. If Bernie were alive would they keep coming back to ask for more 'visions'? Who else would follow if news got around? Regardless, knowing was too tempting. Lulu needed to know.



Alone with the Durochers, Lulu wished she could be back in the Laforêt car shed smoking cigarettes, uninvolved. Monsieur Durocher had sat back down and the couple huddled together embodying the utterly pathetic. Lulu had to turn away. Their sadness crept out from them in a ghoulish fashion as if it wanted her blood, her flesh. She crossed the kitchen, stood at the sink, and turned the cold tap on. She could feel their desperation sink into her hot, sunburned skin. Cupping her hands together under the cool stream, Lulu allowed the water to pool and then brought her face down. She splashed the cold water into her face and it slid down her neck and traced her shoulder blades. It felt so good that she did it again. Just with this intention to cleanse and heal, Lulu began to feel the slight tingle of the girl's existence. Bernie was alive. Lulu rubbed her wet neck and whispered a prayer to Mother Mary looking up into the tortured downcast eyes of the bloody, crucified Jesus. This was all it took—to send loving energy enough to heal, and she felt Bernie's life even stronger. If her years of healing had proven anything to her, she knew with certainty that Bernie was alive. She felt close by, even.

Lulu almost swung around and blurted the news to the Durochers, but something held her back. Hope. Lulu understood the universality of hope. It could be a dangerous thing to hold onto. Hearing that their daughter was alive would give them hope to keep looking, but Lulu didn't know where Bernie was, or whether she would be alive much longer. The knowledge tugged at her brain like she knew it would. She dropped her forehead to her hands resting against the sink, sensing the Durochers holding their breath. Lulu felt cruel, and drained.

The Ste Anne's tower clock began to chime the hour, or half hour. Lulu didn't know which one. The day had been stretched too long.

"Is that it?" Madame Durocher seemed to be asking her husband.

Lulu winced. Sometimes this happened. Often, the people who came to her for what they called miracles were only half-believers, and the lack of some physical ritual was too anticlimactic for them. But Bernie was alive! She wanted to shout it. Relief poured down over her, and for the first time in a long time, she marveled at her power. Turning, she dropped to her knees, ignoring the pain that shot up from her bony kneecaps. She clapped her hands together in a prayer gesture, sending them upward with revival. Madame Durocher gasped. Please God, let Bernadette Durocher survive, Lulu prayed within. Then she bowed forward swiftly onto her hands and knees, as if pushed from behind, as if knocking the healing demons out of her body. The clock chimed once more, and silence followed.

Poor Bernie, Lulu thought of the vibrant girl she looked up to that day on the brewery pipe. She's stuck somewhere, alive, and can't get home. Or won't come home. Bear's ideas of Bernie running away slid forward in her mind here, and real tears sprung to her eyes. She didn't want to look back up into the Durochers' grieving faces. There was nothing enough to tell them. The weight of it kept her pinned to the floor. She felt silly for acting out and ashamed for hiding what she knew. Bernie is alive. They should know, but it was too much. They would keep coming back for more answers.

## SEVENTEEN

Sunday, August 5, 1928

Each moment was like a speeding car flashing by Yves. Ruby had banished Luc's pain with heroin, and he had drifted painlessly into comatose sleep. Now Luc lay there on the kitchen table breathing shallow and sparse.

"He never stopped breathing," Ruby said. "We were with him the whole time." All three girls lined up side by side, making space for Dr. Stewart to work.

Perhaps the coma was advantageous if only for the doctor's first task. With Luc unconscious, Dr. Stewart probed his flesh and muscle, groping for the bullet, without so much as a twitch or a whimper from his patient. Luc was unnervingly pale. He had lost so much blood. Pacing the kitchen, Yves breathed loud.

"Come on, Doc." Yves yelled. "Find that slug."

"I don't feel fragments," Dr. Stewart said. "That's good."

Yves wanted to collapse. His throat was sour. He stopped and held the counter, feeling motion sick. Joanna came at him with a glass of water, wanting him to sit, save his energy. But his conviction wouldn't let him. Each movement was a disorienting jerk, accelerating and slamming the brakes, reversing, slamming, circling. He crossed to the icebox away from his brother's lifeless body. Luc already looked like a corpse. It was hard to acknowledge. Yves turned back to hover behind the Doc's business.

"I think I got it," Dr. Stewart said. Half of his hand was plunged into Luc's upper chest. "Christ, I think it's lodged in his scapula." Bracing against Luc's body with his left arm, he dug deeper for a firm grip on it. Blood seeped from the wound.

"Need something?" Ruby asked. "To help dislodge it?"

"Shut up," Yves hissed, watching more blood spill out of Luc's body.

"I need to feel it," Dr. Stewart explained.

"Holy fuck." Yves couldn't watch. He'd seen a lifetime of blood, bodies ripped apart, gushing, smoldering, but this was his baby brother. He was not there when the bullet entered Étienne's head. He realized now that God had spared him that horror.

"Got it." Dr. Stewart held the slippery lead slug in his fingers. "Apply pressure," Dr. Stewart directed Ruby. "Get him a chair. And a glass of water." This was to Joanna and Sally, the chair and water for Yves. "I need to open you up. He needs blood now. What's your type?" he asked Yves.

"O." Yves dropped into the chair, rolled his sleeve to his bicep, and curled his hand into a fist.

The doctor pulled tubing, a syringe, and other supplies from his box for the transfusion. "Good."

Doctor Stewart worked fast, and Yves focused on him. The man's precise motion, someone else taking over for the moment, eased a thimble-full of anxiety. Yves drank from the glass that was placed in his hand. Some physicians concentrated best under complete deference and quiet. Others found more focus in engaged conversation. Doctor Stewart was the latter.

"You serve?" he asked Yves.

"Yeah. You?"

"I volunteered. I was too old to enlist or conscript and fight, but after a year or so, all our boys gone, I couldn't sit around delivering babies and such." Having secured the needle in Luc's arm, the doctor moved back to Yves.

"You look pale. Get him something to eat," Doctor Stewart directed the women in general.

"I'm fine." Yves sat up, trying to be the good patient. In truth, he thought he may lose consciousness.

"What happened?" Doctor Stewart asked, without looking up. And without being specific, Yves knew he meant the scars.

"Shelling at St. Quentin. Got me from the side." Yves slowed his breath, releasing it deliberate and even. "I got lucky. I was far enough from the blast that this was all I got." The doctor tapped at the veins in Yves' inner elbow. "My brother pulled me back from the battle zone." Yves could feel the girls listening but he didn't care. One of them retrieved the empty glass from his free hand and filled it with a slice of cinnamon cake. She seemed to know the drill. Eating also calmed Yves a little. The intimate procedure between the three men provided space to even mention that time.

"It was the first shell of the day, from what I can remember. Really early, before light. It was foggy overnight. It's funny, because, you always felt sick for those first sorry bastards, the ones caught off-guard by that first shell across." An odd laugh bubbled from Yves' throat, surprising even him. He looked down at the needle in his inner elbow, at the tube that connected him to Luc. He hadn't even felt the needle prick. "That day, it was me. Well, me and some other sorry fucks. I found out later, Brisbois, a private we'd served with since training, died immediately." Yves stopped. He hadn't thought about Brisbois for a long, long time. Those first

days in the medic tent had been touch and go. Étienne delivered the news about goddamn Brisbois. The Doc had moved on to sewing up Luc's wound, and in his busy silence, Yves continued.

"Étienne was to my right, a ways down. And I blew right into him. Full force." The numbed ideas of that morning came clearer as he talked, calling them up from the far boundaries of his mind. But it didn't bother him to think about his own agony. "I wish I couldn't remember how much it fucking burned, but I can. I remember that whole goddamn trip, Étienne dragging me back to the medic, who was already too busy. He sent Étienne and me way behind to a nurse station on the road to Liez. It was still so cold. March. He kept saying, 'Come on. Quit your whining. Focus, brother. Focus.' The ground was shaking behind us but somehow I could walk with Étienne's help. Merde, the looks I was getting, everyone running to the front while we were already walking away. That's how fast it happens. I'd given those looks myself. Every time you saw a guy in bad shape. I mean, the side of my head felt like hot mush. I kept my hand against it the whole time, asking Étienne over and over if he could see my brains. And he fucked with me the whole time. He laughed, and told me they were unraveling onto my shoulders and down my back. Jesus. He told me I'd be an even worse dancer than I already was after this. He said, now he'd have a chance with the girls because I'd only have half a head of hair. That's how we are, the Marceaus. Laugh first, get serious later." Yves felt his lip quiver. "That's how I knew I was going to be okay. You know?" He glanced at Luc's face. "Some guys make light right near the end, but with us it's the other way around."

Those were some of the last minutes he spent with Étienne. Recalling them was where the true pain of that time came from. He pursed his lips together tight, blinking, keeping himself

from letting even one tear loose. But the emotion was mixed, for Étienne, for Luc, for Bernadette.

"You were sent back to London, I assume?" Doctor Stewart asked, saving him.

"Yes," Yves said. "Were you there?"

"Taplow in Berkshire? It was a convalescent hospital. In an honest to goodness palace. Gorgeous place. I'm no surgeon, but I did my best. Learned a lot."

"I was shipped to Wokingham. Not far from you, I guess."

"Hop, skip, and a jump."

Yves finished the cake. "What year?"

"Seventeen to Nineteen."

"Eighteen. April to September."

The two men paused a long time after that. The girls seemed frozen, too, waiting, traumatized in their own kitchen. Yves noticed the constant bird ruckus again outside in the wilds and shorelines of Middle.

"A few more minutes and then we need to move him," Doctor Stewart said. "He's in shock."

"Right." It was hard to digest. Yves just wanted to pick Luc up and move.

"You need to come," Yves told Ruby. "I might need you." She said nothing, but nodded.

After Doctor Stewart packed them up, Yves carried Luc out to the boat. The sun had dropped and dusty-looking clouds criss-crossed a navy blue sky. Ruby clamored onboard with the men, calling something back to Sally and Joanna who trailed like lost children. The boat motor growling to life snuffed out her voice. Yves pulled Luc into the cabin with caution. Still unconscious. Still seeping blood through the quick fix bandage. Yves pressed against the wound

with the focus of a surgeon, and let the doctor navigate. He trusted Dr. Stewart knew where best to go, how to arrive in record time, and anyway Yves didn't have the verve left to ask. Yves couldn't make another decision, possibly tainting the right course to follow from here on.

"Here." Ruby held few plums in her palm. "Eat something." The fruit was hard and tart, but Yves had hardly eaten all day and given a pint or so of blood to boot. On the bench, Yves studied his brother's face willing the features to animate. He made promises over and over, out loud and inside with his entire existence, to Luc, to Maman, to Bernadette, and to God. What good it would do, he did not know. But sitting in the night wind, on the doctor's strange yacht, listening to that nautical whistle in his good ear, there was nothing left he could do.

The ride back to the mainland, to a village called Leamington, took one shapeless hour. The time was broken only by repeated breath checks. Yves leaned over Luc to listen for life. Sometimes with the roar and splash, Yves couldn't tell if his baby brother was still alive, and had to ask Ruby for help. She knelt beside Luc the whole way back to the mainland. At one point, Yves noticed that Ruby was holding Luc's hand in the dark.

A lonely, pulsing green beacon at the end of an exaggerated jetty greeted them at Leamington. One flickering streetlamp pointed the way into town at the crest of the cliffside shoreline. The boat pattered as close to shore as the doctor could make port. A dozen sleepy boats rocked in berth. The coast was dead, and the slight sway of fantastically massive dark oaks and firs lining the bluffs was unwelcoming.

"What now?" Yves' loud voice carried across the water, and bounced back off the grassy cliffs.



"There's a motel up the way on Erie," the doctor said. "I'll go phone the hospital. They'll send a vehicle." He didn't wait around for agreement, but took off sprinting toward town up the steep hill. His body glowed for a half second under the streetlamp and was gone.

Bobbing gently in the calming water, Yves viewed the empty shoreline and marina in a haunted light, as if eyes were watching from somewhere. Beyond the wall of forest, yearning music echoed. Clarinets? Strings? He listened, harder than usual. Above, Yves found the domed peak of a pavilion emerging from the treetops. Ruby sighed, and it sounded like a howl in that kind of calm. He touched his brother's cheek. Clammy. Yves hated this uselessness. This eerie feeling, coupled with acknowledging the possibility that Luc could pass away, brought forth those earliest dreadful feelings in that Wokingham hospital, a veritable palace itself, where he learned that Étienne would never return from the trenches. It was August. Nearly ten years ago, exactly. All around him, life-altering news arrived daily from the front for the soldiers and nurses and doctors. Joyous news. And the worst news. The moment after the mail had been completely handed out was always a relief, for no news was truly good news in those days. And even good news sometimes was difficult.

The soldiers there felt absent from real life, existing in what could only be compared to limbo. They were souls lying in absolute stillness, or roving about room after seeming endless room submerged in the mind. This ritual continued through May, June, and July. But August knocked the humidity out of the air in England, and as everyone breathed into softening nerves, Yves was issued his medical discharge papers. His return to Canada was scheduled for September first. Concerning himself, he felt indifferent about the information. He planned to refuse his trip home in favour of working at something useful in England while Étienne continued to fight to the end. He vowed to be there when the Allies prevailed, and the troops

marched down the streets of London and Paris in a victorious storm. But only a week later, his own terrible news came in the form of a note card, delivered by a Canadian Officer, who found Yves engaged in a card game on the lush green lawn of Bear Wood Mansion. At Amiens, Étienne's squadron was ambushed while taking German prisoners of war. His brother was shot dead at point-blank range.

While rereading the telegram again and again, the ringing in Yves's head amplified, just as it had begun to subside. His condition worsened. Instead of traveling home by ship, he spent hours and hours despondent in that idyllic English summer countryside, languishing in the stench of infected flesh. The day Yves was to be transferred to a mental hospital for war veterans, was the day he got up and left Wokingham. So much of Yves had fallen away since then. Ten years gone. Étienne, and Yves.

It couldn't happen to Luc. And yet Yves knew if Luc did wake, did fully recover, this would kill who he once was, too. He would never be the same wide-eyed Luc. He would know gravity now, feel it in his bones.

Ruby didn't speak, and Yves couldn't even meet her eyes, as the two of them sat alone on the boat. He avoided the judgment in her eyes. Her presence was comforting only in the basest way. It kept his absolute panic from breaking out. That was all she mattered to him then. Every last thing was his fault. Only Luc mattered. And Bernadette. Yves had finally reached mainland again, but was still so far from the girl. With Luc's head in his lap, Yves accepted his fate. He would call Lauwy from the hospital. Ask him to free Bernadette from the tunnel. Ask if there was some way Lauwy could keep her there, in his home, until he arrived by morning. It would be the favour of a lifetime.

The myriad of consequences drifted in like breaking waves. He zoned out on them dancing against the rocky wharf in the cadence of the green light. I'll marry Bernadette, he thought. Why had it taken such catastrophe to reach this simple conclusion? He should have relented then, as their fight escalated, as she fired into hysterics. He should have pulled her out of that tunnel and agreed to get married, just to buy some time, just until he could get back from this deal. What a fucking joke. Elon probably had his crew out looking for the tunnel at this very minute. What time was it? The revenge fantasies blossoming in Yves' head since he and Luc had run *The Hope* aground, sunk to the bottom of his gut. Elon and his henchmen could find Bernadette, if they guessed right. Yves would kill him if they so much as touched her.

"He's coming," Ruby whispered.

Doctor Stewart appeared at the top of the hill and raced down, his body a featureless shadow against the asphalt until he reached the docks.

"Let's get him out and ready. They're sending a truck." Doctor Stewart leapt from the slip into the vessel, landing clumsily on two feet. The boat rocked.

"Jesus," Yves said. "Come on. You hand him to me."

They maneuvered Luc out of the doctor's boat as best they could but he was completely deadweight. Yves pushed the idea of him as a body away. It felt as familiar as shrugging on his suit coat, this lifting a comatose man. He thought it best to haul him over a shoulder, carry him further, faster. Yves could tell that Luc was almost not there any more. They would arrive at hospital at just the crucial moment, or miss it within breaths. Yves held tight to Luc, getting up that hill, and under the glow of the street lamp. His own heaving breath knocked around his banging skull. The headache had never waned.

The towering trees blocked any moonlight there might have been, leaving a starry blue-black stripe of sky over the street, pointing to town. They waited, listening to the instruments blow wispy through the forest park, and to the crickets chirp nearby. For a strange moment, Yves heard his maman's voice in his head. "Un signe d'automne." A sign of autumn coming.

Minutes later, the truck's lamps flashed into view down a long, sloping main street. They illuminated house shapes along the journey. Reaching the end, the truck was actually an old buggy, driven by a nun in full habit. She skipped out from behind the wheel.

"Hurry, hurry," she said unnecessarily, herding them in with her tremendous floppy sleeves in the headlamp glare. Ruby took the front passenger seat while Yves and the doctor lifted Luc into the backbench, and propped him in between them. Though the ride simply carried them straight back through town, no turns, no curves, Leamington felt expansive. A torrid breeze moved across the hood smelling of freshly turned soil and manure. The doctor and the nun exchanged some medical language on the way, but Yves honed in on the high whines of cicadas calling out to one another as the truck passed columns of old trees. Luc's body was like a heater leaning against him. Yves felt wet again with sweat as he watched the procession of trees grow and pass away in measured lines, two by two, as if they had been planted there by someone who had foreseen a lane like this before even dreams of roads.

"What's his blood type?" the nun shouted above the wind at Yves.

"I don't know," Yves said. "I can donate."

"That's fine. We have stores."

"He's going to need lots of blood," Yves added, for something to say.

"No," Doctor Stewart said. "You're done."

Yves wanted to say something back, retort, or make some suggestion, but he decided not to argue now. He'd step up when he was needed. Eventually, they steered into a short drive behind a smartly square, two-story, orange brick house that stirred with life inside. Sister nurses met them at the buggy wheeling a chair. With Doctor Stewart, they swept Luc up the side ramp into the light inside. Yves unravelled his body from the buggy and stumbled into the driveway, following behind, as if walking with chained ankles. The dirty smell of young tomatoes filled his head. Black shades of the landscape—foreground, background, horizon, big sky—shifted and bounced with his steps. His stomach lurched, and he thought, Am I falling?

Yves woke to the sound of water running into a porcelain basin. The room was dim and cool. A softly ticking ceiling fan spun overhead. His first instinct was to close his eyes and let sleep take him back below. Then he jerked awake. Images from former consciousness came to life in saturated tints. A nun's habit in headlights. Red brick hospital. Luc's clammy face. He searched the room, but found only an old man sleeping in a corner bed. The other four beds lay empty and made. Morning light bled into the room from behind thick window shades.

Swinging his feet to the floor, Yves discovered he was wearing a hospital gown swung low to his knees. He still wore Ray Brueckner's ridiculously tight waders as well. His feet were bare. Yves first tried the door closest to him. It was locked. Across the room, another door had been left half open to a hallway. He followed it toward subdued light.

"You look better," said a voice from behind when he entered the next room fully. Ruby sat herself up in a bed. The richness of her, those dark features, the gem-tone fabrics, and the way her curves played with movement, was stark against the hospital whites.

"Where is he? Is he all right?"

"He's stable. Over there." She pointed to a bed where Luc lay alone, flat and still.

Yves wandered down the aisle of beds. His eyes watered, gazing down at his youngest brother. He'd been covered with a sheet to his collarbones. The temporary bandage was gone and in its place, a crisp, clean pad laid over the wound. Yves wanted to lift it to see the damage, but he left the nurses' work in place.

"Don't touch it." A sister nurse entered the room. She tucked a hand into Yves' elbow, tugging him gently away from Luc's side. "We're monitoring for infection, and we'll administer pain medication when he wakes."

"Has he..." Yves wiped his eyes.

"He hasn't come to yet. But he should with some good rest." She was young, twenty-five maybe, though she addressed him with certainty that only came with wisdom or faith. Her face was chubby squeezed in the wimple; her eyes, large, pearly marbles. "You look better," she said, and smiled like a mother. "Yes, much better." Still holding his elbow, the young nun led Yves over to a bed across the aisle from Luc, and sat with him.

"I'm Sister Bernadette..." she said and continued, but that was all Yves heard.

Mon Dieu. Mother of God. Bernadette. His heart exploded against his ribcage. His reaction was plain as he doubled over his legs. To vomit, or pass out again, he wasn't sure. But he yanked himself up again, too quickly. The blood rushing to his head blacked him out, and in, and out. When Yves opened his eyes again, he was lying on the same bed.

"How long was I out?" His breath came unwieldy.

"Only a minute." The nun had hold of both his arms, pressing her weight down so he wouldn't bound back up again. "Breathe, Monsieur Marceau." But he was lifting her from him,

gripping her arms and setting her aside, as easily as he could. "You need to rest," she said, as he rose to the window. A great morning cloud divided the sky, filtering summer sun over an abundant field of tall corn, row on row.

"What? Jesus! What time is it?" Yves turned back to the room, breezing past the nun, finding crucifixes where there should have been clocks. He wouldn't call Lauwy, now. He'd go himself.

"Ten to eight," Ruby said.

Yves tore off his hospital gown. "Where's my shirt?"

"It's in the laundry," Sister Bernadette said. "It was filthy. Please." She appealed to Yves to calm down, stay and wait, but she might as well have been speaking Japanese. He wasn't hearing it.

"Reste ici, mon frère." Yves leaned over to Luc's ear and breathed good-bye. He kissed Luc's forehead for the second time of their ordeal, and stood to lock eyes with Ruby. He was still shirtless. "Stay with him?" Half question, half command. She nodded again. Where was Doctor Stewart, Yves wondered as he tried a door, and found a closet.

"How do I get out of here?" he asked the nun. Ruby pointed to a side door.

"Thank you," he said. Twenty-four hours Yves had known her, but it felt like years. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Outside, Yves squinted into the surrounding day. It was already hotter than Hades. He felt like an escaped madman, shirtless, in the drive of some homestead asylum stranded in acres and acres of lush, flat farmland. You really could see forever out there. Yves considered running into town, but quickly turned the option down. Too much time. There was the old buggy still

where the nun had parked it the night before. He was at it, in the driver's seat, in a dash. The key still stuck in the ignition.

Sitting tall and bare chested at the wheel, Yves steered the chugging buggy to the dirt road in Nowhere-ville, thinking, I must look a sight.

"Mister! Mister!" An aged nun wearing a nurse smock called from the front porch. She was making her way to the drive.

He pulled right, back toward the small village centre they'd spirited in the midnight hour. He only knew of one road that he could follow all the way back to his riverside bungalow. Out here in the sticks, the roads weren't paved, except when passing through some developed town, like lakeside Kingsville. Yves had only come this way once or twice in his life, but he knew he was in for nearly two hours. The only positive note was that he would not need a map. It was a straight shot following the coastline. He would arrive at his own drive, sitting high and sunburned, to rescue Bernadette from the hole he'd put her in.

Jesus, Yves thought. Two hours and he would face his fate. He had expected relief to flood in, knowing Luc was taken care of, knowing there was time to make things right with his girl, but something new pulled at him. He could not place his worry, but he could sense it, crouching in the shade up around the next bend.



## EIGHTEEN

Monday, August 6, 1928

Lulu could not sleep. The night was too quiet. Even the crickets seemed calm. Minutes and hours passed as she lay listening to every creak in the house as it relaxed under the moon. She heard each chime of the Ste Anne's bell, and both the midnight and one o'clock trains amble through town. When she had reached her bed in tears, and after she heard the Durochers leave out the front door, Lulu recited three "Ave Marias" and one "Pater Noster" to repent for withholding the truth. Simply, lying. She tried to reason out her guilt, kneading it to the corners of her mind, telling herself she was protecting the Durochers from more grief, but it always came back to Bernadette. She should be protecting Bernie. Not the girl's parents. So Lulu's heart suffered and pushed sleep away. Poor, poor Bernie. Where was she?

Tomorrow, I will confess, she promised herself.

"I will confess," she said aloud to God, turning over again to face the window, hoping that resolve would let the Sandman come.

From somewhere in the backyard, an owl hooted. She heard it once or twice before but missed most nights she'd been peacefully dreaming.

"Hoo h'HOO, hoo," it called.

Was it calling to a friend? Hunting? Lulu tried to imagine what the owl looked like. How large its eyes might be. How it could see in the dark. Lulu pulled the light sheet off her sticky body, and stepped to the window, kneeling at the sill. To the left, she could see the lights of

Detroit out-topping and out-twinkling the Windsor skyline. With the dark fields like a quilted sea spreading in the distance, the cities appeared as one metropolis; Detroit swallowing up the other in one great display of light and prosperity. From the county, there was no distinction between one side and the other.

To the right, the church steeple rose up from the crossroads in Tecumseh. The owl sounded agitated out there, but Lulu couldn't see the little beast. With her head at the window, Lulu felt the pleasant night air on her face. It was still hot but not so suffocating as the air trapped in her room. She felt drawn to go outside with the owl. To be inside, in this heat seemed unnatural. Would not biblical men and women sleep under the stars in this weather? Lulu pushed herself up from the window, gathered the sheet off her bed, and balled it up under her armpit.

After sneaking through the house on tip-toes, cringing at every strained floorboard underfoot, Lulu emerged onto the porch and breathed in the thick, grass-scented air. The caress of the cool lawn on her bare soles sent a refreshing wave up her shins and calves. The cotton touch of her nightgown grazing the hair and skin of her legs was even more soothing out here. She moved stealthily into the deep dark of the backyard, straining her eyes into the shadows of the tree dinosaurs. Nothing moved. Near the roots of the maple, under the wide reach of its loaded branches, Lulu patted the ground with her feet, testing for softness and damp. The yard had not yet been saturated with dew.

Lulu dropped the white sheet and used her toes to spread it out. Then, kneeling in the middle, she smoothed out the edges. Her feet had collected bits of grass and dirt and so she balanced on her bottom, swinging her feet away from the sheet, and rubbed them together. A bottomless yawn crept up from her gut, and she tried not to focus on it. Let the Sandman sneak up on me, she thought. Lying on one side, Lulu grabbed the sheet's edge, and rolled herself into

it loosely. She wiggled one arm up to secure the sheet bonnet-like around her head, remembering the pill bug incident. Years ago, she had been hiding from Luc and Bear under the wagon next to the field, and a baby pill bug had crawled up into her ear. Each weightless step it took on the delicate surfaces of her inner ear canal sent bass drum beats ricocheting through her skull, nearly driving her mad. Maman had known exactly what to do, though, watching Lulu tumble around the yard and into the kitchen, writhing with possession. Maman poured a few droplets of warmed lard into her ear and turned her over waiting calmly for the bug to emerge. The pill bug fell out in seconds, spun into a tiny ball, and when Bear crushed the thing with his heel, Lulu had sobbed.

I was nine. And he was ten, she thought. Are we in any sense the same as we were that day?

In her snug sheet cocoon, Lulu's vision adjusted to the dark. The trees were like family members even in the night. She searched for the owl in their gnarly limbs, but could not find it, and so closed her eyes to wait. Lulu yawned again. She set an internal clock to wake herself early so Maman would not find her in the yard. Then, the owl hooted again, somewhere high in the canopy of the adjacent maple. Lulu opened her eyes to search the branches, finding only the design of leaves against sky in shades of blue-black. A few stars pierced the low haze.

Tomorrow, I will confess, she said inside again. But instead of the peace this recitation was supposed to bring, it stirred another thought. Monsieur Durocher's voice repeated in her head, "We heard you can see things, Louise." What did he mean? The words slowed in her mind. *We heard. You can see. Things. Louise.* Did they think she could see Bernie somewhere? She closed her eyelids and let her mind's eye wander. Crickets in the field seemed to chirp louder. The feel of invisible bugs grazed her face. As her body relaxed onto the earth, Lulu's inner vision

soared back to the pond. The purple heat lightning flashes. The pale arm cutting a front crawl stroke in the dark water. Bernie's white swim cap appearing, and then disappearing between the rushes. The water rippling away from her navy blue swimsuit. Bernie couldn't really be there. Yet, Lulu had felt her. Bernie was closed in, trapped somewhere dark and watery.

Lulu's mind leapt away from there to remembering the sensation of Bear's arm touching hers as they hid behind the shed, steps away from where she lay now. She thought of her love for Bear, as her dearest friend, and compared it to the way a man loves his bride. The flashlight bouncing through the woods jumped up. Looking left, looking right, down the train tracks, Lulu saw that tunnel of sky like ink, outlines of trees, and the tracks fading to a black centre. The deer. Nothingness pulsed behind her forehead. Something or someone else was down there at the end of the blank space. Lulu felt it, but she just couldn't see it.

The owl hooted far away now, and Lulu stood on the tracks, frozen and listening. Bare feet on one board between the rails. The owl was back in her yard, in her maple tree. She listened hard. The smell of hot iron wafted up. The taste of a penny puckered saliva in her mouth. She could smell water and damp clay. If she listened really hard, she could hear it, too. Not dripping, not rushing. Trickling. The river pushing softly against the bank? Fish darting along the surface of a pond? A break wave parting from the stern of a freighter? The smell of wet wood. Still air. Lulu could sense waiting. Tortured waiting. A machine clicked on somewhere down a corridor. Dead air pulled toward it. Dusty orange light globes fizzled. She would suffocate without air. Fatigue inhabited her body.

The owl hooted above again, maybe lower in the tree. She felt it hovering, maybe watching. Have I slept? Lulu wondered. She rolled onto her side still tucked safe in the thin linens. Rest settled over her then at last as the Ste Anne's clock tower struck three times.

## NINETEEN

Monday, August 6, 1928

Peach Island. Peach Island. Lulu woke with a start. The beetle fluttered in her chest. Peach Island. A map of it popped into her mind. The dilapidated building there on the St. Clair shore. She opened her eyes to the same leaf patterns, only now the sky was indigo. Good, she thought, unraveling from the sheet. It's still early.

Light, dewy sweat coated her face. It's still early. Racing up and off to Bear's house, she twisted the sheet under her arm. Of course, no one had thought of Peach Island. With its hidden waterways and groves, Peach was where kids went to get far away from their parents' voices and the tacky city sidewalks in the summer time. Some set up camps and made the journey several times a week. But most kids were forbidden to make the trip.

At the mouth of the Detroit, Peach Island was a brazen salmon swimming in place against the current of the northern Great Lakes. Superior's frigid water drained into Huron above, and all that churning power funneled down the St. Clair River and surged into petite Lake St. Clair. Little Peach braced itself against that flow, a guppy poised to be sucked into the pursed lips of a giant catfish. And thus, the current around Peach was treacherous. Even the strongest swimmers could drown there in the unpredictable current. The way to make it across was to angle a sailboat or a dinghy from up shore and manage the passage going with the currents. People did it all the time.

Lulu turned the Laforêt's backdoor knob until the latch retracted without noise. She pushed the door into the empty kitchen, careful not to make noise with her first steps. Bear's bedroom was down a short hall to the right, past the lavatory, and a slight jog away from where his parent's slept. As Lulu snuck through the doorframe, she held her breath, channeling Spotted Rabbit, Shawnee Warrior Princess. She would need her gumption all day long. Today, she was lucky Bear was an only child. His only sibling, a brother, had died as an infant. Reaching Bear's door, she first brought a finger to her lips in a hushing sign, just in case. She crouched, and opened the door.

Bear was a heavy sleeper. He lay flat on his stomach, face buried in the mattress. Lulu was proud of herself for entering soundlessly, but now she needed to wake Bear without startling him, or waking his maman and papa. Still barefoot, still with that finger to her lips, Spotted Rabbit pressed down with her heel trying to make the floorboard groan. It cracked louder than she had hoped. Bear jumped to his elbows, eyes frozen on her, but made no other noise.

"What?" he mouthed.

She waved her hand to say 'get up' and 'come on' at once and turned her back so he could dress. Bear was just as soundless as Spotted Rabbit. She reveled in a secret smile. They were going to find Bernadette Durocher.

Once she pulled some mismatched laundry off the line, and Bear had retrieved his rusty bicycle from the car shed, they met in the road. Lulu was in a hurry, and Bear pushed his bike alongside, but still she said nothing until they were well on their way down Shawnee into town.

"Okay, Rabbit. What happened last night?"

With her most grave expression, she faced him. "I know where Bernie is, Bear. Peach Island."

"How d'you know this?" Bear furrowed his brow.

"I dreamed it," Lulu said. "I had a vision."

He walked on, considering.

"Pepé said it once, a long time ago. That I might have visions. Pepé told me once that daughter healers can sometimes see the future. I forgot about it. I was little and I never saw anything. But last night I dreamed about Bernie. I couldn't see where she was but I *felt* where she was. And this morning, I knew it." Lulu paused for effect, and to catch up with herself. She spoke at the same rate that she was figuring it all out. Last night, the Durocher's were asking for this premonition. Guilt rose up again with the funny sense in her body that all but confirmed Bernie was alive. Spotted Rabbit shrugged it off, pushed back her shoulders. In a few hours, she would return heroic with Bernadette.

"Well, where is she?" Bear asked.

"You know that abandoned pavilion on Peach?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah. She's there."

Together, they approached Tecumseh Road, the only people awake and moving about the streets. A row of mourning doves on a wire overhead cooed to each other. The blue above was livening. The buildings stood lonely looking without any activity at the crossroads.

"You really think so, eh?" Bear asked.

"I know it." Lulu stopped to look him in the eye. "Bear, I know it. She's hurt or sick, and she's been waiting stuck there, or maybe locked up, for almost three days."

"Jésu."

"We have to go get her."

"What about the police? We should tell them, I think."

"Why would they believe us?" She reached out for his arm and held his wrist, feeling a new tenderness blooming inside for Bear. He believed her without question. "Let's just go get her. We'll be back before they even start the search."

Bear nodded and straddled the bike, holding it steady for Lulu to climb aboard the handlebar. Bear peddled momentum into the ride. On the way she told him of the Durocher's visit, of sleeping under the maple, of the owl, and the train tracks. The wind lifting through Lulu's short locks felt new. Absolutely everything seemed possible.

Lulu jumped off the handle bar at Sand Point Beach.

"Let's get a boat from the marina," she said, adjusting the pair of faded red bloomers she wore for chores around the house. One of Maman's smock tops hung loose over her shapeless waist. It was almost long enough to be a dress. Lulu knew how silly she must have looked, like a large baby, but she didn't care. Bernie's life was at stake. Three days.

"Luc's is just down the road," Bear said, following.

"Yes, but then we'll have to carry it back here," Lulu said. "Too much time."

"We'll get caught."

"It won't matter when we return with Bernie," Lulu said. "We'll be heroes."

"Christ-*ophe*, Rabbit," Bear swore. "You get us into trouble every time."

"You love it," she said, picking up speed as the tip of Peach jumped into the landscape. Diffused yellow light on the horizon reflected off St. Clair. "Come on." She took off running through the empty park, and he followed on his bike.



It was easy to steal a small boat from the yacht club this early. Several lined the bank there with a dozen canoes, overturned and unlocked. Veiled in the shade of the boat shed, they debated the suitability of both vessels. She argued for the speed of the canoe against the current. He countered that the canoe would be quickly redirected with the flow. In the end, Bear won out as, clearly, the cedar guide boat had ample room to fit a third body—Bernadette—and this specifically satisfied Lulu. She pictured them rowing back to the yacht club, the gleam of the honey-stained planks shining into those first boater's eyes. They would stand on the docks, hands at their brows, shielding the glare and muttering, "Is that who I think it is?"

One thing they did agree upon was to drag the rowboat in the shallows away from the marina to the beach, where they could angle at Peach Island with some headway. The sun crested St. Clair's horizon, and the temperature change was immediate. They hopped aboard, sat shoulder to shoulder on the middle bench, and rowed out from the mainland working in sync. The Detroit's luminous emerald waters seemed to shine from beneath, their oars scooping up light. Already, Lulu and Bear were sweating in the first rays of the day. But they toiled together, stroke after stroke, and traversed the gap swiftly.

On the way, Lulu began to feel uneasy about the scene with the Durochers from the night before. She decided to confess to Bear, in between laboured breaths, that she could have assured the grave couple their daughter was still alive hours and hours ago, but had not. "Guilt is eating my insides," she said. "The only thing that will make it stop is to find her."

"It's not your fault she's missing," Bear said.

"It doesn't matter. I should have told them I felt Bernie's life."

"What if they didn't believe you?"

"I thought of that," she said. "It's impossible to explain. But their faces...were like dead people's faces."

Bear seemed to think about it for a minute. "Well, look where you are now. On the rescue."

"Bear, we have to find her." Lulu checked over her shoulder. They were reaching the southern shoals. "Or I'm going to Hell."

"Don't be so dramatic." Bear jumped out of the boat into waist-high water. He never let her wade into those soupy emotions anymore. "You're not going to Hell."

"I lied, Bear. To suffering people." Lulu let her conspirator guide the boat closer. Still, the undertow pulled the stern toward the cities down river. "It feels like the worst kind of sin. I could have eased their pain."

"You were protecting them, Lulu."

She splashed into the water, the makeshift dress ballooning around her middle. The spongy clay bottom filled the spaces between her naked toes.

"What if you were wrong, huh? What if the coppers find her today in the search, dead somewhere?" Bear continued. "They would blame you for giving them hope, I think."

"She's not dead. She's here." Lulu was even more sure of it now, heaving the rowboat up onto the bushy bank.

The unfinished and abandoned pavilion was hardly visible from their beach landing. Lulu knew the building was there, but the nature had created a fantastical illusion. Though its decaying brick walls reached all the way to the rusty break wall at the shore, the pavilion was so overgrown with lush ivy and white flowering vines that it blended into the natural flora.

Coming upon the ruins, with the shifting perspective, Lulu could make out the shape of a topiary mansion. "See that?" Lulu asked, keeping her voice low for no reason she could think of.

"Yeah," Bear said. Woodland birdsong twittered in the trees. There was true quiet here too. The island smelled of soft fruit and sweet peas. Alone in the Stateside channel beyond, the towering white Peach Island lighthouse came into view absorbing the sun.

"You think she's inside there?" Bear asked, pointing to a mossy doorway.

"On my honour," Lulu replied, feeling Spotted Rabbit return. Rabbit had an instinct to stalk, crouch low, and approach in careful steps, but Lulu quickly realized the opposite was required. She stood tall.

"Bernadette!" Rabbit cupped her mouth and cried. "Hello!? Bernadette!" She was sure they were seconds from finding Bernie, trapped in a corner, bruised and broken, unable to make her way home on her own. Rabbit felt her close.

Bear took up the cry as well. They were coyotes howling to a lost cub in the woods.

"Bernadette! Bernadette!"

Entering the pavilion, they found a dank interior. Sunlight filtered at the corners and creases here and there. The building had been deserted only five years, but it could have been decades for what was left—no window panes, the roof had mostly caved, crumbled interior walls. Still there was some solid shelter despite the elements and overrunning of foliage. This had to be the place.

"Bernadette!" Bear called, and the sound was consumed by the leafy insulation.

"Shhh," Lulu hushed. "Don't move." She froze, held her breath. She wanted to hear the space. In her vision, what had she understood? The trickle of water. The movement of air. The scent of metal.

"What?" Bear asked after a spell.

"Shhh," she hushed him again. "Wait." She closed her eyes, wanting that inner vision to lead the way. Sound here was faint. Delicate tones of waves lapping against the break wall. Loud breath. Stagnant. The air did not move across her skin in this manufactured tree house. The heat, heavy and humid. The smell? Fresh. Inside, the idle pavilion released a musky scent from its decaying forest floor. A mosquito bit into her neck, and she smacked it. It was not the place. Lulu was crestfallen. Several rooms still needed to be searched, but Bernadette would have called out to them by now, wouldn't she?

"Bernadette!" Lulu hollered, opening her eyes.

"Bernadette!" Bear joined in again.

They stood in the centre of the largest room, the canopy of brick and boards and vines capturing their voices.

"We need to search the whole place. Twice. Make sure we don't miss a spot." Lulu pointed to a hallway, and then she crawled over a heap of bricks where the wall beneath a window had collapsed. Wandering the maze of empty, unfinished spaces, Lulu called out to Bernie, and could hear Bear do the same. His voice was deep and obscured, but she could hear him without a doubt. If Bernadette was in the pavilion somewhere, they might find her dead. A dreadful sensation rippled up from her toes, climbing her back. Was something more evil at play? Though the fabulous garden building spread the space of a large house, its grounds were not so big that Lulu and Bear couldn't loop around more than a few times each, reaching every hidden nook.

"She's not here," Bear finally said, stopping Lulu in the arched entranceway behind the green framework. Tall grasses stretched into the island where a lazy canal grew water lilies.

"I know," Lulu said. "It seemed so real in my dreams." She couldn't hide her disappointment and despair, which felt separate from her like bullies she wanted to punch in the face. She wanted to blame something or someone else for her mistake. And worse, Bernie was still missing.

"We'll tell the police what you saw," Bear said. He gripped her shoulder. "We can go with them and look for places like this one." The birds whistled all around, clear, pretty bells.

"But..." Lulu said, shrugging away. She was going to admit she was wrong, though it was hard to say. Perhaps she couldn't 'see things' after all. A great grey heron dipped into the sunshine of the canal, and lighted on the bank there. "Now we're going to get in trouble for everything."

Lulu felt she might cry tears of anger, feeling foolish to believe in something so ethereal. She wanted to be alone, or at least away from Bear's pity. Lulu wandered into Peach's secret meadow. Poor Bernie. The heron lifted its stick leg and angled its head this way and that, eyeballing near-swimming fish. She looked up, searching the tree branches, as if there would be some answer there. The island remained tranquil, as if it did not know she had failed, did not know a girl had been missing for three days.

"Maybe she's still here somewhere on the island?" Bear said.

"I don't think she is," Lulu said without turning back. "But what do I know?"

"Come on." Bear bounded over the scraggly lawn to her. "We're here now. Let's search the whole island."

"I think it's pointless." Lulu still could feel that place in her dream where she saw through Bernie's eyes, smelled with her nose, and felt with her skin. But now doubt entered where there had been none before.

"Rabbit." Bear thought he knew how to shift her emotions. "Before you had the vision, we were going to join the search party anyway. We're here now. Let's search."

Lulu shrugged. Bernie still needed to be found, and she wouldn't be without any scouting. "D'accord," she said, thinking he ought not to call her Rabbit any longer. At that moment, it felt particularly childish and stupid. A girl was likely dying somewhere not far off. "I'll go this way."

"I'll head that way." Bear pointed to a stone bridge they had once fished from springs ago. "We'll meet at the west tip."

Lulu nodded and ducked into a curtain of willow branches, heading north.

"Bernadette!" she called inside the willow tree canopy. There, it was extra quiet. The understory was cool and mossy on the pads of her feet. Lilies of the valley thrived in the dappled shade here, and perfumed the enclosed air.

"Bernie!" she heard Bear call.

Bernadette was not on Peach Island. Lulu accepted it now. But how could she be sure after believing so strongly that Bernadette was there? Passing through the draping leaves on the other side, Lulu found a small stand of wide trees. Sunny light seemed to move there, drifting in swirls of pollen fragments and earthy dust. Crows cawed somewhere. Nothing was sure, she concluded. The thought was unsettling. Surely, *something* must be certain. It seemed a question that could take a lifetime of exploration.

"Bernadette!" she hollered. "Bernie!" She searched, to and fro. The orange flutter of oriole wings flashed by. Faintly, she could still hear Bear calling into the half-wild island. She could trust Bear. Of that she was sure. Leaving the umbrella of branches, Lulu found the grasses dry and prickly. She was at the edge of the hobby orchard of peach trees, five rows, ripe with

hanging fruit, and filled with dozens of chatty, pecking crows. Instead of choosing a row, Lulu skirted the busy black birds along the shore side.

"Bernadette!" she called into the columns, and to the shoreline trees, but the beasts competed with her voice, crowing louder. She listened, for an answer, for Bear, but could only hear crows. Lulu kept calling as she realized she had not heard Bear call for a while. He must be reaching the point. She dashed off that way, keeping her senses alert. "Bernadette!" she called. Up ahead, she could see water through the brush again, the canals snaking back and forth through the island's center where the tallest trees grew. And then, the peak of a canvas tent appeared in view.

"Bernadette!" Lulu cried. "Bernadette!" Her heartbeat thumped in her ribcage, her throat burned, nearing what she thought could be the girl's runaway campsite. Lulu pushed past woody, thorny bushes, ignoring the scratches on her arms and legs. The head of a person emerged from the tent at the exact moment Lulu bounded into the clearing, her feet landing straight into a smoldering fire pit. Too shocked at first to cry out, she fell forward onto her knees, gulping breath in. The large bare feet of a man stepped beside her. She shrieked, afraid to look up.

"Calm, calm," the man said from above.

Lulu dared to look. The Sheeny Man loomed above her. His dirty hand reached for her shoulder. She scampered away, a frightened, hunted rabbit. The bottoms of her feet burned.

"Get away!"

The Sheeny Man backed up slow. His eyes drooped in a sad manner she had never noticed before.

"Bernadette?" Lulu called out. Despite the pain and the fright, her mission was forefront in her mind. Was she just there? In the tent? Had the Sheeny Man taken her? "Bernie?"

The Sheeny Man waved his hand awkwardly at Lulu. "Hold, hold," he said, and crouched back into the shabby tent. From her vantage point on the ground, Lulu could see directly inside. She crawled to double check. The tent was a hodgepodge, piles of jumbled junk, no room even for a man to lie down. No Bernadette. Assured of this now, Lulu crawled away faster, clawing at the ground, heading toward the west tip.

"Hold." The Sheeny Man was there, following with a cup and a soiled cloth. "Come."

"Go away!" she yelled. "Leave me be!" She was too stunned to consider his help, but he kept following. "Bear!"

Ahead, the canal approached. She lifted onto her raw toes to close the gap. Gracelessly, she tumbled down the reedy bank and plunged in. She swam below the surface, opening her eyes once to the cloudy green, until she needed air. The pads of her feet throbbed, but the hellish sting subsided. Treading water with just her hands and arms, Lulu glanced over her shoulder. The Sheeny Man had stopped in the marshy weeds as if he simply could not get wet. His sad eyes watched her leave.

Lulu swam the breaststroke in the center of the canal away from the campsite. There was no flow, which made the swim easy. She trailed her legs limp behind, only kicking away tall growing seaweed. Now, her calls were for Bear. She screamed as loud as her lungs would allow, but she couldn't see much from the cove. Following the curves of the waterway, Lulu guessed she was heading in the direction of the rowboat. She hoped Bear would turn back soon, give up searching for Bernie, and begin searching for her.



## TWENTY

Monday, August 6, 1928

Yesterday's epic storm had not reached the mainland. The earth was crusty and arid, and the morning was already sweltering, which made for an unpleasant ride sitting high in the buggy. Yves' skin was sunburned tight from his row to Pelee. Now the dry air whipped across his body, pinging dusty crumbs at his face and chest and arms, and choking his parched throat into coughing fits. The sun did further harm, baking his back. He would arrive home in sorry shape, but not worse than Bernadette.

With his reckoning closer at hand, Yves became penitent and humble. The sky was suddenly divine. He had been godless for ten years, and now feeling like evil incarnate, Yves needed to believe in some kind of almighty good. If a heavenly being could spare Bernadette's life, and Luc's life, lives he personally put in jeopardy, then he had to bow to it. Put faith in it.

Why do people replay the horrible scenes from their life instead of the happy ones? He tried to shake his mistakes out of mind. Bernadette was there, at the threshold of his room. Bare shoulders. Loose dress. Honey gold waves of hair. He searched his memory for the detail, as she crossed to him on the bed, as his fingers found her skinny, long thighs and traveled up to her stomach, lifting the chemise over her head.

"Do you ever want to marry?" she asked him afterward.

He sighed, and rolled away.

"Why would you ask such a thing? Right now?" All he wanted then was to enjoy that sweet fatigue.

Bernadette paused so long that Yves thought perhaps she'd fallen asleep.

"It's an important thing to learn about a person." She turned to face him, still naked. Lying on her side, her small breasts pressed together almost creating cleavage. He leaned down to kiss her there, before she might change position. She breathed in deep, perhaps smelling his dirty hair. He licked one nipple, then the other.

"Encore?" Bernadette said. There was a tenor about her voice that suggested otherwise.

"Non," Yves said, his lips and nose still pushed against her chest. "Je suis très, très fatigué."

She caressed his hair a while, lying together close. The ceiling fan blew warm air over their sticky skin. If only the scene ended there, Yves thought, trailing a dust cloud behind the buggy through Kingsville, a lake town. Not much closer to home.

"We need to discuss something, cher." Bernadette kissed the top of his head.

Exasperated, Yves swung onto his back, exposing his front side to the fan breeze.

"Jesus Christ," Yves swore in English. He wiped a hand over his eyes and waited to hear what she would start into. He was still nauseated from the whiskey, and Bernadette had been itching to define this thing they were doing for weeks, this affair that only happened between the walls of his bungalow. And for weeks, he had been meaning to end it. She was only eighteen, for chrissake. But he relapsed every time she was near. It was the most enchanting sin Yves had ever committed. And time after time, he couldn't conjure the will to let her go.

Instead of continuing with words, Bernadette guided Yves' hand to her hip and then to rest on her belly. She was a clever, intuitive girl, especially for her age. This quality kept him

riveted in her presence, and camouflaged her youth. Even in this most difficult moment, she knew how to handle him.

Women have this power, Yves concluded, racing past a blurred countryside. They're born with it, but not all know how to employ it with skill. He recalled his ex-fiancé, Eleanor. She had it. Eleanor had crushed him with that particular feminine power. Maman possessed the handling of men to such a degree that she raised and ruled seven of them, plus Papa. And Maman still had a grip on all of them. Even Lulu. Only twelve? Thirteen? She already had that Bear Laforêt wrapped around her baby finger.

Let a woman in, Yves thought, even a little, and she'll rule your heart.

Bernadette had bewitched him in the few months he had the utmost pleasure in knowing her. Lying beside her, his rough hand lifted and lowered on her stomach with her steady breath. Yves played with the shocking idea that she could be pregnant before reacting. He pitched from shock to fear to anger to wonder like a ship rocking in rough water. It was dizzying. For Bernadette to be pregnant was not even a scenario he'd considered once, even though he was used to feeling that risk each time he took a woman to bed. His predicament boiled inside. He couldn't deal with it on this night in particular.

"Are you meaning to tell me you're pregnant?" he asked, still lying prone, still staring at the swirling ceiling fan.

"Yes."

"Fuck." Yves let it slip under his breath though he didn't care. He wanted her to know and feel his vexation. Good. Let her fear me a little, he thought. "I don't have time to deal with this right now." He said this more to the ether than to Bernadette. He needed to meet Luc soon at

the boat in Tecumseh. Yves pounded a fist against the mattress. Only last night, he had made the unexpected deal with Elon, and opening the tunnel was on the line.

Yves lifted himself off the mattress and sat on the edge of the bed, head in hands. Fucking pregnant. Fucking eighteen. Fate had once again risen from her festering crypt to bite him in the ass. And just as he believed his luck was dawning.

"Are you sure it's mine?"

"Oh, real sweet, Yves," Bernadette snapped from behind his back. "How can you even ask that? You *know* you're my first." Her voice cracked at those last words, *my first*. "And only," she added.

"A man has to ask."

"That's a horrible thing to say."

"It's the truth."

"I should be the one asking," she said a little too quick, betraying some hidden contempt.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Yves stood, pulling up his pants, zipping. He searched her face.

She was retrieving her dress from the floor, exposing her naked bottom, and making a business of evading the question. Still naked, she stood and lifted the delicate pink chemise over her head. The material slipped over her body in a way that teased him. Her slender arms reached around to clasp the single button at the nape of her neck, the same one he had fumbled with an hour earlier.

"What the fuck are you trying to say, Bernadette?" Yves glared at her, bothered. The bed separated them.

"I know you're not faithful," she said, squaring her shoulders to him.

"Really?"

"Really." She met his eyes, the weaker dog bowing in slight submission.

Yves stretched a cotton undershirt over his head. He sighed. "Tell me," he said, lighting a cigarette from the pack on the nightstand. "When, along the line, did I become beholden to you?" he asked, blowing smoke across the bed linens.

"You're not being fair, Yves." Her pale eyes pleaded with him. "Or truthful."

"Life's not fucking fair, Bernie." He gestured with a flat palm as if announcing her pregnancy to an audience. "Obviously. Learn that now."

"I saw you with that ginger woman." Bernadette let her voice rise. "Last night?"

"What? Where?" For a brief spell, Yves couldn't remember the events of the previous evening. There was too much happening. Then he recalled Carla. "At The Chophouse? You were at The Chop? You fucking followed me?" How could she have followed him and if so, what had she seen? And who had seen her? A certain confusion passed over him. He twitched and leaned over the mattress.

"I didn't follow you," Bernadette said with venom. "But I was there."

"What the Hell were you doing at The Chophouse? Do you know the types that hold up the walls there?" His throat strained, shouting now.

"*You* were there."

"That's right. I was." Yves stood down, sweeping the hair out of his face, combing it in that habitual manner over his missing ear. "Baby doll. You have no clue who I am."

She opened her mouth to say something, but did not make a sound, which made him glad. Her face was so sensual that he wanted to leap across the sheets and throw her down again. His blood was up.

"I know you."

"No," he said. "You don't."

Bernadette looked dejected, her arms slack at her sides, her hair still sex-fussed.

"I'm the guy who doesn't want a baby. *Can't* have a baby. Or a wife." Yves smoked, dramatically. "I'm the man whose going to keep chasing tail all the days of my godforsaken life. Believe me. You do not want me."

"Yes, I do," Bernadette insisted. "You're being hateful. That's not the Yves I know."

"Jesus Christ, Bernadette! I can't do this right now."

"Fine." She crossed her arms over her chest. "When?"

"Not ever. Okay?"

"I'm not leaving until you tell me when we are going to talk about this." She pointed at her stomach as if she might stab it.

"I need to go to work." Yves checked the alarm clock on the bedside table next to her. "I gotta go. Now."

"No." Then, catching Yves completely by surprise, Bernadette climbed onto his bed, one foot at a time. She stood solidly in the centre, daring him with a look that said, hit me or fuck me. "You have to deal with this." The ceiling fan spun inches above her head.

Deciding to ignore her, Yves motioned to skirt the bed and leave the room. She slapped him. He froze and tried to warn her with his stare.

"You can't leave," she said, leaning in, testing him. "I'm having your baby."

Again, he turned to walk away and again, she smacked him, this time also pushing in his nose with force.

"Fuck!" His hands went to his face. "I'm warning you. Stop this now."

"You stop it. Now."

"You're being a child."

"I *am* a child!" Bernadette's voice raised an octave in a scream.

"Keep it down!"

"You need to help me!" She pointed at his face. "I don't know what to do! I am a child and you're the father!" Her eyes were watery pools of light. Her breath came faster. "I'm fifteen."

"Calm down!" Yves grabbed a hold of her elbows. "You're what?" She struggled in his grip. "You're what?" And as she yanked her arms up and away from his grasp, her left arm flung into the fan blades, striking her wrist with frenzy. She screamed out in pain and white panic. Reaching out, Yves' aim was to soothe or console her but she recoiled, ducking low.

"Get away from me!" She jumped from the bed.

"Bernie! Jesus!"

"Don't touch me!" she hollered.

Thank God, I don't have neighbours, Yves thought. "I'm not going to hurt you." He edged closer.

"Ow," she said, stretching her fingers and examining her wrist. "I think it's broken."

"Let me see."

"No!" She retreated toward the door. "I'm fine."

"Let me see." Yves repeated, forcing calm into his voice. A cool fear rose in him. If he didn't grab her now, she'd flee. To where, and what she'd say, knocked terror around his body. She crossed into the hall. "Bernadette."

"I'm going home," she said, still backing away.

"Come here." Yves held out a hand.

Bernadette spun on her heels and darted down the hall. Yves followed close behind. She scurried down the stairs. He took them three at a time, tripping over his long limbs, and landing on his ass half way to the bottom. She whipped around the banister and headed for the kitchen. His lengthy bare-footed strides caught her as she reached the side door.

"No!" she cried out.

What choice do I have? Yves thought hugging her close. She began to sob with abandon, relaxing in his embrace.

"No. No. No. No." Over and over. She pushed away again and he gave her some space. "You're a pig." She spat in his face. His rage returned, letting her spittle slide to his chin. With tight fists, she pummeled his chest.

"Stop it!" He roared as loud as he ever had, and pushed her away. "Stop it now!" She stumbled but managed to hold her ground. Those strong legs.

"You're not going to help me." She sneered at him, all of the loveliness missing from her face. "I'm fifteen. And my Papa's going to kill you. He'll go to the police."

Yves lurched across the kitchen, and the absolute terror in her face branded itself so deep into his brain that the image would wake him in feverish sweats forever.

Atop the open buggy, Yves shook his head of sweat trying to lose that haunting sight. What happened next was a most unlucky accident. Reacting to his menacing lunge, Bernadette twirled off balance and tripped into the basement stairwell. Why he had never got around to mounting the door there, he could not recall. Whatever the reason, there it was, the door agape with Bernadette falling collarbone-first into the doorframe. Her arms and hands akimbo, grasping at the walls, she skidded down the steps on her heels. Yves was at her back, not to help, but to hunt.



"Stop!" she screamed as he found her armpits. Her fingernails found the back of his neck.

"Fuck!" he swore.

She fought in a way he would have never thought her capable. Lifting Bernadette toward the far end of the concrete basement, Yves opened the tunnel door with a struggle. Pushing her into the dark was not easy.

## TWENTY-ONE

Monday, August 6, 1928

It didn't take Lulu very long to make it back to the pavilion meadow where she had first split ways with Bear. Swimming the canal was open and easy, even with scorched feet.

"Bear!" she called, dragging herself from the canal where a few planks had been arranged to form a makeshift fishing platform. "Bear!" She sat upon it keeping her feet submerged in the water. Lifting her knees, one at a time, Lulu tried to assess the wounds on the bottom of her feet. The water was green and murky with duckweed and other muck but she could make out nasty red sores full across her foot. At the big toe pads and mounds, walloping yellow blisters were already growing. Translucent strips of skin floated in the water.

"Bear!" she hollered. How long would she have to wait? That notion of waiting in the dream washed over her. Hurt. Scared. Waiting. She wondered for a second if the premonition had been about herself, and not Bernadette. In such a case, she had woken and embarked on this mission only to fulfill her own wretched dream. How absurd, she thought. What kind of world created such chaos? She wondered if the Sheeny Man would come looking for her. How did he find his way here? Where was his horse and wagon? What would he do with all of the rubbish in his tent? Pretty Peach Island was an ideal summer hideaway to shut out the rest of the world and find some peace. It would make sense, in a way, if Bernadette had made an escape here. But the Sheeny Man was still living in such squalor. You would think he would bathe with so much water around, she thought.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes could have passed, she couldn't tell. Curious minnows darted in and out of her dangling legs. She watched them. Time passing seemed to matter something different for every thing—man, woman, animal. If I could be a fish, Lulu drifted into those submarine thoughts. Not too much time could have passed, though. She was still quite wet when finally Bear came running across the bridge shouting out her name.

"Bear! Over here!" she called, waving. The relief of seeing him again set the tears falling from her eyes. "Over here!"

"What happened?" He knelt beside her. "You fall in?"

"I stepped in a fire pit." She pulled her feet to the surface and the almighty sting was immediate. She yelped and dropped them back. "The Sheeny Man lives here."

"What?"

"I saw a tent in the woods and I went running after it thinking maybe Bernadette was there. You know, like you said. Maybe she really did just run away? But it was the Sheeny Man! He scared the Hell out of me, and I jumped straight into his fire pit. And then I crawled to the canal and he kept chasing, saying, 'Hold. Hold.' It was terrifying, Bear. Honest to goodness, terror." She finally noticed Bear was wet, too. "Why are you wet?"

"He chased you?" The concern spread into his brows, ignoring her question. "Let me see again?" Bear asked, nodding to her sunken feet. "Leave them just in the water." He bent low to survey the damage. "Those burns are good and deep. You need a doctor's look over. Je pense." He stood, turning about.

"Why are you wet?" she asked again.

"There's an island within the island. I had to swim across."

"Really?" But Lulu could see the inner workings of Bear's mind on his face as he

considered his next step. "Can you swim to the bridge?"

Lulu nodded.

"Bien. I'll go get the rowboat and drag it to the other side." He pointed over the bridge.

"Meet me on there, d'accord?"

"Oui."

Wading under the stone bridge, Lulu's breathing bounced off the underside and water's surface. The sound of water trickling from the vision sprang into her mind again. She stared at the lake channel opening from the shade there, trying to zone in on the sensations of that early dream. She wouldn't be able to help today, she realized. They would spend half the day in hospital tending to her careless stupidity. I'm as reckless as Maman says I am, she conceded.

Bear arrived then, towing the rowboat along the shore. He appeared sturdy and older from below.

"Come here," he said, descending knee deep at the water's edge. "Here. Grab my neck." He reached around her ribcage and Lulu clutched the side of the boat with her other hand, lifting herself in with an elbow. She fell onto her shoulder and rolled in, her tailbone painfully smacking the bottom. Out of the soothing water came her feet. They hit the air with that brutal sting.

She howled. Would this day kill her? "Christ-*ophe*! Ah, ah, ah!"

"Keep your feet in the water." Bear watched her readjust while holding the boat from tipping. She knew at this angle how hard it would be to row, how impossible the trip back to the yacht club would be.

"Ow! It hurts, Bear." The tears continued to flow as she whined and whined.

"I know," he said, jumping into the boat. "We're going."

"I can't paddle like this."

"I know. We'll just end up down river a bit, that's all." Bear situated himself on the middle bench with both oars and pushed off toward St. Clair. "I'll run back for the bicycle."

The current would take them fast. They both knew it.

"Take me to Yves'," Lulu said. "Aim for his dock. You know where it is, bien? He'll know what to do."

"What if he's not home?" The boat emerged from the island's cool shade into the blinding sunlight, a million tiny points blinking back at them across St. Clair. Bear aimed for the distant Riverside shore.

"I know how to get in. We can call someone from there, at least." Simply thinking of her eldest brother calmed Lulu. Yves was that solid age, worldly enough to trust him with anything. Yves was skilled and intelligent, and a veteran of war. He was, perhaps, the most handsome man Lulu thought she would ever know, even with his scars. His erect posture, broad shoulders, and lean face with dark, sparkling eyes offset the mystery behind the twisted red skin. With the age gap of seventeen years between them, Yves was more of a father than a brother. If Lulu was a rabbit, then Yves was a mountain.

Early sailors guided their vessels east into St. Clair while the Detroit's emerald current tugged their little rowboat swiftly away.

"The search party's probably out now," Lulu said.

"Uh huh." Bear strained the oars against the water, smooth on the surface but turbulent just below.

She leaned over her knees to watch her toes ripple the beautiful sea-green water, tipping the guideboat to one side.

"Don't do that," Bear said. His elbows poked back at her with every stroke.

She kept quiet to let him concentrate. They were partners again. Eagle and rabbit. She felt her feet bobbing back along the hull. The force of the water was surely ripping the dead skin off the pads of her feet. The blisters would be busted. Still, it was better than exposing the burns to the wind. Poor Bear. As hard as he paddled, the stern kept tracking back into the river's centre. Quicker than Lulu expected, the boat passed the west tip of Peach Island. Seagulls circled low and slipped away, dipping into in their adventure for a snap. Lulu watched the bright green puffs of Belle Isle Park curve into the riverscape.

"Belle Isle ahead," she said, for something to say. She couldn't believe how fast the river was taking them. Yves' bungalow faced Belle Isle at the opposite end, but they were still far from the bank. Bear had to work harder now so they could cross the open and flying middle channel, and land at the dock on the Canadian shore.

"I'm sorry I can't help," Lulu said. Here, she could do nothing but watch Peach Island recede into the horizon and call out useless information.

"You could flip sides and help me navigate," Bear said. He grunted with every pull. His entire upper half leaned way back in the boat with each stroke. Slowly, he made progress. Now they were in the direct centre of Fleming Channel. Riverside barreled by on one side. Belle Isle whipped away on the other. Lulu took to designing her maneuver, grounding her hands on the bench, and lifting her feet up and over in one clumsy swoop to the other side. She cried out the whole time. The pain was ridiculous.

"You okay?" Bear asked.

"Bien." Despite the speed, Lulu was surprised by the still and quiet. Wind fluttered past with the strength of butterfly wings. Water parted at the stern with light laughter.

"We getting there?" Bear asked.

"Oui," Lulu said. "Get over more. It's around the next head land."

"I'm trying," Bear grunted.

"I know. Keep going." Lulu coached. "I can't see it yet, but we're almost there."

Parks and beaches and houses and boats blew by. If she weren't in so much pain, the ride would have been fun. She put the idea like a pin in a hat for something to try again at a later date. Straight ahead, the American bridge tower appeared, just a faint stick at the end of the city. In the foreground, the grey jigsaw puzzle of Detroit's buildings and high rises climbed into a bleached sky.

"There!" Lulu pointed. Yves' dock jutted into view with the tiny red, white, and blue flag lifting in the draft. "We're not going to make it! Come on, Bear!" The roof peak of Yves' house and the top window materialized in the treetops. "Come on! You can do it! Get us there!" Lulu cheered for her best friend as the river bank rushed by. Bear grunted, and pressed on, his arms pumping the rhythm of a steam locomotive. They were still too far, and the dock swept by with at least a twenty-foot stretch left to go. Still, Lulu encouraged him.

"Go. Go. Come on. Almost there!" Lulu pulled her feet into the boat just before it bounced and ground against a steel break wall. She held her breath the entire time. The rowboat sailed straight ahead from there, crashing into the first rock jetty. Bear jumped up to grab at whatever he could hold, losing the oars in the process, but securing them to land.

The tears came. Lulu bit back what she could, but a guttural cry released anyway. She sat paralyzed and dumbfounded, holding her knees balancing in place.

"Crawl," Bear said. "I can't do everything." He planted one foot on the jetty and kept one in the boat, steadying so Lulu could climb out.

Scraping her hands and knees with every move, Lulu ranged the rock wall, finally

arriving on shore. Bear was hauling the boat up onto the jetty and following her, but she could only concentrate on the tortuous task in front of her. More than once she cracked her knee against a sharp stone edge, drawing blood. These slips made her instinctively press into her toes to advance, mistakes that intensified her cries. Her eyes blurred complete with tears.

Bear stepped over her head then, and grabbed at her arms to pull her up.

"Wait." She resisted, unsure of how not to hurt herself further.

"What's the best way to do this?" Bear thought aloud.

Lulu sucked in her breath again, biting out the pain. She felt like a baby.

Bear turned and crouched low. "Get on my back." He sounded cross, but once she managed to climb up, resting her thighs above his hips, the way was easier.

"Jésu. Your feet are a sight."

"Back that way." Now it was she who sounded cross. Lulu raised a finger over his shoulder, pointing him back up shore. "Hurry." She needed to get her feet back into water before they burned right off. Bear jogged on in silence, carrying Lulu easily. She cried with little noise jostling against his body, her face so close to his. They had not touched like this in years. What seemed like perfect child's play at ten felt so charged at thirteen. Each snuffle was intimate. Every squeeze of her hand, or elbow, every adjustment, was shared. Had he ever seen her in such a state, she wondered. What must he be thinking of me? She became acutely aware of her chest flattened against his shoulder blades, and her pelvis bumping at the sway in his low back. These thoughts and the pain absorbed Lulu's focus as Bear crossed the riverfront properties to Yves' house.

"Here right?" Bear asked, out of breath.

"Oui."



Bear did not slow reaching Yves' lawn. The familiar contours of her brother's bungalow bobbed before her with Bear's footfalls. She focused on the yellow diamonds of stained glass that ran along the front window. Yves' old convertible was in the drive. Lulu's heartbeat slowed. Half of the remedy was just reaching this point.

Bear climbed the front steps and onto the screened porch. The solid oak front door was closed, but Lulu peered up into the window as Bear tried the knob.

"Locked," he said. His hands and arms were still slick from the sweaty work of rowing, and she was slipping in his grasp. He struggled with her body.

"Means he's not home." Lulu couldn't hide the disappointment in her voice, and the mere fact that Yves was not at home unsettled her again. Her pain hit a new height.

"How do we get in?" Bear twisted his neck at an angle, trying to meet her eyes. The skin on his face was flush from sun, so pale compared to her forearm clutching his chest.

"Side porch. There's a key under that plant over there." She pointed to one of the large ferns set on either side of the front stoop. Bear bent low, placed Lulu with care on a wicker settee, and left the porch. She watched him find the key and disappear around the side yard.

Her feet were seeping blood. The arches had been spared but every single toe pad had formed hideous orange blisters, a few had already popped. Would she be able to walk on these feet ever again? The notion brought forth a scary, gasping sob. Lulu looked about the empty porch dramatically, imagining herself wheeling about in a pathetic chair like *Pépé*. My life is over, she thought. I'm going to be an invalid.

The front door opened in and Bear was at her side again, this time lifting her cradled like a baby. She threw her arms around his neck and craned her face away so he would not see her features contorted in beastly cries.

"Shhh," Bear was saying. "You're going to be all right." At last, he set Lulu on the kitchen counter and ran cold water into the basin. On her own, she swiveled her feet into the soothing stream. The sedating relief was immediate. Her sobbing receded but the tears continued.

"Call Luc's house. The telephone is in the hall."

Alone in the kitchen, Lulu called out the numbers to Bear as he rang the operator. The sleek mantel clock in the front living room ticked in the silence as they both waited for an answer. There was none.

"I don't want to call Maman," Lulu said.

"Lauwy?" Bear's voice came from the hall.

"He'll tell Maman."

"René? Michel?"

"Bien. Try them." Again, she called out the numbers, and again, they were not answered.

"Merde!" Lulu swore. Bear appeared in the doorway, all dark and dirty and wet. Bear was a feral animal in her brother's fine home. She knew she looked the same, crazy and wild.

"What now?" Bear asked. "Call the club?" Lulu had calmed. She gazed down through the crystal clear water at the raw bottoms. In the quiet came a hollow, woody bang from the basement. A ladder falling against the concrete floor?

A distinctly female voice said, "No." It was a meek sound, but a firm command.

Lulu and Bear stared at each other, communicating at once the question, "Did you hear that?" and the answer, "Yes." All of the fine hair on Lulu's body tingled. She regarded her arms. Goosebumps. She felt them too, down the back of her neck. Below, muffled tones of discussion followed.

"Someone's here," Lulu whispered.

"Yves?" Bear asked. Lulu shrugged. "You want me to get him?"

"You heard the girl, right?"

"Yeah."

They waited, straining to listen. Lulu's stomach growled.

"What if it's not him?" Lulu whispered.

"Why wouldn't it be?" Bear mirrored her hissing whisper. "Should we wait?"

As Lulu decided what next to do, staring at her ghastly feet, Yves' wavering voice climbed the basement stairs and rose through the kitchen floorboards.

"Bernadette, please," he said.

Lulu's eyes widened twice their size. She snapped her head back to Bear, whose expression matched hers. His jaw dropped open to say something but no sound came out. Lulu waved her hand, beckoning him back to the sink.

"Lift me out. Lift me out."

"What?" Bear asked.

Lulu forgot the pain. Her sixth, seventh, and eighth senses were screaming at her. Get downstairs.

"Holy Jesus," Lulu said. Bear crossed the kitchen in a beat. Lulu mounted his back again. "Go. Go," she commanded.

Bear paused in the doorway. They listened. Nothing. And then barreling footsteps. Yves appeared, shirtless, hatless, and manic, taking two and three stairs at time. His head turned up only at the last few steps and froze, his face stricken with panic at the scene before him.

"Lulu?" Yves questioned, like he couldn't believe his own eyes.

"Qu'est-ce qu'as-tu fais?" Lulu asked. What have you done?

"Don't... Louise..." Yves said as Bear took the first step down.

"Yves?" The female voice from below was fragile, but clear. Yves clutched Bear's arm, a weak effort to conceal the inevitable at this point. Lulu slid down from Bear, teetering on the outside edges of her swollen feet. She held herself against the wall.

"Bernadette?" Lulu called. It was the first time she expected an answer.

A girl showed herself in the rectangular shape at the base of the stairs. Largely featureless, she appeared, frail and beaten. Instead of responding, her entire body jerked in a soundless cry. With each stair, Lulu's body sunk deeper and deeper with dread. The girl's soiled and ripped dress still sparkled at the scooped neckline. Little by little, the girl became Bernadette Durocher. Her blonde haircut, her crying eyes, her lips, shoulders, everything, came more into focus with every step. It was her. Lulu didn't know what to say and so she stopped, and rested a hand on Bernadette's arm.

"You're alive." Lulu had not meant to upset Bernie further, but this simple statement released the missing girl into spontaneous sobs. Bernie nearly collapsed, holding the shaky banister and gripping Lulu's forearm. "It's all right," Lulu said, sinking against Bernie's weight. Both girls lowered themselves to the last stair. "We found you."

Bernie's skin was sallow. Her under-eyes looked bruised. One hand and forearm was dark purple. She leaned back against the staircase, staring blankly at Lulu, then up the steep flight, and back again at Lulu. "We found you," Lulu repeated.

And her mind churned. All of the obvious questions cascaded forth, but they could wait. Bernadette sighed, and her entire body shivered.

"Are you cold?" Lulu asked. It was stifling, but damp in that staircase.

Bernadette nodded. She seemed to not have the ability to speak.

"Bear! Get her a blanket." Lulu peered up the narrow space. Both Bear and Yves disappeared in separate directions. What the hell had happened here? And why? Lulu held Bernadette's hand.

"We looked for you."

Bernadette met Lulu's eyes.

"Are you okay?" Lulu asked.

Bernadette shook her head. No. It seemed to drain her of energy. Just this morsel of movement. Yves appeared with a glass of water. Bear came straight behind with a quilt. The strange quartet huddled together, tucked away in a wicked secret. Yves caressed Bernadette's head with his manly hand. She made no move, except to drink in gulps.

"Easy," Yves said with a catch in his throat. "Breathe. Slow."

Lulu tried to will Yves to look at her, but his focus was all on Bernadette. Sweat beaded and dripped down his face. Or was he crying too?

"Mon Dieu," he said under his breath. Spittle formed between his lips. He pulled Bernadette into him, and she winced.

"Mon Dieu," Bear said in a disbelieving tone. His hand found and squeezed Lulu's shoulder, angling her to view something in the basement. At the other end of the unfinished space, underneath the formal living room, where the brass clock ticked on the fireplace mantel, was a dark, medieval portal into an unknown place below. A bulky wooden door was left wide open. Lulu winced and struggled with standing upright again, but she needed to take those last steps onward.

"Non." Yves tried to grab back some control of the situation, but he was beyond reckoning. "Lulu stop." Bear was at her side, slipping an arm around her waist, propping her up,

and leading them to the threshold. She ignored the knives digging into the soles of her feet, and shuffled forward with Bear's support.

Below, the tunnel fell away. Its eerie glow birthed a shadow within each of them that would return again and again over a lifetime. The metallic, filtered air Lulu had experienced in her vision escaped from the cool passageway. Bernadette was here.

"She was here."

Behind Lulu and Bear, Yves murmured to Bernadette. She said nothing. She had seen this place. The terrible dream was real. The world folded up into a note small enough to fit in a pocket.

## TWENTY-TWO

Monday, August 6, 1928

Across the street, a dog barked incessantly. Yves couldn't focus on anything but Bernadette now. When he changed out Ray Brueckner's pants, he brought Bernadette with him to his bedroom, leading her by the hand. He held her, kept her within his touch, watched her throughout a confusing and painful knot of conversation in his kitchen. Yves needed to make sure if Bernadette made some sign of pardon or promise, that he would see it first. After talking around things for a while, with Lulu sitting on the counter with her feet in the sink, it was Bear Laforêt who made the decisions. Without matters fully decided regarding Bernie, he put forward that unfortunately the Durocher's would have to be without their daughter another few hours. Lulu's feet needed medical attention before they took to infection. Yves would have to drive her downtown. He didn't like it but he would comply.

Before leaving, Yves carried Bernadette to the living room sofa and tucked her tight into the quilt. Her skin was regaining colour after some tea and crackers. He knelt in front of her, waiting for Bernie to lift her lashes. She'd been staring down, into her hands, avoiding direct eye contact with all of them. He needed to see those copper pennies. But when she wouldn't look at him, he kissed her face all over with the most tenderness.

"I'll be right back," he said. "I swear. Darling," he added, though he wasn't sure what his word was worth to her. She was a doll, lying there, wrapped up in his house. She looked all of fifteen for once. He rubbed the stubble along his jaw, watching her from the hall. A fifteen-year

old world was dancing, and new shoes, and tulips. Bernadette would keep him young, fill his life with rhythm, if she would let him back in.

On his way out the side door with Lulu in his arms, Yves stopped to address Bear.

“Don’t let her leave. For anything, hear?” he said. “It’s very important.” He waited for Bear to respond positively. “I’ll be right back.” In light of all that had happened, the likelihood that he would actually return felt doubtful.

In the drive, into the unrelenting sun of that summer, Yves carried his little sister to his black convertible Dodge. The soaking tea towels Bear had wrapped around her feet dripped onto the aluminum floor. The barking dog, continuing on his neighbour’s porch, let loose a howling trill. It pierced the good ear. Unlike Bernadette, Lulu stared at him hard as if he weren’t real, as if she were examining a person for the first time. Here, he was the one who couldn’t look at her. Sitting next to him on the bench, Lulu watched and waited. But he didn’t know what he could say to her.

“Are you wearing Maman’s shirt?” was all he could think to ask, and he knew how absurd it sounded.

It was Lulu’s turn not to answer him. There was no use in having any conversation at this minute. The events and consequences were still stirred up sediment. Yves reached for the key in the ignition, when a vehicle pulled in and parked behind him. Both he and Lulu turned in their seats. Elon, Joe, and another Brueckner man stepped out of that same maroon sedan from Friday night, and slammed their doors shut with dramatics. The dog responded.

“Frenchie!” Elon yelled.

“Stay in the car,” Yves said to Lulu, and then stepped into the drive.

“Where you been?” Elon asked. Yves was looking at a young, relaxed Elon Brueckner, whose expression wore a shade of happiness that was unexpected. He was hatless and wore short



sleeves and suspenders like he was going on a picnic. “I’ve been looking all over for you.” He noticed Lulu. “Hey, kid.”

“Jacques Lapin?” Yves asked, trying to hold back his rage.

“Didn’t work out?” Elon asked back. “I thought you could pull it off.” He lit a cigarette, and while he took his time blowing it out, he considered Yves’ house. “Oh, well. You know, you win some, you lose some. And that one wasn’t even mine to lose, so...”

“You set us up to fail.” Yves clenched his molars.

“Did I?” Elon considered this. “What happened?”

“They shot my brother.”

Lulu gasped in the car, but thankfully held her tongue.

“Shit. I thought it would work, you know?” Elon said. “I’m sorry.” Whether it was fatigue or plain disorientation, Yves was having a tough time reading Elon again. He was born a mobster. “Is that what took you so long?” Elon gave Lulu another glance. “Aw, it’s okay, honey. He’s alright, right? Your brother?”

Yves shot Lulu apologetic eyes. “Yeah, I think he’s going to be fine.”

“Good.” Elon sauntered past Yves scrutinizing the house, the yard, and craned his neck toward the dock, where the little Canadian flag hung limp. He turned back to the group. All eyes were on his performance. “Is the tunnel here?” He pointed to the dry grass. Something shifted in him, and it felt as though Elon would dart inside at any moment.

Yves inched closer, but failed to say anything.

“Looks like it might be,” Elon continued. He gazed back at the river. “If it is, you know, I’d really like to see it.” For a moment, Elon appeared as if he were about to open a long awaited gift, his eyebrows raised in exaggerated arches. Then he dropped the expression. “No? Mind if I

look around?”

Yves lunged toward him when Elon made the move to head inside, and he yanked his arm back. “Did you hear what I said?” Yves hollered. “They shot my brother! There’s no deal.”

Elon elbowed away from Yves’ grip. “Settle down, Frenchie. This kind of shit happens all the time. Grow a backbone.”

Yves sent Elon a right hook to the face. The fist met Elon’s cheekbone in a satisfying smack. As Elon stumbled away, Yves heard the familiar draw and cock of a handgun behind him. He ached to keep beating Elon’s sick face, but Yves froze for his sister’s sake.

“Hey, Yves,” Joe said. “Get a hold of yourself.”

A second later, as Yves turned to check Joe behind him, there came a click-clack of a shotgun pump. Bear Laforêt aimed Yves’ own Browning through a gap in the side door at Joe.

“Jesus Christ.” Yves held his arms out trying to corral the escalating violence.

“You threw the first punch.” Elon tossed his head back, and flicked his smoke into the weeds. “She got a gun, too?”

Yves realized then he had a posse of teenagers. It was lunacy but it was all he had to work with it. “There’s one under your seat, Lulu.”

Elon clapped his hands together once and laughed hard. Yves balled his hands into fists and seethed. He’d die to wail on the fucker, but he backed toward the Dodge door. Yves could hear Lulu stir behind him, readying his other rifle. Elon pointed a finger at Lulu and grinned at her through the windshield.

“You’re adorable, honey,” Elon said. “You know she’s got some true aim, that one.”

“Like her brothers,” Yves said.

Elon crossed the drive again, and Yves saw a thickening vein bulge onto his neck, which

moved under the skin like a nest of insects.

“Fucking kids,” Elon mumbled, reaching the sedan.

“We’ll do this again, soon,” Yves called and waved. “We’re not done.”

“Don’t I know it,” Elon called, returning the wave. “I’ll give you a call. You work for me now, jagoff.” He crossed to the passenger side and stepped into the sedan muttering to Joe, “Let’s get out of this shit hole country.”

The dog would not shut up. It kept on as Joe started the car, backed out of the drive into the street, and squealed away.

Yves shared a look with Lulu.

“Holy shit,” she said. Yves had to laugh. She was kneeling on the bench seat now, still gripping the gun in her kid hands.

Yves turned to the house. Bear was still there, too. He’d lowered his gun and stepped into the yard.

“Thanks, kid,” Yves said.

Bear nodded. “What now?” he asked.

The pebbles in the drive crunched under Yves’ shoes as he shifted there, thinking. The screen door creaked then. Bernadette was at the stair, emerging from the house.

“Don’t leave me here.” Finally, her glance found Yves’ face, though her sad, glossy focus did not meet his eyes. Of course, it was a mistake. He could not leave her here, where he’d locked her away. Bernadette moved to the Dodge, passing Yves within an inch of grazing his arm, and climbed into the back bench. A pair of cicadas struck up communication overhead in his old, twisty elms. He studied her movements, wondering if there was any hint yet at her pregnancy.

A river breeze drifted through the yard, and the dog still barked. Yves motioned to Bear to join them in the car.

He shut his door, gentle and quiet, for no reason at all. “We’ll have to make some decisions on the way,” Yves said. He turned to look at Bernadette, Bear, and Lulu. Only Bernadette did not meet his eyes, or respond.

Yves finally started the ignition, and the Dodge hummed to life. After the long trip that morning in the buggy, Yves appreciated the smooth, familiar hum of its engine and the comfort of the springy bench. At least this one detail felt normal. Backing off his property and into the road felt like admitting something. He was exposed and Bernadette was exposed. Sailing along the riverside road, Yves glanced back at her. She was squinting away into the harsh sun and the wind, which tousled her hair across her somber face.

## TWENTY-THREE

Friday, December 21, 1928

The train station echoed unlike anything Lulu had ever heard. Every clicking heel and spoken word, and every single sound bounced from the vaulted dome ceilings to the marble walls and floors. The vibration seemed like it would go on forever. Lulu wore her best Christmas suit for the day trip to Detroit, a smart velvety black smock dress. She had anticipated the stylish travelers jaunting to and fro, coming from somewhere exotic or beginning an epic transatlantic journey, and she wanted to blend in with that crowd. She even applied Flo's red lip stain in Luc's new car on the ferry ride over. But the biting December cold gusting through the royal doors of the station's main hall kept Lulu tucked into her very plain winter coat. At least my shoes are shiny, she thought.

She watched her strappy heels jut out and stride across the intricate tiles, making their own rich sound. Only recently, she had begun to walk in a way that didn't betray her sorry, disabled feet. But the shoes were new, and perhaps she'd laced them too tight, so her sad feet ached. A Christmas tree, like the crown jewel of the North Pole, pierced the blank space in the centre of the massive room. Lulu zoned in on it, willing the strong, green scent and shimmering gold decorations to saturate her with warm holiday feelings. For the past few years, Christmas had been shrinking. Yes, there was the caroling and lighting of the advent candles, and the sweets and gifts, but the magnitude of it seemed to be receding into childhood like objects in a side view mirror. This year especially would be a strange holiday.

Luc stopped before her, and not noticing, Lulu bumped into her brother. He grabbed her arm from behind and pulled her beside him. Together, they took in the tree.

"Nervous?" he asked. Lulu shrugged and gave him a squishy face.

Yves and Bernadette were coming home. Four plus months in Cuba had hidden them from sight, but never out of mind. Not for Lulu, at least. She couldn't deny the nerves fizzing inside her like sparklers. She had not seen her eldest brother since that dream-like weekend in August, except in the photographs Bernadette mailed to Shawnee Road.

Those photographs were passed around the Sunday table only once and then placed in the sideboard drawer under candles and napkins. Maman wasn't interested in corresponding with her eldest son and his child bride. Sometimes, Lulu would sneak the photographs away to her room, or into the woods, to study them closely. She sensed this habit frankly added to the anxiousness that built up around those events, but she couldn't help herself. No one except Bear seemed to feel its domination, how it changed everything. Looking at them, Yves and Bernadette in the photographs, bewildered Lulu. Yves' likeness captured by the camera gave away zero emotion. He was there, stooping over an impressively stacked pile of tropical fruits in the sun-whitened cobblestone street, but his face said nothing. In another photo, he stared blankly into the lens while sitting before a coffee cup at a busy plaza cafe. What could he be thinking, Lulu always wondered, after all of that?

Bernadette's photographs were even curiouser. Her sister-in-law's face grew fuller and fuller in each returning envelope. She waved from beneath a palm tree wearing a black bathing suit in an early photo. Her hair was wet, evidence of the swim she had just taken in the grey ocean waves behind her. Bernie squinted into the sun and smiled as if to show off all of her teeth. In another, she posed next to a little Cuban boy on a donkey. With hand on her hip but leaning

away, she was looking at the animal instead of into the lens. Almost in profile, her belly declared signs of pregnancy under a long tunic. In the last photograph that came late November, Bernie was definitely round, the details of her large figure disguised in a draping white, nautical-inspired dress. Her sun-lightened hair was long now and covered in a floppy hat, which blocked her eyes out in shadow. She stood on a bleached-out staircase, one arm waving, her teeth glaring, and the mountains like green giants sleeping beyond.

The letters and photographs stuck with Lulu for days. She always showed them to Bear, later, after some time allowed for her thoughts to absorb. Bear offered a fresh perspective while Lulu had already decided how to feel. She was learning that this was a comfortable way to handle anything.

In the station, Luc found them a spot to wait on an oak bench waxed to a high gloss. They were early. The overnight train from New Orleans was due to arrive at 10:41am. The stately brass clock set in ornate mosaic read just after ten.

"You want a hot chocolate?" Luc asked. He hopped up stuffing his hands into his pockets. Perhaps he was nervous too, she thought.

"Oui," Lulu said, and he left. Since the incident that no one ever mentioned, not even the sisters-in-law, Luc had been doting on Lulu. He had always spoiled her but now she could do or say no wrong. Bear too, received Luc's special attention because he also shared August's vehement secrets. In these last months, Lulu sensed Luc acting as Yves' shifty accomplice, keeping her and Bear in good graces. But she also felt Luc's heart in his actions. Sibling intimacy meant he could understand her experience in the particular way she needed and know the sacrifice and guilt she carried because she could confess these trespasses to no one.

Dieu Merci for Bear. She leaned her full weight on him often, especially when nights

were just too immense. In those sleepless hours, Lulu whisked through the back yards of Shawnee Road to lift a flashlight over her head and shine into Bear's bedroom window. While the summer lingered into September, they slept side by side under the maples. And when autumn brought frost and wind, they would smoke and talk in Monsieur Laforêt's car shed. The spunk of Spotted Rabbit had not bubbled into her personality since the morning on Peach Island. The warrior girl had lifted and curled away in the same black smoke of the Sheeny Man's fire pit.

Luc appeared in the crowd holding two paper cups with wispy, white steam rising from them. He handed one to her, but remained standing. He sipped, and looked about.

"I think I'm nervous," he said. "Don't tell anybody." He winked at Lulu. He was always winking these days.

"I won't."

"She's going to be real big, eh?"

Lulu only blew on her drink. It was an obvious remark. Of course. Bernadette was nearly seven months pregnant.

"You think they're going to stay in Riverside?" Luc asked.

She shrugged. Lulu hadn't thought that far. Bernie, only a year older, would be her sister-in-law. With all of the time gone, and the girl having existed primarily as an abstract person inside Lulu's head, the notion they were now family was absolutely surreal. Bernadette was sometimes still that girl pulled onto the brewery drainage pipe in her white swim cap. Often, she was the gaunt apparition at the base of the basement stairwell. Sometimes, Lulu thought she could hear Bernie's voice, meek and unconvincing over the radio, all the way from Havana.

The police had taken a dozen photographs of Bernadette when she resurfaced. The newspapermen had what Flo called "a field day." The story they told was of a young girl crushed



in a deep blue depression over a boy. The jilted girl had run away to Peach Island to weather her heartache away from the pity and gossip of the neighborhood. Naïve and unprepared, the melancholy darling first lost her boat, then broke her wrist falling from a tree, and finally ran out of the little food she had packed. To Lulu, this was hardly believable fiction. A French-Canadian girl of fifteen would fare much better stranded on Peach. But the newspapermen loved the tale, and ran with it. Of course they did.

Just as she had sensed Bernadette in that dank hole all those months ago, Lulu could feel the shimmy of the New Orleans train as it crossed every railroad tie on its journey to Michigan. The stuffy train car air that Yves and Bernadette were breathing flushed Lulu's face in the cool, vacuous station. Her sixth sense vision developed rapidly once she understood its influence. Twice, Lulu had 'seen' Bernadette crying in the first light of morning dreams. The music of another language played in the background with the constant rhythms of ocean waves. But Lulu had no more control over the power than the first time. Like an ant disturbing the sand from below, Lulu's urges to seek out a teacher were surfacing. But for now, there was enough to deal with right in front of her.

Luc paced, stretching his right shoulder back at an odd angle, a tick that would likely endure his whole life through. "C'est magnifique, non?" Luc said, swinging back Lulu's way. His face was tilted heavenward where great chandeliers enlivened the carved marble arches overhead. "You ever been here?"

Lulu shook her head. He knew this. He was talking for the sake of talking.

"You're quiet." Luc stopped pacing and sat, playfully leaning against her. "Everything is all right, Lulu." His tone betrayed that he was also convincing himself.

"You don't know that." Lulu said. She had not meant to say anything but something

enigmatic was stirring. An extended business honeymoon, they all were calling it. What a farce. The beetle shook its wings against the stripped walls of her ribcage, and made Lulu want to break something.

One day that autumn, Lulu had hoisted an ax over her shoulder and set out to the forest. All afternoon she chopped until her muscles strained. She thought of herself as a beaver, as a first settler, developing the great wilderness of Canada. When she was done, nine beautiful young trees had fallen.

"It's going to be all right," Luc continued. "Christmas is here. And the baby will be born soon." He finished his hot chocolate. "That right there is a recipe for magic. You'll see."

"Will I?"

Her attitude seemed to shock him. "What's wrong with you?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I find it hard to believe in your optimism."

"For Christmas?" Luc huffed, making light. "Aren't you a Scrooge?" She knew he knew what she meant, but the truth was, Luc had time and again proved himself the quintessential optimist. At his worst, he had been shot and left near death in a strange town, and still he returned with a tired, boyish smile. And now he was attempting to spin Yves' shame and Bernie's sorrow into a Christmas carol. And the song angered the beetle. The beetle beat its hard wings enough to break something inside.

"You know I don't mean Christmas," Lulu said. The bottom of her hot chocolate congealed into a thick brown goo, and she stared into it.

"Lulu. You want to do this now, eh?" Luc asked.

"We never talked about it."

Luc pushed at his right shoulder and looked around as if anyone knew who they were, as

if their particular story was worse than the rest. "You had plenty of time to talk to me over the last four months." He pointed up to the clock. "They arrive in twenty minutes."

"You're right." She didn't want to end the conversation, but she had matured much over the fall and knew this was perhaps the most inappropriate time for this nature of discussion. But the beetle crawled into her throat. "I don't want to see him."

"Then you shouldn't have come, Lulu." Luc sighed.

"Yes, I should."

"Yes, you should?" Luc mocked her grammar.

"You know what I mean," Lulu practically hissed. Sharing the same blood with someone was hard. It meant they could torment you the way you torment yourself. Easy.

She stood and snatched the paper cup from his hand. Feeling taller, Lulu clicked her shiny heels across the vast hall to a wastebasket, and wandered back to the glittery tree. Even though she was still cold, Lulu unbuttoned her winter coat and pulled the hot collar away from her neck. Her curls were maintained in that stylish bob. Before her, a cherry red icicle shaped ornament dangled on a branch. In a few steps, she could hold it between her fingers and squeeze the glass until it shattered in her hand. Lulu imagined herself doing this, the pop of the smashed glass, the blood filling her palm from a dozen deep cuts, sophisticated strangers giving her quizzical glances and calling out in horrified tones. But she didn't take the steps. Instead, she tipped her head back to the top, where a radiant silver starburst nearly grazed the ceiling. Light refracting from the star gave the impression that it was encrusted with real gems. Lulu wished she could see the beautiful object up close, perhaps hold it in her hands and let the brightness blind her.

A whistle in the train yards reminded Lulu of the nearing scene. She tucked her bare

hands into her pockets, and turned back to join her brother. On the way, she locked glances with a distinguished looking Coloured gentleman wearing a grey woolen suit, sitting tall and having his shoes shined. His face responded as if he had expected Lulu to notice him there. He could have been her Papa's age, maybe younger. There was a sprig of black and white feather in his fedora. The man began to smile, but Lulu looked away, quickly finding the cheeky eyes of a young and freckled porter, careening a load of luggage toward the street entrance. The station was filling.

Lulu had been preparing herself for Yves and Bernadette's return for three weeks, but with the event just minutes away now, she felt unhinged. If only she could be in two places at once making two separate statements—I hate you, and I love you.

"He made it right," Luc said in a soft tone, when she returned to the bench.

Lulu's gasp was so sudden that she choked on her own spittle. And she coughed as if something was stuck in her throat.

"Are you okay?" Luc asked.

She tried to clear her throat, felt the catch again, and settled for swallowing. The sugary walls of her throat seemed to collapse and stick together. She coughed.

"Get her some water," a stranger from behind them somewhere said. But Lulu was fine now.

"Where will we find them?" Lulu asked with a subdued voice.

"There's arrival information on that marquee over there." He led her to the chrome-framed ticketing windows. "Okay. Vas-y," Luc said. "Let's meet them at their tunnel."

If Luc heard the irony in his statement, he did not let on. Lulu buttoned up her winter coat, and dutifully followed her brother to where the passengers would emerge. That tunnel her

brothers dug beneath Yves' house, that horrific dungeon of a place created the worst of her dreams. Now that the tunnel was shut forever, and to Lulu, it represented all the potential evils existing in the world.

Before Yves left town, he called a little Marceau siblings meeting underneath his house. Luc arrived still drugged for pain and with his right arm wrapped tight across his chest. It was a day Lulu would never forget—Wednesday, August 8—her thirteenth birthday. Only Maman, Bear, and Flo remembered.

“First, let me apologize.” Yves said, sitting at a folding table in his basement. “I fucked up. I’m sorry. If we’re going to keep working together, you need to know the whole story.”

Then he brought the entire truth before them. Lulu struggled not to acknowledge the large oak door closing off the passageway to nowhere behind her brother. And though she also found it difficult to look directly at Yves, for all the devil he had invited into their lives, and Bernadette's, she focused in on his features separately—the warped skin on his neck, his nicotine-stained teeth, his rather long nose, the laugh creases that carved his skin, from nostrils to outer lips. Broken down into pieces, Yves wasn’t so handsome after all. While he told his whole tale, Lulu thought that her oldest brother's face revealed no remorse, no personal sorrow. His expression only changed to convey the regret he felt for his brothers' sacrifice of building the tunnel in the first place, and for ruining their chances to make it big in this world. Lulu thought he down-played the dangerous stakes he had laid for the family.

Lauwy looked relieved. "To be honest, in these last months, I was prepared to walk away," he said. "The Shawnee’s keeping me busy and I'm happy with that."

Luc, Michel, and René were pissed off and not so ready to agree with their so-called leader.

"Two goddamn years, Yves," René said. "I'm not ready to give in just yet."

"I don't think we have a choice, brother," Yves said.

"You want to get out of the business? Run away? Fine." Michel spoke with his arms, throwing them up to punctuate his anger. "But don't leave us with nothing. All that work down the toilet."

"Yves. Yves, I'll buy your house." Luc said. He was weak but still there at Yves' right hand side. "We'll finish the tunnel ourselves. Make a new deal." It seemed a silly thing for him to say, when Luc couldn't lift anything heavier than a toothbrush for the next month at least.

Yves placed a hand on Luc's good shoulder. "You would all end up dead, Luc." He looked at each of them, including Lulu. "They're sick fucks. Pardon, Lulu. But they are, and you're done with them. Your lives are worth too much."

"I wish you'd thought of that before we put the nights of two years into that damn thing!" René said.

"I know. I know," Yves said, bowing his head. "Please. Hate me forever for putting you through this. But don't go making a new deal with the Brueckners. Or anyone else. They'll come after you. And I promise, it won't end well." Yves paused. "Think of your families."

"I am," Lauwy said. "I'm with you, Yves." He leaned away from the table, folding his arms. Never much for words, but solid as a white pine.

"Isn't it worth taking a look at this from another angle?" Michel stood, lighting a cigarette. "Could we not go to the government?"

"For what? We dug a little hole," Yves mimed talking to some official. "It's completely illegal, but perhaps you'll find it useful? They'll put us in handcuffs. Think, Michel."

Lulu thought Yves was stupid for mocking his brother when he needed to win Michel

over.

"Walker's already got a tunnel," Luc said. The brothers and Lulu all turned to look at him. "Don't you think they do? They're technically American, right? And they got businesses on either side of the river."

The information was inconsequential to their trouble but each stopped to think about it. Bernadette pictured the stately, orange palace of a building in Walkerville, and a passageway leading under the currents of the strait from its own hidden rooms. How many others have tried this? She wondered. Were there dozens of burrowed holes under the Detroit? But now she understood the gravity of their problem. The tunnel would have made them unique runners, and probably stinking rich.

"Yves, come on," René said. "You can't blame us. This is a major fucking blow."

Now, as they argued over their options, Lulu came to see her brothers in a grey unfavourable light. Their motivations in this life, especially Yves', were driven by the basest sins. Lust. Greed. Gluttony. Pride. These demons crept into their features.

"Look. At the fight, Elon pointed out some flaws in our business plan," Yves said. "And I hate to admit it, but I can't ignore them any longer."

"What fucking flaws?" Michel shouted and returned to his seat. "Pardon, Lulu."

Why were they meeting down here? Lulu wondered. Couldn't we talk in the kitchen, in the light? For the first time, she felt unsafe among her own blood.

"Well, it's not going to be so easy for them to truck loads out of the park. One bridge. The Coast Guard right there," Yves explained.

"But the yacht club's on the other side," René said. "We discussed this."

"And The Ambassador is almost finished," Yves said bowing his head. "We took too

long."

"We've still got about a year! You said so yourself!" René leaned over the table like a wild dog ready to attack. Sweat slid down his temple.

"Hey!" Lauwy pushed René back in his seat. "Hey. Think about that, René. A year. That worth risking your life for? What about your wife and kids?"

Dieu Merci for Lauwy, Lulu thought.

"Yes," Yves said, in a way that also conveyed gratitude.

"Guys," Luc piped in. "That asshole on *Hermine* just shot me without a second thought."

"But you were trying to knock over his shipment," Michel said. "No offense."

"So, what?" Yves asked. "You would've shot him too?"

"Look. How we going to get shot if we make a solid deal?" René asked.

"I'm saying there's no solid deal to make," Luc explained. He now caved completely to Yves' will.

"It ain't worth it." Lauwy punctuated Luc's point. "Period."

"You want me to admit it?" Yves pressed his weight against the table staring at René and Michel. "All right, I'll admit it. I did. I fucked up. Okay? I fucked up, royally. I apologize. And I swear to you, I'll spend my life making up for it." Yves stopped. It appeared he might cry, but after a moment, he sucked his emotion back in. "And I'll admit something else, too. Those fuckers scare me now. You know, because, you work with them, and what do *you* become? A little more like them. And a little more, and a little more... Until what?"

Lulu felt his meaning in the hairs that lifted on her arms and up her back. They were gathered steps away from those consequences. Poor Bernadette. The mantra had a new specific meaning now.



"You become monsters." Lulu was thinking this and had not meant to say it out loud.

Her brothers turned to face her. Never had she captivated them to such a degree.

"That Elon guy came to the club, you know," Lulu said in the thick silence that followed.

She wanted to keep their attention now she had it.

"When?" a few of them asked.

Lulu took a second to calculate. The week had unfolded with unusual and disturbing events each morning, afternoon, and evening giving it the impression of a year.

"Sunday night," she said. "Ask Xing. The three of them were shooting skeet with revolvers."

"What?" Lauwy seethed.

"Yeah, ask Denis," Lulu said, recalling the boy's nervous expressions.

"That's what he meant?" Yves asked.

"He made me shoot with them," she said. She reached for the cola in front of her and gulped. Her brother's faces never looked so similar, their lips parted, their eyes squinting in a combination of puzzlement and deepening anger. "They were looking for you." Lulu pointed at Yves.

"They?" Lauwy asked. Yves' hand went to his face, rubbing his eyes as if to erase some horror he had seen.

"Yeah, Elon and those two dumb goons," Lulu said. Michel snickered at her choice of words.

"It's not funny," Yves said. "Even a bit."

"This stops." Lauwy jammed a finger into the table. "No more fucking debating. We're done."

"Sacré bleu," René swore, throwing up his hands.

"Sacré nothing. It stops." Lauwy's strong brow furrowed so deep Lulu thought it might get stuck that way. "This ain't just knocking heads anymore."

In the station channel marked four, Lulu leaned into the cold marble wall. Pressing her bare palms against the stone at the small of her back, she allowed the chill to make her focus. Down the way, through what little she could see between the people milling about, winter puffs of air sped across the glass doors obscuring any view of the trains. So she watched the faces of the travelers, the railway personnel, and others like them, waiting to greet loved ones. Face after face had a story somewhere behind the eyes. What those people would learn if they could see into her story, she thought. And soon, she would meet Yves' and Bernadette's sets of eyes. Even though Lulu was part of their story, she would never know the depth of it. Four months is a long time for other stories to be written, she thought. And babies. And a lifetime together. This was just the beginning, and there was some hope in that.

A clear whistle blew outside. The tunnel began to resonate with passengers filing through the doorways four and five at a time laden with suitcases and bags. Family and friends funneled into the passageway from the main hall, filling in the rest of the space with more noise. Fruitlessly, Lulu craned her neck to catch sight of anything familiar, the shape of Yves' usual hat, Bernadette's sunny hair, but she was too short to make out any specific detail between the embraces and arrangements of the passing crowd. Until Luc was elbowing Lulu, and Yves and Bernadette were there, in front of her. This gave her no time to prepare a reception, and she awkwardly reached out to hug them in a blur of foreign scents and textures. There was a flurry of 'Hellos' and 'Merry Christmases' and 'You look wells,' some of this flowing out of her own mouth. Stepping back, Lulu immediately took in how dark their skin had become. Bernadette's

face was a round brown bean. She had grown her sun-lightened hair unfashionably long and natural.

"I'm just freezing," she said, those same bright eyes squinting under a rim of mascara. "Aren't you freezing?" she asked Yves. "You know, I knew it would be cold but this is really cold!" She laughed funny.

"Ah, you'll get used to it," Luc said. "You've just been spoiled. Here, let me take your bag."

Yves appeared to have gained some baby weight in Cuba, as well. Lulu had never seen him look fuller, and it had a way of aging him. As always, Yves motioned to take the lead tipping his nose toward the lobby. Lulu avoided looking directly into his eyes, afraid that if they should meet her mind would travel back through time to those awful hours after she'd found Bernadette. What do you do with hours like those? Would they always exist there in between the two of them? In the pauses, and the unsaid?

"Oh, snow!" Bernadette said, as they crossed through the front entrance and down the sprawling steps. But the day was still and the airy snow bits only floated about the steel blue sky in slow drifting polka dots, not threatening weather any worse than that. "I was hoping for snow," she said to no one in particular.

Since it was the holidays, cars were lined down the boulevard, and Luc had to park his new black and green Buick a ways down 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Lulu double-stepped in her pinching heels to keep up with Bernadette's long waddle. Bernie was always a tall girl but now she took up real space too, in a royal blue woolen coat that flopped about over her legs. She held her hand out to touch the insignificant flakes as if she had never seen snow before.

"Do you like my new coat?" Bernadette asked. "Yves bought it for me when we stopped

in Cincinnati. Isn't it pretty? I'm very happy with the colour."

"It's pretty," Lulu said.

"I want to knit myself a matching set. Tuque, mitts, scarf," she said. Her hatless head looked uncomfortably bare outside now and Lulu thought to offer up her own. "Do you know how to knit? What colour do you think? White? Red? Ooo, maybe orange?"

Bernie went on talking as if she had not for four months. And Lulu answered where she could. She'd never really known Bernie before, and never imagined her talking so steadily. The men had reached the car and were stowing the bags into the trunk. The girls caught up and waited beside the Buick on the sidewalk.

"So, how is school, Lulu? Sometimes I think I miss it and then I..." she trailed off mid-sentence.

Luc slammed the trunk shut, and Yves looked over at his wife.

"Your head must be cold," he said without offering a solution except to open the back door for her.

Bernadette steered her awkward body into the backseat as Lulu watched in wonder until everyone was inside the car. She raced around to the other side and climbed in. No one said anything as the engine grumbled to life in the cold. The seats were ice-like on the bottom and legs.

"Four days till Christmas," Luc said filling the fleshy hush inside the car. Lulu felt he was referencing the endless traffic that kept him from pulling onto the boulevard, and she wanted to say something to help build a conversation now that Bernadette had quieted, but she couldn't think of a thing to add.

Luc got the car going and threw out the easiest question. "What's Havana like?"

Lulu expected Bernadette to burst into a rambling answer, but she was staring out the window, watching the west side rush by. The question hung unanswered until Yves said that it was hot and happening, and that the cigars were phenomenal. And the rum.

"What do you think of the rum," he asked Luc. Ahead, the windshield filled with the grand columned train station, busy with taxis and whistles and people bustling about. And then they passed it. Inside, the car jostled them gently. Four people with nothing to say.

"Would you like my hat?" Lulu asked Bernadette who abruptly was wearing the same forlorn features as the summer day she left Canada.

"What?" Bernadette asked, delayed. She gazed across the tight back seat at Lulu. "Oh, no, thank you." Bernadette gave Lulu a barely detectable smile and continued to look into her eyes. The car bumped as Luc turned down another street. The emerald green river was straight ahead but Lulu could only see it from the corner of her vision.

"I got married," Bernadette said to Lulu with a hint of disbelief. "In a place called Playa Jibacoa." She pronounced it with a flowery Spanish accent.

"I know," Lulu answered.

"I wish you could've been there," Bernadette said, looking back out the window where bare trees and apartment buildings whisked by. Lulu was about to say something in response when Bernadette cried out. "Oh, look!" She pointed a finger to the window. "The bridge!"

Where the street met the river on Jefferson Avenue, Luc pulled over for the view. The crisscrossed Ambassador towers connected country to country in a great double arc over the river.

"Wow," Bernadette said, fogging the window with her breath. She wiped the vapor away with her sleeve.

Thick girded wires hung at intervals from the main suspension cables. Each approach had giant angled ramps from opposite shores in solid-looking black steel. The edges dropped off from a titanic height that made Lulu think of immediate death. The half-finished bridge stood tremendous, an otherworldly gateway, a sign of the times, but also simply a way of crossing. In a few months, they could drive across the Detroit. From where they were parked, Canada was flat and appeared insignificant. But it was home.

"Almost finished," Luc said, pulling the car back onto the road.

"Wow," Bernadette repeated. The sight seemed to enliven her spirits again and she settled her head back on the seat. She closed her eyes. "I'm tired of looking out the window," she said. "Miles and miles and miles of it."

Yves and Luc began to discuss something in tones lower than the whirring motor and the tires spinning over the road. Soon they would be all the way home. Lulu thought about her brother and his pregnant wife greeting Maman, and the rest of the brothers, and Bear. The beetle pulsed its wings inside her throat. She thought to reach up and touch her neck and check if it was really real, but before she could, Bernadette grabbed her hand. Lulu glanced over at her new sister-in-law, but Bernadette's eyes were still closed. Her chin rested on her pretty blue lapel, facing toward Lulu. As if to assure Lulu she was not sleeping, Bernadette squeezed her bare hand around Lulu's thick mitten. With nothing left to do but wait, Lulu watched the city go by through the mysterious plumes of wispy, white steam rising from the manhole covers downtown.

## VITA

Melissa Remark was born in Windsor, Ontario. She obtained her diploma in Film and Television Production at Humber College in 2000 and her Bachelor's degree in English Literature at Trent University. She joined the University of New Orleans Creative Writing Workshop to pursue an MFA in Fiction in 2010 and served as co-associate editor of *Bayou Magazine*, UNO's National Literary Journal, for two years. This manuscript is her first novel.